

December 2025 Daily Devotional



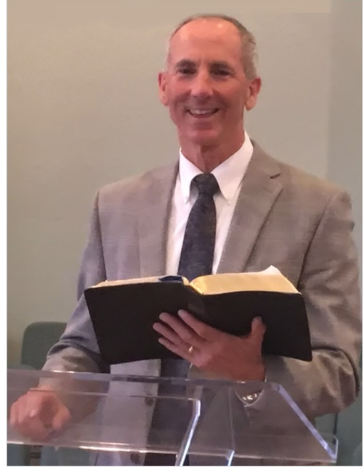
*Send forth Your light
and Your truth,
let them guide me;
let them bring me to
your holy mountain,
to a place where
You dwell.*

Psalm 43:3

Vistoso Community Church

Foreword

We begin this month with devotionals in the Book of Ephesians and the Book of Romans. Then we return to the Book of Ephesians until we near our Christmas celebration. At the beginning of Christmas week, we begin a four-day series of devotionals designed to prepare our hearts for Christmas.



We close out the month with a lesson considering Jesus' second advent, followed by a short series on the abundant life promised the Christian. The final devotional of the year is a review of our 2025 theme of the year: *God's Word is Sufficient*.

I trust you will take up the challenge to put all of this together. May God bless as you know Him more fully through His Word.

In His grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Redig'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'K' and 'R'.

Kevin Redig

All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NKJV (1992 edition) or the NIV (1984 edition).

Return to Ephesians

Monday, December 1: Read James 4

We discussed grace in the November devotional, but let's see if we can review the concept of God's grace because it tends to be somewhat abstract. Let's see if we can better understand the concept by the way it is used in Scripture:

1. As we have learned, what is the starting point for every member of the human race? The answer is that we are all dead in trespasses and sin! We are, by nature, an object of God's wrath.
2. Given our starting point of being spiritually dead, to be *made alive* is to be *saved* from our lost condition, and it is *by grace you are saved*. (Ephesians 2:8)
3. What is grace? The normal definition of *unmerited favor* is a good place to start. For something given in grace is something we neither work for nor merit. Let me take it a step further by giving you a definition that comes from studying its Biblical usage: Grace is *God's abundant answer to our ever-changing need!*

When we were dead in trespasses and sin, what did God do? He sent His Son to bear our sin, die in our place, and receive unto Himself the punishment that was our due. That's grace for the lost!

As those who have placed their faith in Christ, we have a promise. When we find ourselves in need of divine enablement, divine wisdom, restoration of fellowship, and any number of countless other things, God will provide every single one of them. That's grace for the believer!

Continued on the next page.

Return to Ephesians

Monday, December 1: Read James 4 (Continued)

If mankind has a need, God has an answer. The grace of God starts with rain falling on the just and the wicked. It proceeds to providing a means of redemption from the slave market of sin. It continues for the least child of God to do all things through Christ. And, it concludes with an eternity with Him in a body just like our Savior's.

You do not have a need that God, in grace, will not meet!
No wonder the Scripture says,

... He gives us more grace.

James 4:6



Return to Ephesians

Tuesday, December 2: Read I John 5

We will continue to consider grace for a couple more days in order to firm up our thinking on this marvelous subject. For a long time, I would go to Ephesians 2:8-9 to prove that we are saved by grace.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

But actually, the proof that we are saved by grace is contained in Ephesians 2:4-6. Verse 8 is really a summary verse for what has gone before. In the world of mathematical proofs, it would be labeled QED—indicating the completion of the proof. For, in Verses 4-6, we have already learned that we have been *made alive, raised up*, and are *seated in the heavenly realms*.

But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus ...

There are several things to note:

1. All of these blessings are said to be associated with the grace of God, so QED—we are saved by grace.
2. Do you see man anywhere in the picture? He is completely absent because our salvation is solely a work of God offered to us as a free gift.

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Return to Ephesians

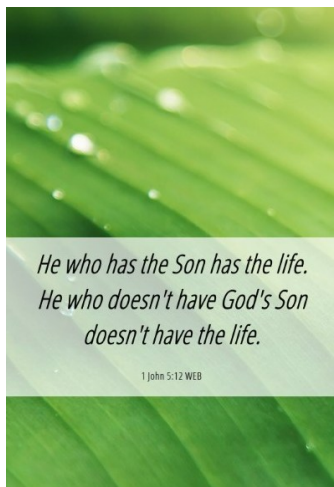
Tuesday, December 2: Read I John 5 (Continued)

We too often muddy the waters on this issue. We try to tell a spiritually-dead person that he or she has to commit, surrender, dedicate, and clean up his or her life. Let me ask a question, "Does a spiritually dead person actually have anything of worth to surrender to God?" Of course not! That's why the issues of surrender and submission don't come to the fore until after we have become new creations in Christ.

One final item to consider that demonstrates the work of God in salvation apart from any involvement by man: Did you notice that we are made alive, raised up, and seated in the heavenlies *with* or *in* Christ? We are saved because of our association with Christ, through faith. Our salvation is not based upon anything we bring to the table.

**Whoever has the Son has life;
whoever does not have the Son
of God does not have life.**

I John 5:12



Salvation is that straightforward. But how do you get the Son? The very next verse tells us—by believing in the Name of the Son of God.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

I John 5:13

The name is who Jesus is and what He has done on our behalf. Now that's grace for you!

Return to Ephesians

Wednesday, December 3: Read John 1

Today I want you to test your GQ, that is, your *grace quotient*! It is just like testing your IQ, except it measures how in tune we are with:

... the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:7

Here is the test: Consider the words *devotion* and *blessing*, then circle the option below which most accurately describes God's plan for the Christian Life.

Devotion —> Blessing

Blessing —> Devotion

What I am asking is this: Does God bless us as the result of being adequately *devoted* to Him? Or, does He bless us up front and provide everything we need to grow into devoted service, knowing that we will fail many times along the way? The answer to this question is to choose between *law* and *grace*. You see, under the Mosaic Law, the Jews received blessing for their obedience and cursing for disobedience. Under grace, we have every spiritual blessing in the heavens (Ephesians 1:3) right at the outset of the Christian Life.

It is not until we begin to understand who and what we are in Christ that we are called to *walk worthy* before Him.

Could it be any more clear than John 1:16-17:

From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Do you see devotion as an upfront criterion? This is what grace is: God providing undeserved blessing up front, with the intent that devotion will follow—knowing it will never do so in proper measure.

Lessons in Romans

Thursday, December 4:

Read Romans 7:14-25

We left our reading in the Book of Romans after a discussion of *the wretched man*. This descriptive term should really catch our attention as we come to understand that Romans 7:24 is talking about the Christian. What possible reason could the Christian have for being described as a wretched man?

Although there are a number of reasons, the one being revealed in the seventh chapter of Romans is a wrong-headed effort to live the Christian Life from the source of *self* or *by means of the law*. By *self* I mean any combination of will-power, self-discipline, or personality. By *means of the law*, I mean any combination of do's, don'ts, rules and regulations.

Perhaps you are thinking, "Why aren't self-discipline, rules, and regulations a good thing?" They most certainly can be, but they do not have the ability to achieve the supernatural quality of life to which the Christian is called. The Christian Life requires a supernatural means of enablement that only God can provide. Let me show you this from the Scripture. The best set of rules and regulations ever given to man is the Mosaic Law, and look at its purpose:

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

Romans 3:20

The purpose of the Law was to show us that we are sinners in need of a Savior—for we are all going to break it!

Lessons in Romans

Thursday, December 4:

Read Romans 7:14-25 (Continued)

Once that lesson sinks in, and we turn to Christ for our salvation, then:

Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. Galatians 3:24-25

Once saved, it is time to move on to the means that God has provided to manifest the new life we have in Christ—and that means is not a new system of rules and regulations! How about personal will-power and self-discipline? I John 3:6 says:

Whoever claims to live in Him (Jesus), must walk as Jesus did.

Well, let me ask you a question. Is your will-power and self-discipline an adequate source of power to walk as Jesus did, day in and day out, for the rest of your life? Let me gently say, that those who think so, have a misplaced confidence in the flesh. God has a far better way, and we'll begin to unfold it in the days ahead.

Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

Galatians 3:24-25



Lessons in Romans

Friday, December 5:

Read Romans 8:1-4 (Read repeatedly)

Let's take stock for a moment of what is the possession of every child of God as communicated within the Book of Romans. It is an awesome list:

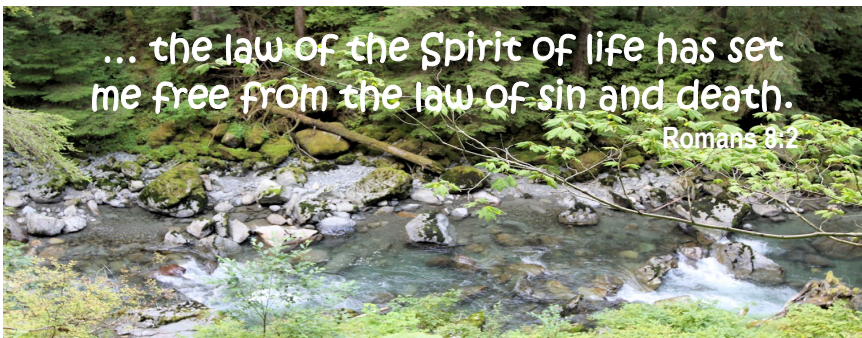
- Sins forgiven and now clothed in the righteousness of Christ.
- The power of the sin nature broken by means of our identification with the death of Christ.
- Lastly, a share in the resurrection life of Christ.

There is more: peace with God, out from under wrath, standing in grace, and reconciliation. Yet there is one essential piece missing, and we are going to find it as we begin to work our way through the eighth chapter of Romans. Let's start here:

... the law of the Spirit of life has set me free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:2

We discussed the *law of sin and death* when we covered Chapter 7. It is any system of rules and regulations, or an



Lessons in Romans

Friday, December 5:

Read Romans 8:1-4 (Continued)

emphasis on trying to live the Christian Life from the source of self. Then what is the alternative? We have a name for it now: *the Law of the Spirit of Life!* Now we just need to understand what that means.

For what the Law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature ... Romans 8:3

By now we should know this: The law does not provide the power necessary to live the Christian Life, and it was never meant to do so. Instead, the law documents our sinfulness and brings us to Christ! So God took matters into His own hands, and here is what He did:

He condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. Romans 8:4

The righteous requirements of the Law are the starting point for the Christian Life, and there is a whole lot more on top of that. And, this high and lofty quality of life cannot be lived from any source within us. Only by means of the Holy Spirit. Here is what I seek to constantly remind myself:

Every need I have as a Christian is answered in the life of Christ and functionally implemented by the Spirit of Christ!

The Christian Life ceases to be about me and what I can do, but what my Savior can do through me by means of His Holy Spirit! Naturally, to Him be the glory!

Lessons in Romans

Monday, December 8:

Read I Corinthians 3:1-11

Friday I introduced you to the Law of the Spirit of Life, which the Scriptures declare have:

... set me free from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:2

I know you want the specifics regarding the Law of the Spirit of Life, but first allow me to share something with you that I hope will help as you seek to understand New Testament spirituality. Our lives as Christians are often decades in length and involve many challenges along the way as we seek to grow in our faith and become conformed to the image and likeness of Christ. As we struggle in our daily walk, there is a temptation to look for a shortcut—an easier way—to obtain spiritual maturity and success.

Then, when we hear about the Law of the Spirit of Life, we think to ourselves: “Maybe that is the answer I have been seeking! Tell me more so I can obtain the secret to victory in my Christian Life.”

This is something I want to warn you about. As essential as it is, you cannot start with the Law of the Spirit of Life! The Christian Life begins with faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the one and only foundation upon which the Christian Life can be built. (I Corinthians 3:11) And, progress is made one truth at a time. There are no shortcuts, no skipping ahead, no quick fixes. Let me lay out for you the sequence: We need to understand the Christian’s cleansing from sin is obtained only by means of the Blood of Christ! (I John 1:7) Our justified standing before our holy God is only found in the imputed righteousness of Christ. (Romans 3:22)

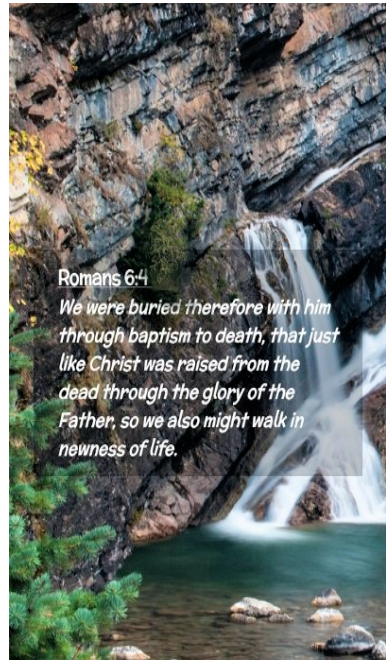
Lessons in Romans

Monday, December 8:

Read I Corinthians 3:1-11 (Continued)

Our separation from the old man is the result of our identification with the *Cross of Christ*. Now, as those who have been made alive in Christ, we have a share in the *Life of Christ*. (Romans 6:3-4).

All of this information comes before Romans Chapter 8. Our walk in the Spirit can be no stronger than our understanding of all that has come before. That is how the Christian Life works: God has provided everything we need for life and godliness but it only becomes functional in our lives as we understand what He has provided, respond to it in faith, and put it into practice.



So today's devotional, is simply to encourage you to pursue spiritual growth, one step at a time. Don't worry about some spiritual secret to be revealed, concentrate on steady growth based on the unfolding of God's Word—one truth at a time such that the following would be true of you:

... no longer infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching ... Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is Christ.

Ephesians 4:14-15

Lessons in Romans

Tuesday, December 9:

Read Romans 8:1-11

I have been trying to convince you that not even the most self-disciplined among us can live the Christian Life in his or her own strength. Nor can anyone do so by will power or anything else that has ourselves as its source! Instead, we need the supernatural enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Isn't that exactly what today's reading says?

And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you.

Romans 8:11



Those who are
in the flesh can't
please God.

Romans 8:8 WEB

Lessons in Romans

Tuesday, December 9:

Read Romans 8:1-11 (Continued)

Every born-again child of God has the Spirit of God living in them. (I Corinthians 6:19). And, every born-again child of God has the life of Christ. (Galatians 2:20). As you can see in the Romans 8 passage, it is the same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead that is going to manifest the *Life of Christ* in each of us. This is New Testament spirituality—the *Spirit of Christ* enabling the *Life of Christ*.

Growing to the point this is actually happening on a daily basis is the process of spiritual maturity. The alternative is trying to live the Christian Life by means of our own strength and self-discipline. As soon as *self* is involved, we are destined for failure. Why am I so certain of this? Allow me to share two verses of Scripture that I hope will settle this point once and for all!

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells ...

Romans 7:18

So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Romans 8:8

This is what God thinks of *self*: nothing and cannot! And so, He has provided a replacement: our new life in Christ!

Further, He has provided a source of enabling power: the Holy Spirit! What is the result? Look at how perfectly things work out when we do it God's way:

... the righteous requirements of the Law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh, but according the Spirit.

Romans 8:4

Lessons in Romans

Wednesday, December 10:

Read Romans 8:11-18

I want to focus on two verses found in today's reading.
First, Romans 8:12:

Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it.

Paul is deep into a discussion on spirituality so, of course, he is talking to *brethren*, or fellow believers. He says we have a debt or an obligation! Let there be no confusion about this obligation. It is not to live according to our sinful natures that would be to live in keeping with its appetites and desires.

By stating it this way, Paul certainly communicates that it is possible, but most definitely not God's intent, for His children to live by their sinful nature. In fact, Paul makes clear the consequences for doing so:

For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die ...
Romans 8:13

Death always speaks of some kind of separation—that's what death is. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body. So what kind of death is the subject of this discussion? It can't be eternal death—or separation from God in the Lake of Fire—since those who believe in the person and work of Christ are granted *eternal life*. Once we have eternal life, we cannot lose it.

So what kind of death can those who are brothers and sisters in Christ experience as the result of living according to the sin nature? It is a separation from the abundant life that is meant to be ours as Christians. It is a breaking of our fellowship with God. We have grieved and perhaps even

Lessons in Romans

Wednesday, December 10:

Read Romans 8:11-18 (Continued)

quenched the Holy Spirit and so He is no longer producing the *Life of Christ* in our lives.

Paul described exactly this condition when he tells the Corinthians that he cannot speak to them as spiritual people but as carnal (fleshly) Christians. (I Corinthians 3:1-3). What is the alternative? Let's look at Verse 13:

For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

Romans 8:13

How is it that we keep the flesh under control as Christians? It is by means of the Holy Spirit! We must learn to allow Him to apply the *Cross of Christ* to our fleshly desires, appetites, and thoughts, that we might separate from them. This, in turn, allows the Spirit to reproduce the life of Christ in us. Am I sure? Yes, I am sure upon the authority of God's Word.

For the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Galatians 5:23



If those qualities are present in our lives, then the life of Christ is on display and we are experiencing the *Abundant Life*.

Lessons in Romans

Thursday, December 11:

Read Galatians 2:15-21

Romans Chapter 8 is exceedingly rich in doctrine. Here is an example that will take us the rest of today's devotional to work through:

But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, but your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

Romans 8:10-11

Consider the following:

1. Until we leave this body of corruption behind and replace it with a resurrection body, our sinful nature will always be a *drag* on our spiritual life. Our sinful nature cannot be rehabilitated or transformed. We must reckon ourselves separated from it through our identification with the death of Christ.
2. As we learn to, by faith, reckon ourselves *dead* to the sin nature, we have a replacement—the new life that is ours in Christ.



Lessons in Romans

Thursday, December 11:

Read Galatians 2:15-21 (Continued)

3. We have the Spirit of Christ—it is He who:

... puts to death the misdeeds of the body ...Romans 8:13

It is also He who produces fruit that we bear and that brings glory to God. (Galatians 5:22-23)

4. So, we have life out of death! This is God's way and it is His work in those who will trust Him to do so. Isn't this exactly what Galatians 2:20 says?

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me ...

This is the short version of what we have been learning in Romans Chapters 6 and 8. We have been crucified with Christ that we might reckon ourselves dead to sin and the power of the sin nature broken in our lives. Then we have been raised up with Christ to a new life meant to be enabled by the same Holy Spirit that raised Christ from the dead. Our role in all this is to:

- Trust God to do what He has said He will do.
- Learn to trust the Spirit to hold the desires of the sin nature at arms length—no longer holding power over our lives.
- Trust the Spirit to manifest the life of Christ through us—producing the fruit of His character.

This brings us back to God's intent:

... that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature, but according to the Spirit.

Romans 8:4

Lessons in Romans

**Friday, December 12:
Read Galatians 5:13-26**

I would like to close our look at the first half of Romans 8 by looking at the difference between receiving eternal life and living a spiritual life. This is the difference between salvation and spirituality; between justification and sanctification. We will use the following quote to help us make this comparison:

A Christian is a Christian because he is rightly related to CHRIST; but 'he that is spiritual' is spiritual because he is rightly related to the Spirit, in addition to his relation to CHRIST in salvation.

L. S. Chafer

What is Dr. Chafer trying to say? First, he is reminding us that, before we had faith in Christ, we were enemies of God (Romans 5:10) and objects of His wrath (Ephesians 2:3) This is a condition in which you do not want to end your earthly existence.

Praise God that He provided a way for us to escape the consequences of being an object of His wrath.

... to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God ...

John 1:12

From wrath to a member of God's family—that's salvation. As a result of being a child of God, we are now:

... alive with Christ ... raised up with Christ and seated ... with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus ...

Ephesians 2:5-6

Lessons in Romans

Friday, December 12:

Read Galatians 5:13-26 (Continued)

That is exactly what it means to be rightly related to Christ, and that is what qualifies us to bear the title of Christian. What Dr. Chafer wants to make sure we realize is that being a child of God does not necessarily make us a mature son or daughter! It saves us for eternity, but doesn't automatically lead to a fruitful life here on earth, nor does it always result in bringing glory to our God. To do both of those requires a *spiritual man or woman*!

What is a *spiritual* man or woman? One who is rightly related to the Holy Spirit! What does that mean? One who is both filled with the Spirit and walking by the Spirit:

So I say live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Galatians 5:16

Let me provide you with a working definition of each:

- *We are filled with the Spirit when there is no unconfessed sin interfering with our fellowship with the Spirit, and we are in such a condition of soul when we are able to respond to His promptings and trust in His enablement.*
- *To walk (live) in the Spirit is to moment-by-moment maintain the filling of the Spirit, through the influence of both the indwelling Spirit and indwelling Word of God, so that the life of Christ might be manifest in us as we navigate life's daily demands.*

As you can see, being rightly related to the Spirit should be a daily priority!

Return to Ephesians

Monday, December 15:

Read Ephesians 2:10-22

We aren't going to make it any further than Verse 10 in discussing today's reading:

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
Ephesians 2:10

This verse has both corporate (the Church) and individual ramifications. Let's deal with the individual ramifications today. When people begin to understand that the grace of God *has provided everything we need for life and godliness* (II Peter 1:3), it is very common for them to question the role of works in the Christian Life. Surely God wants us to do something! He does and, to that end, this verse can be very enlightening. Let's break it down into manageable pieces:

1. The passage is clear that, as those who are *in Christ*, we are *to do good works*!
2. These works have been prepared in advance. They are in the mind of God, and they are specific. So much of the pressure to do good works as a Christian is almost irrespective of God's will. Too often the attitude is that we should just get out there and get to work, and typically every Christian gets the same list!
3. How often do we slow down, do less work in the short term, so that we might listen to what the Lord has to say? Do you think it is remotely possible that God wants to keep these works a secret? Of course not. If you and I seek Him, and wait upon Him, He will *direct our paths*. (Proverbs 3:5-7)

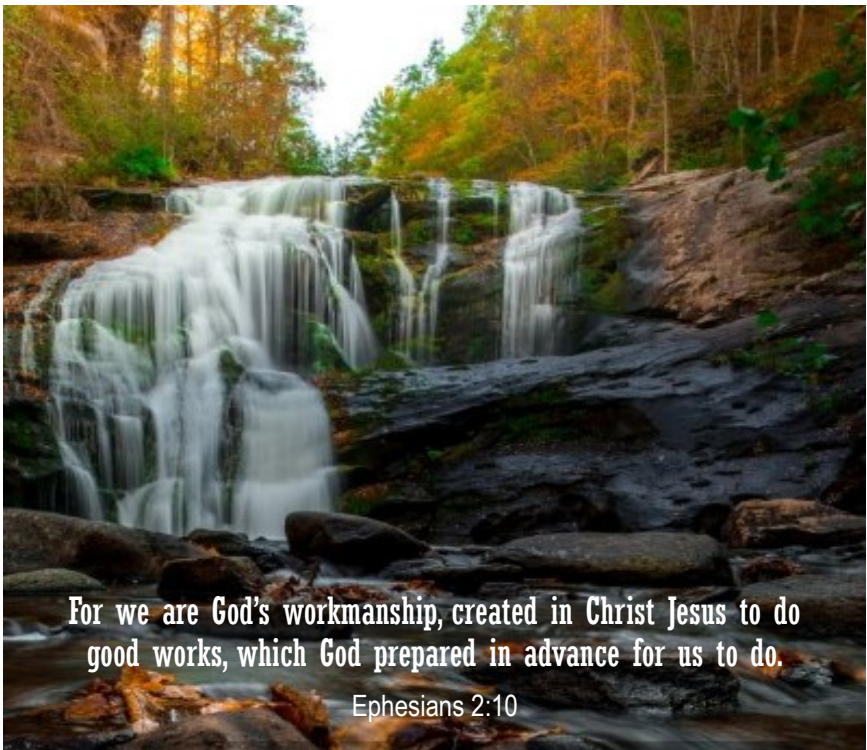
Return to Ephesians

Monday, December 15:

Read Ephesians 2:10-22 (Continued)

4. Now, if we do the works which God has prepared, using the enablement He provides, then we show ourselves to the watching world to be *God's workmanship*. Who do you think gets the glory when we do that? God does, and that's compatible with His plans and purposes.

So, what I am suggesting is a bit more emphasis on waiting upon the Lord and following His leading. That leads to a little bit less emphasis on squeezing out any old kind of work and, instead, bringing glory to God.



Return to Ephesians

Tuesday, December 16:

Read Romans 8:1-14

Would you agree that God has called every one of His children to good works, to bear fruit that is to the glory of God? Both our understanding of Christianity and yesterday's devotional should cause us to answer, "Of course!" Then the question becomes, "How do we do this?"

There are a lot of wrong answers out there, answers that sound good but have no power to accomplish that which God desires. Those wrong answers are based upon will-power and a vibrant personality, and those things are not the Christian Life.



Return to Ephesians

Tuesday, December 16:

Read Romans 8:1-14 (Continued)

Consider the following quote:

It is time for us to see the necessity of going beyond the love motive to the life motive. Our consecration, surrender, or commitment will never hold up if it is our responding to Him from any other motivation than the response of His life in us. Yielding to Him on any different basis will simply amount to our trying to live for Him in the self-life. Miles J. Stanford

Although challenging, is this quote Scriptural? I believe it is!

As for being incapable of living the Christian Life:

... those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Romans 8:8

Well then, how do we please God and from what source?

I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me ...

Galatians 2:20

It is the new life that needs to be manifest and to which we need to surrender. It is this new life that we need to *present to God* as those being alive from the dead. (Romans 6:13)

The word *present* means to *put at one's disposal*, to *surrender*. Now, when the new life we have in Christ is put at God's disposal, note two things:

1. It is natural to produce good works—fruit that lasts.
2. God gets the glory for what He can do through us!

Return to Ephesians

Wednesday, December 17:

Read Acts 15

Because we have 2,000 years of Church history behind us, we often don't realize that the early church had a *Gentile problem*. From the time of Abraham forward, God's plan of redemption had been very *Jew-centered*. Jesus was Jewish and He was the promised Jewish Messiah. Further, with the advent of the Church in Acts 2, it started with Jewish converts.

As we continue our study of Ephesians 2, the *Gentile problem* is clearly documented, for they are said to be:

- The *uncircumcised* (not part of the covenant people)
- Not recipients of the promise of a Messiah
- Not the chosen people
- Not part of the covenantal promises (land, offspring, and kingdom)

No wonder Ephesians describes Gentiles as:

**... strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope,
and without God in the world ...**

Ephesians 2:12

Now are you surprised to know that the solution to the Gentile problem is found in the Lord Jesus Christ? Reflect on the following verse and realize this is our heritage, our means of receiving redemption:

**But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away
have been brought near through the blood of Christ.**

Ephesians 2:13

Consider the following:

- You and I, as Gentiles, were *far away* in terms of the plans and purposes of God.

Return to Ephesians

Wednesday, December 17:

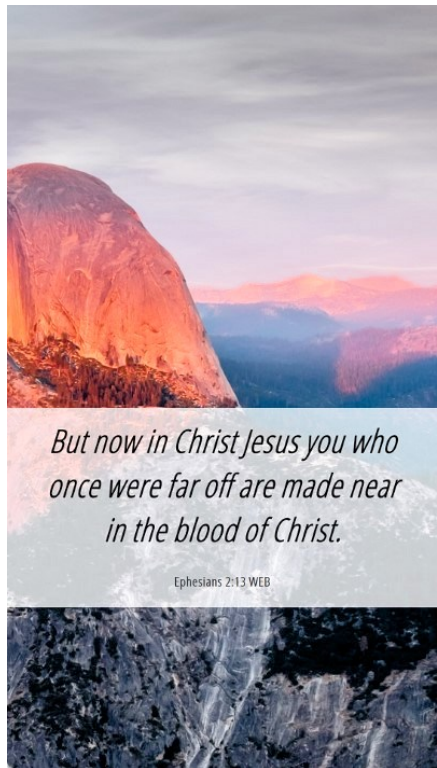
Read Acts 15 (Continued)

- We were *brought near in Christ!* In fact, for the past 2,000 years we have been right in the thick of God's plans and purposes because today His Church is largely Gentile.
- What could possibly allow for such a change, such a blessing? Nothing but the *blood of Jesus!* Jew and Gentile have been made one by means of the finished work of the cross.

Although promises to Israel are yet to be fulfilled, during this time of the Church, ethnicity, gender, and social status are not the issue. You can see this is so in today's reading:

... Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

Acts 15:7-9



Return to Ephesians

Thursday, December 18:

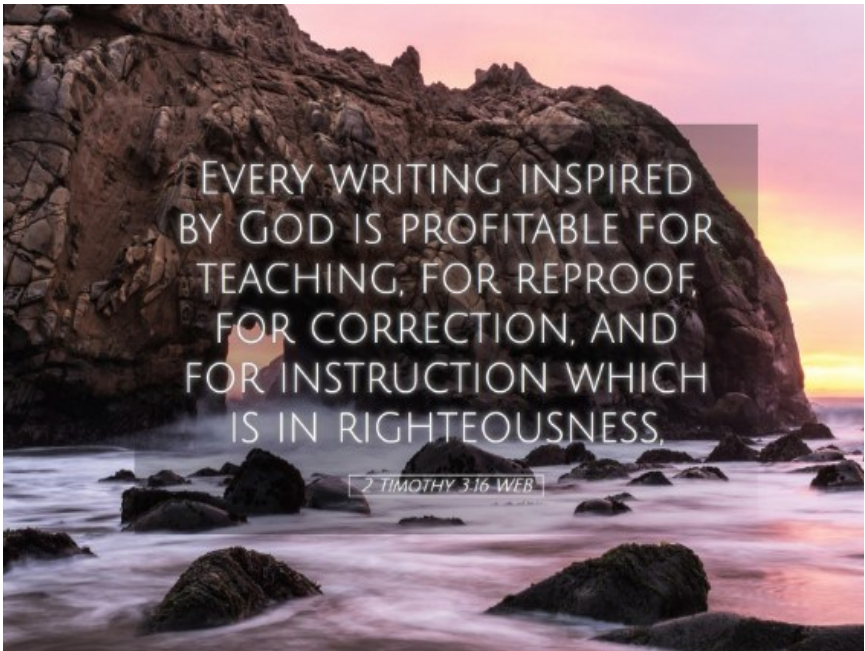
Read Ephesians 2:17-22

The end of Ephesians 2 speaks of Jew and Gentiles being:

... fellow citizens ... and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone. In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. Ephesians 2:19-21

The above is a reference to the Church, of which Jesus is the Cornerstone and within which there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, male or female, slave or free!

Let me ask you to think about a very important point regarding the purpose of the Church from God's perspective (and, of course, that's the only perspective that matters).



Return to Ephesians

Thursday, December 18:

Read Ephesians 2:17-22 (Continued)

Choose one of the following two options:

- **View 1:** The Church's role is primarily to represent Christ on earth in such a way that lost people get saved (brought into the kingdom of Jesus Christ), and, once saved, grow into the spiritual fullness that is part of the so-great salvation provided in Christ. The Gospel, then, is a message of personal salvation through faith alone in Christ alone. It includes a spiritual birth and remission of sins. It is certainly natural for the saved portion of any society to have a positive benefit upon it.
- **View 2:** The Church's primary role is one of being an agent of social change—bettering the condition and lot of men. In doing so, human society will be salvaged, for all the evils in society stem from social injustice of one kind or another. A reconstructed society will lead to reformed individuals.

Which view did you choose? Here are a couple of distinctions to note:

1. This is not to say that View 1 doesn't care about social ills. It is just a matter of your perspective on the role of the church—top down or bottom up.
2. Those who advocate View 1 tend to use the Bible as a source of truth and take it literally. Those who advocate View 2 take the Bible as a rough guide, limit its modern day relevancy, and tend to interpret it very loosely.

Ponder these two views until tomorrow.

Return to Ephesians

Friday, December 19:

Read Proverbs 29

Have you made up your mind about the God-ordained role of the Church? Consider the early church as recorded in the Book of Acts. Did the early Church focus upon the evils of Roman rule and other types of social injustice (View 2)?

Not according to the record in Acts. What we have recorded in Scripture looks like person-to-person salvation, rather than an effort to reform society.

Consider the narratives regarding the Day of Pentecost, Saul of Tarsus, Simon the Sorcerer, the Ethiopian Eunuch, and the Philippian jailor. These are accounts of individual people getting saved—entering into a personal, faith-based relationship with God the Father through the Son (View 1).

Now let me show you an interesting corollary. The transformation that occurred in Paul's life had nothing to do with solving the social justice riddle. Rather, it was the result of a personal encounter with Christ. Then, once he was saved, he stopped perpetuating social injustice, no longer hauling innocent people off to jail.

There is a principle here: if you want to address social injustice, you need to do so indirectly. The means is getting lost people saved, one person at a time, and then helping them to grow in grace and knowledge. That's the best and most effective way of impacting society.

Return to Ephesians

Friday, December 19:

Read Proverbs 29 (Continued)

You see, we need to be brought near to God and be in Christ:

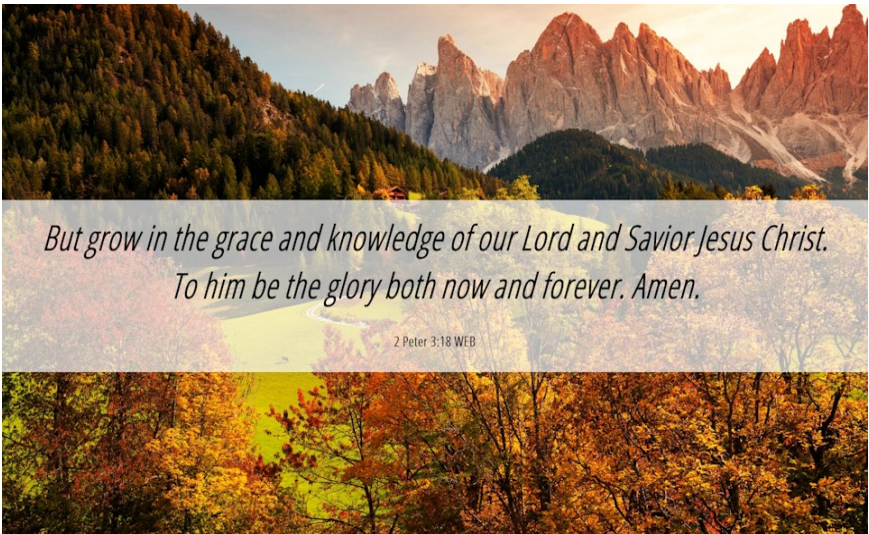
... now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

Ephesians 2:13

Then, much in the way of social ills will begin to take care of themselves—and it will be for real!

The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.

Proverbs 29:7



*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
To him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.*

2 Peter 3:18 WEB

Preparing Our Hearts for Christmas

Monday, December 22: Read Psalm 40

For these few days before Christmas, I would like to share with you a few of the many Old Testament passages which point ahead to the First Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Old and New Testaments are inseparably bound together. The subject matter of the Old Testament centers in the person and coming work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the New Testament centers on His advent and His teachings.

We will spend the next few days looking at just a few of the many examples. In the midst of Psalm 40, in which David is recounting his own experience, he utters a prophetic word in Verses 6-8:

Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me; burnt offerings and sin offerings You did not require. Then I said, "Here I am, I have come—It is written about Me in the scroll. I desire to do Your will, O My God; Your Law is written within My heart."



Preparing Our Hearts for Christmas

Monday, December 22: Read Psalm 40 (Continued)

These verses are speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ at His First Advent, and they reveal His intent to accomplish all that the Father desires. How do we know this refers to Christ? One writer of the New Testament made it so clear:

**Therefore, when Christ came into the world, He said,
"Sacrifice and offering You did not desire ..."**

Hebrews 10:5-7

As you can see, he ascribes the passage in Psalm 40 directly to Christ. What can we know about this coming Christ from the perspective of Psalm 40?

- This coming Christ is going to fulfill the will of God beyond the sacrificial requirements of the Mosaic Law.
- The Word of God predicts the coming of the Christ.
- Jesus will accomplish the will of God for the Word of God is written in His heart.

It is the coming of this Christ that we celebrate at Christmas.



Preparing Our Hearts for Christmas

Tuesday, December 23:

Read Genesis 3

Although the activity of the Lord Jesus Christ can be found as early as Genesis 1, His coming is clearly predicted in Chapter 3. I would like you to consider two connections to our Lord. The first is the more obvious:

So the Lord God said to the serpent ... “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel.”

Genesis 3:14-15

There are multiple references to Jesus in these two verses. Notice, it is the offspring of the woman who will crush the head of Satan. Why the woman? Because of the coming virgin birth of Christ. Then who else is able to crush Satan, other than the King of kings and Lord of lords? (Revelation 19:11-16, 20:7-10) And, of course, Satan's strike at the heel is a reference to his manipulation of people and circumstances leading to the unjust trial and crucifixion of our Lord. But there is another connection to our Lord in this chapter that is more subtle.



Preparing Our Hearts for Christmas

Tuesday, December 23: Read Genesis 3 (Continued)

We saw that Adam ate of the fruit and died—spiritually. The Book of Romans tells us that God has imputed this sin to every member of the human race making Adam the father of sin and death for the human race. In the New Testament, I Corinthians 15:22 sums it up:

For as in Adam all die ...

But one has come who is in contrast to this Adam:

The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam a life-giving spirit ... The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven ... And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

I Corinthians 15:45-49

It is the coming of this second Adam, the One who was without sin and died in our place, that provides life where the first Adam provided only death. And, that's a reason to remember and celebrate!



Preparing Our Hearts for Christmas

Wednesday, December 24:

Read Ruth 2:20, Ruth 4

I trust you are somewhat familiar with the great salvation story of Ruth. As you saw in today's reading, Boaz assumes the role of *Kinsman-Redeemer* in purchasing the land of Ruth's deceased husband and taking her for his wife.

The *kinsman-redeemer* is developed elsewhere in the Old Testament; but in short, it is a male who acts on behalf of a relative who is in trouble or need of assistance. A kinsman-redeemer might buy back mortgaged property or buy a relative out of slavery. Two things to consider about the kinsman-redeemer:

1. There had to be a familial relationship in order to fill the role. (Leviticus 25:47-49)
2. The redeemer had to pay a price. (Leviticus 25:27)

The kinsman-redeemer as portrayed by Boaz is a type of Jesus Christ. He came to redeem us from the slave market of sin that we might be transferred from the dominion of



Preparing Our Hearts for Christmas

Wednesday, December 24:

Read Ruth 2:20, Ruth 4 (Continued)

darkness and into the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Colossians 1:13-14) Notice how Jesus fulfilled the criteria for a kinsman-redeemer:

1. Speaking of Jesus in Hebrews 2:14, 17:

Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity ... For this reason He had to be made like His brothers in every way ...

2. As for the purchase price, consider I Peter 1:18-19:

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

Here is yet another reason we celebrate Christmas for it is a recognition that our kinsman-redeemer has come into the world.



Preparing Our Hearts for Christmas



The Nativity by Federico Barrocci, 1597

Preparing Our Hearts for Christmas

Thursday, December 25:

Christmas Day

Enjoy reflecting upon the following passages of Scripture:

"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a Son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us."

Matthew 1:23

Simeon took Him in his arms and praised God saying, "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you can now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the sight of all people, light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." ... Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, His mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Luke 2:29-35

The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth ... For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known.

John 1:14-18

When Jesus Comes a Second Time

Friday, December 26:

Read John 12:37-50

As the day after Christmas, I think it appropriate to try and reconcile these two verses:

"For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it."

John 12:47

"... He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead."

Acts 10:42

In context, both verses are clearly speaking of Jesus. But how can they both be true? The first says Jesus did not come to judge, and the second clearly says that Jesus has been appointed to judge all. What are we to make of this? The answer is to properly place each verse into the plans and purposes of God.

We have just finished celebrating the eternal Son of God taking on our humanity at His First Advent. He did that because He came to save and not to judge!



Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity, so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is the devil ...

Hebrews 2:14

If Jesus was going to be our representative at the cross, He needed to share in our humanity. And, He did. Surely you can see that He did not come to judge, but to save by being judged in our place. The wages of sin are death, and He paid those wages for us. But what about His appointment to judge the living and the dead?

When Jesus Comes a Second Time

Friday, December 26:

Read John 12:37-50 (Continued)

Make no mistake, this is going to happen!

For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

Romans 14:10

This clearly hasn't happened yet. That is because it is a future event associated with the second time Jesus comes—His second advent. Look carefully at how that event is described in Revelation 19:11.

And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.

Do you see how this fits together? Jesus comes first to save. And, for the past two thousand years He has been so patient in allowing each successive generation a chance to receive the gift purchased at so great a cost.

Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God ...

John 1:12

But this time of grace will come to a close. Then He will come again, not to provide salvation but judgment.

... He comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in His truth.

Psalms 96:13

Here is a very simple bit of advice: Accept the salvation offered by Jesus before you face Him as judge! Why do I think that is so important? Because:

... there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus ...

Romans 8:1

The Abundant Life

Monday, December 29:

Read: John 10:1-18

As we approach the end of the year, let me ask you a question: *Do you have an abundant life—spiritually speaking?* Why would I ask such a question? Because Jesus raised this very issue:

“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” John 10:10

Let’s break this into two parts. First, Jesus came that mankind might have life! We saw this in yesterday’s devotional:

“... I did not come to judge the world, but to save it.” John 12:47

Faith in the person and work of Christ leads to life—eternal life. But notice in today’s reading that Jesus doesn’t stop at simply having a certain duration of life! He came that the quality of the life we have would be that of an ***abundant life!*** So for today and tomorrow, let’s begin an investigation of what this means. To do so, let’s first define the *Abundant Life* and then describe how we attain it.

To define the *Abundant Life*, I am just going to allow the Scriptures to speak for themselves. We will have by no means exhausted the subject, but this will be a good start. And as a reminder, we are talking about a spiritually *abundant life* as opposed to materially! So here goes. The *Abundant Life* can be defined as:

- A life in which we abide in Christ and He abides in us (John 15:4)
- A life in which we bear spiritual fruit that brings glory to the Father (John 15:8)

The Abundant Life

Monday, December 29:

Read: John 10:1-18 (Continued)

- A life in which we have learned to tap into the spiritual blessings on reserve for us in heaven (Ephesians 1:3)
- A life in which God's power is made perfect in our weakness (II Corinthians 12:9)
- A life in which the Spirit of Christ is the source of enabling power (Romans 8:9)
- A life in which in every circumstance we know the breadth, length, height, and depth of the love of Christ and know it to overflowing. (Ephesians 3:17-19)

There is much, much more! But, now you know why it is called the *Abundant Life*. You won't be surprised to know that the Greek word translated *abundant* means of superior quality, overflowing measure, and of great advantage! Jesus came that we might have this kind of life! I trust we might choose in the year ahead to learn more about it, that we might take Him up on His offer! Part 2 tomorrow!



**"... I have come that they may have life,
and that they may have it more abundantly!"**

The Abundant Life

Tuesday, December 30:

Read John 10:19-42

Yesterday we defined the *Abundant Life*, today we will consider how we might attain such a wonderful thing. The first thing we have to know is that, when we trusted in Christ for eternal life, we received exactly what was promised—eternal life. But what is often overlooked is that the life we receive is the life of Jesus. That is why it is eternal! We are then told to count ourselves,

... alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:11

We are also told to know that:

... Christ lives in me ...

Galatians 2:20

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Colossians 3:4

At this point, we should all know why Jesus promised to bring *Abundant Life* to those who believe. He is going to share His life with us, and His life is by definition *Abundant*—superior in quality, of exceeding measure, and of great benefit!

So, this changes today's question a bit. No longer should we be asking how to attain the abundant life—that begins with faith in Christ for our eternal life. What we should be asking is, "*How do we experience the abundant life that is ours by virtue of having trusted in Christ for eternal life?*"

I could write a month of devotionals to fully develop this question, and still fall short. In the limited space remaining, let me suggest three things that are necessary to live a spiritually abundant life: Abide in Christ, walk by faith, and walk by the Spirit.

The Abundant Life

Tuesday, December 30:

Read John 10:19-42 (Continued)

In John 15:4-5 we find:

“Abide in me, and I in you ... He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

First, I know that when Christ is *abiding* in me, I am experiencing the *Abundant Life*. That motivates me to meet the initial condition of abiding in Him.

Secondly, perhaps you are thinking that to *walk by faith* is too simple. Two things make it challenging:

1. Our faith must have the right object—which is the truths and promises of God’s Word.
2. We must believe them when circumstances pressure us to do otherwise.

Peter was not experiencing the *Abundant life* when he started to sink after hearing the howl of the wind; but he most certainly did when he preached a sermon on Pentecost in the face of ridicule—and, 3,000 souls were saved.

Finally, to walk by the Spirit is to allow Him to teach, guide, and enable. This, too, has its challenges for sin grieves the Spirit and persistent sin quenches His ministry in our lives. But, as we confess our sin, we simply trust Him to work the truths of God’s Word into our lives—something we cannot ourselves do.

I pray that both you and I would be blessed to experience as much of the *Abundant Life* as possible in the year ahead, for this is the kind of life Jesus came to provide!

The Theme of the Year

Wednesday, December 31:

Read Psalm 43

Our theme throughout this past year has been: *God's Word is Sufficient!* This is to recognize God's Word for what it is: revelation from God, preserved by God for our enlightenment! Further, our goal has been to develop an ever-deepening relationship with the Word, so that we might know the One who stands behind it!

There have been a number of messages throughout the year which are worth reviewing, but, for now, consider today's reading:

**Send forth Your light and Your truth, let them guide me;
let them bring me to Your holy mountain, to the place
where You dwell.**

Psalm 43:3

This past year we made the effort to visit God's holy mountain—the place where He dwells. And, I trust we will continue to do so in the year ahead. Perhaps you are wondering, *"How can we come into His throne room? How can we go to the place where He dwells?"* The passage in Psalm 43 tells us. We can do so by means of the light and truth that God has sent forth! For He has given us an entire book of truth in His inspired Word. Jesus Himself confirmed this for us while asking the Father to:

"Sanctify them with the truth, Thy Word is truth."

John 17:17

We might imagine that we need two things: light and truth. But, in reality, let me suggest that it is only one thing with two components. His Word is truth, and the understanding of His truth is what provides light for our souls! Truth is always in *the Book*, but it only becomes light for each of us

The Theme of the Year

Wednesday, December 31:

Read Psalm 43 (Continued)

when we open the Bible and allow the Holy Spirit to illumine its truth to us! The psalmist says it this way:

For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light. Psalm 36:9

Peter says it this way in speaking of the Bible being a more certain source of truth than what we see with our own eyes:

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. II Peter 1:19

The Word of God is truth. As we come into an understanding of what it has to say, our souls will be illuminated by the inherent light of God's truth. Truly in the light of His truth, we see light. Such light is found nowhere else, for this world is the dark place of which Peter speaks. As the light of His truth illumines our soul, one piece of truth at a time, truly we do come into our Lord's presence in the place where He dwells. No wonder we open the Word of God nearly every time we meet—and I look forward to doing so regularly with you in the year ahead.

Now what could be more appropriate than to wish you a happy and blessed new year, as you open God's Word and are ushered into His presence!



VISTOSO



Community Church

He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit...*John 15:5*

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