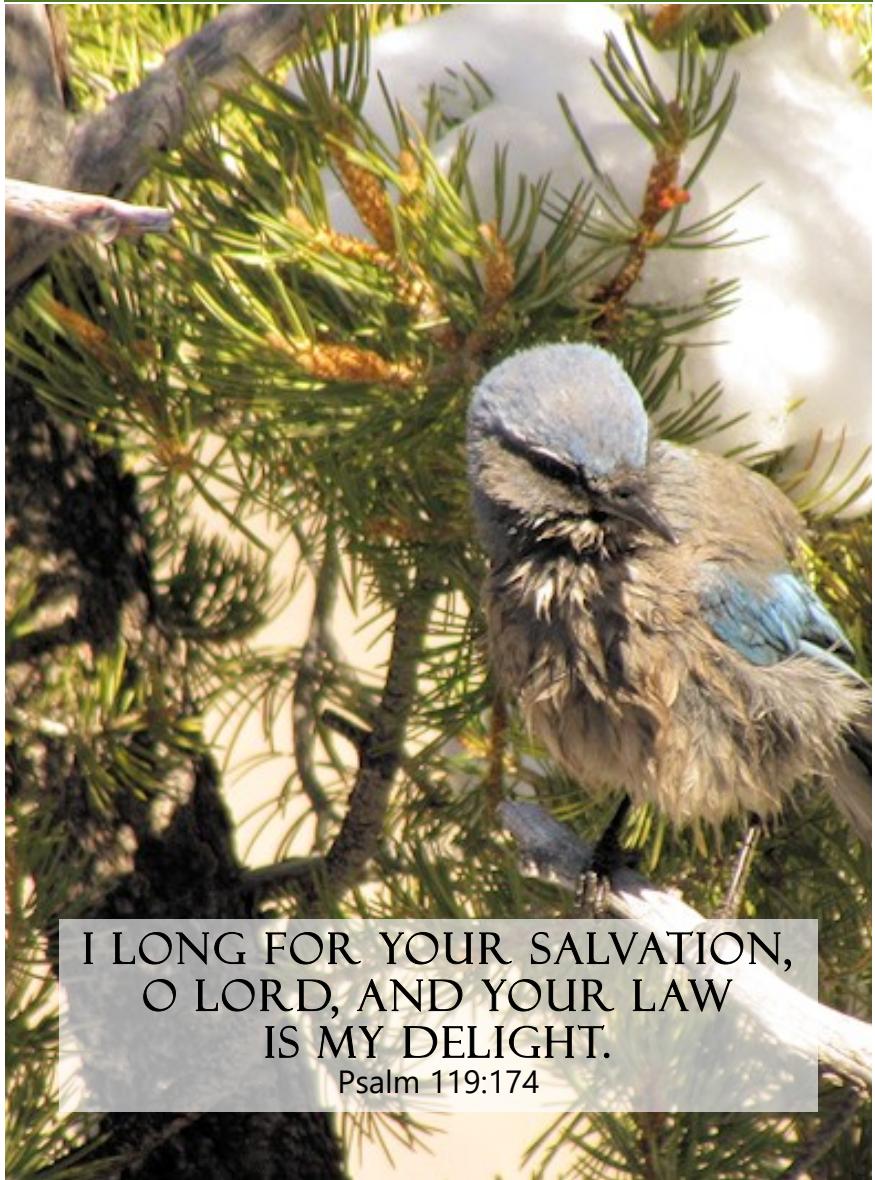


February 2026 Daily Devotional



I LONG FOR YOUR SALVATION,
O LORD, AND YOUR LAW
IS MY DELIGHT.

Psalm 119:174

Vistoso Community Church

Foreword

As we move into the second month of the new year we are going to be spending the bulk of our time in the New Testament with readings in Ephesians and Romans. We will also continue our topical investigation of the Missions and Disciplines of the Christian Life. Despite the New Testament focus, we will also be taking a look at the life of Elijah toward the middle of the month, a topic that I trust will be of great interest.



May God bless your efforts to draw closer to Him through His living and powerful Word!

In His grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Redig".

Kevin Redig

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

Lessons from Ephesians

Monday, February 1: Read Ephesians 3:1-13

The Greek word translated *mystery* refers to something that was hidden, but is now revealed as Paul explains:

... grace was given to me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God. ... His intent was that now, through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known. ... Ephesians 3:8-10

These points help explain the *mystery* nature of the Church:

1. The Church was a *mystery* because it was *kept hidden in God* for ages past. You will not find one reference to the Church in the Old Testament.
2. Regarding this mystery of the Church, Paul says it was revealed to him: "*the mystery made known to me by revelation.*" (Ephesians 3:3)
3. The insertion of the Church into human history on Pentecost ushered in a new *administration* in the unfolding of God's purposes.

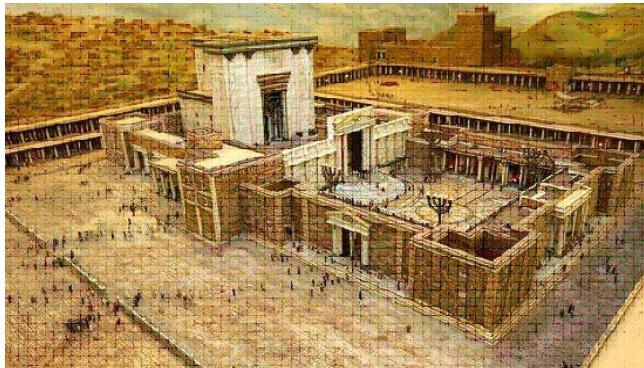
The word that is variously translated administration, dispensation, or stewardship refers to the way something is organized and operated. The word literally means *house rules*. In short, God worked one way with and through the nation of Israel, and He is now doing something different through the Church! Many differences between Israel and the Church should come to mind: First, the universal outpouring of the Holy Spirit is what established the Church in Acts 2. Then, Jesus ended the requirement to offer animal sacrifices, because He *offered for all time one sacrifice for sins* ... (Hebrews 10:12)

We'll continue with the mystery of the *Church* tomorrow.

Lessons from Ephesians

Tuesday, February 3: Read I Peter 2

At right is a mock-up of the Jewish temple. Below, is a picture of one of the great European cathedrals.



Somewhere along the way in church history, the leaders of the church became confused and then made a mistake. They determined that, since the Jews had their temple, apparently the church needed to have temples too.

Lessons from Ephesians

Tuesday, February 3: Read I Peter 2 (Continued)

We started with the Church as a mystery in yesterday's reading, a mystery that had nothing to do with buildings. Today's reading puts the church in a different light:

As you come to Him, the Living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

I Peter 2:4-5

Did you catch it? The Church is meant to be a spiritual house built from living stones.

Let me break this down a bit further:

1. The church is not a building, it is people!
2. The church can be pictured as a body—with Christ at the head and believers each performing a role under the headship of Christ. Or, it can be pictured as a building—with Jesus as the cornerstone and each believer a living stone meant to be in proper orientation to Christ.
3. God still dwells in His temple by His Spirit! But, during the time of the Church, we would be the members of the body or the living stones!

What a stupendous and shocking difference. To appreciate glorious architecture is fine, but that architecture has nothing to do with the New Testament church.

Lessons from Ephesians

Wednesday, February 4: Read Romans 11

There is a notion that is particularly prevalent in the thinking of some Christian churches and writers today that Israel has somehow become the Church and that the promises to Israel are now the promises to the Church. I trust that today's reading will put that error to rest.

The natural follow-on to this erroneous doctrine is that God is finished with the Jewish people and they are, therefore, no longer an object of His special care and protection. This is how Christians get themselves involved in trying to force Israel to give land to the Palestinians. For it comes down to who owns the land, and whether the promise of Genesis 13:15 still stands.

As mentioned, today's reading should put an end to this error. The reading addresses the issue directly and indirectly.

I ask then: Did God reject His people? By no means!

Romans 11:1

That would seem to be a pretty direct answer to the issue, wouldn't it?

Then read Romans 11, Verses 11-26 carefully. You will find that there is a very clear distinction made between Israel and Gentiles. In context, Gentile is used to reference Gentile Christians. This means that Israel and the Church maintain their separate identities. Israel hasn't morphed into the Church—far from it.

Lessons from Ephesians

Wednesday, February 4: Read Romans 11 (Continued)

Then consider how this section closes:

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers (like Paul, I don't want us to be ignorant of this mystery either) **so that you may not be conceited. Israel** (clearly a distinct entity) **has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in** (a reference to the Church). **And so all Israel will be saved. ...**

Roman 11:25-26

Do you see it? Israel has a future! God's declaration from Genesis 12:3 still stands.

"I will bless those who bless you (Israel) and whoever curses you I will curse. ..."

Thus, it behooves us (the Church) to bless Israel that we might be blessed by God!



*I will bless those
who bless you,
and him who dishonors you
I will curse.
and in you all the families
of the earth
shall be blessed.*

Genesis 12:3 (ESV)

Lessons from Ephesians

Thursday, February 5: Read Ephesians 3:14-21

As Paul wraps up the first half of the Book of Ephesians, he offers the second of two fantastic prayers. The first prayer in Ephesians Chapter 1 was a prayer for revelation, that we might know the truth. This prayer focuses on realization, by that I mean truth from God that we appropriate by faith and know by experience. Paul begins with:

I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

Ephesians 3:16-17

This takes us back to the source of power, of enablement, in our Christian Life—the Holy Spirit. Note carefully the goal of being strengthened by the Spirit, that *Christ may dwell in our hearts!* The word translated *dwell* means to settle in, to be at home, to influence. What a marvelous picture of the deeply relational life the believer is meant to have with his Lord and Savior. How does this happen? It is accomplished by the Spirit's work and our response of faith. It is only as we trust the Word of God and *abide in Christ* that He will be at home in our hearts.

The prayer continues in Verse 17: *And I pray that you being rooted and established in love ...* There are two powerful metaphors here that we dare not miss. *Rooted* evokes the picture of a tree whose roots are down deep. *Established* carries the connotation of a foundation deep in the ground that leads to a sturdy building. We are not going to overcome our failures or make progress in our Christian lives unless our *roots* go down deep into the love of Christ. My favorite part of this prayer comes next—we'll take a closer look tomorrow.

Lessons from Ephesians

Friday, February 6: Read Romans 8:28-39

Here is the continuation of Paul's prayer, picking up where we left off yesterday:

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge. ...

Ephesians 3:17-19

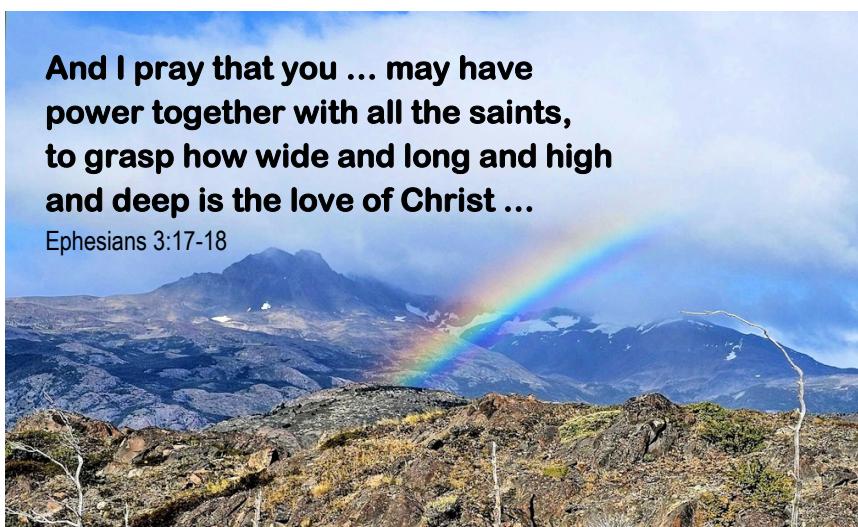
This is Paul's prayer that each believer would, in a personal way, know the love of Christ. But this passage also has context, specifically, the first three chapters of the Book of Ephesians. When we take that context into account, this passage becomes exceedingly precious:

1. Often, we measure the love of God by our circumstances. We think He loves us if things are going well, and doubts arise when things are not going well.

Continued on the next page.

And I pray that you ... may have power together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ ...

Ephesians 3:17-18



Lessons from Ephesians

Friday, February 6:

Read Romans 8:28-39 (Continued)

2. Here is what this passage becomes when we apply the context of the first three chapters of Ephesians, which focus on our position in Christ:
 - The love of Christ is wide enough to bring Jew and Gentile together, so it is certainly wide enough to deal with every circumstance in our lives.
 - His love is long enough to choose us to be holy and blameless in Him before the foundation of the world, so it will certainly cover every day we have been given on this earth.
 - It is deep enough to deliver us from our condition of *dead in trespasses and sin*, so it certainly can handle any failure in life.
 - It is high enough to place us in union with Christ in the heavenlies.

Within this context, the love of Christ stands above every challenge, every trial, every loss—even failing health. It is no wonder that Paul also said:

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus ... Romans 8:38-39

Back to the Book of Romans

Monday, February 9: Read Romans 8:1-17

Thus far in our devotional reading of Romans Chapter 8, we have spent a lot of time on *The Law of the Spirit of Life* as the means to live the Christian Life. One way to distill what we have learned is the following summary of what God has provided and desires for us to do:

1. *To Know the Word* is the place we must begin.
2. *To Walk by faith* in the truths and promises of God's Word that we have come to know is next. It is essential to understand that the challenge of this *Walk of Faith* is trust in these truths and promises at the point they intersect our daily lives.
3. *To Walk by the Spirit* is the final step, where we understand this to be trusting the Spirit to both *put to death the misdeeds of the flesh* and to *manifest the life of Christ* in our lives.



2 TIMOTHY 3:16

Every writing inspired by God is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction which is in righteousness,



Continued on the next page.

Back to the Book of Romans

Monday, February 9:

Read Romans 8:1-17 (Continued)

We have *Knowing the Word, Walking by Faith, and Walking by the Spirit!* What I would like to do for the next few days is look at a number of illustrations, two from the Old Testament and one from the New, and analyze two things:

1. How well does the above approach work in real life?
2. If we can identify where things break down, we can avoid the same kinds of failure in our own lives.

Perhaps at this point, you might think this is pretty straightforward and, in theory, it is. God has provided everything we need, and all we need to do is trust Him to do what He has promised. But this is sort of like saying you are a courageous soldier because you are a good marksman at the range. I would suggest that the real test of courage comes when someone is shooting back!

In the same way, a walk of faith and a walk by the Spirit become much more challenging when the world around us is *shooting back* and we are having to deal with our internal proclivity to sin. As we will see, some of the Bible characters we will consider have their difficulties as well. I believe their difficulties, and an occasional victory, have been recorded that we might learn from them.



Back to the Book of Romans

Tuesday, February 10: Read Matthew 14:22-33

This is a very well known portion of Scripture. But let's not let that keep us from examining Peter's walk of faith more closely. How did Peter do on *knowing the Word of God* and *believing* what it said? (Of course, in this case, the Word of God happens to be the actual words of Jesus.) I think we should agree that Peter heard the words of Jesus and believed them.

You might not initially agree, but isn't it true that Peter got out of the boat and started to walk toward Jesus? So he heard the words of Jesus and believed them—as shown by his response.

Now for the next step, how was Peter's *Walk of Faith*? That is the same as asking—*how did he do when it came to applying the truths and promises of God's Word at the point they intersected his life?* Today's reading tells us:

But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord save me!" Matthew 14:30

Peter had a very clear *word* from Jesus, He said, "**Come**!" So, in faith Peter got out of the boat and started toward Jesus. But when he heard the howl of the wind and saw the size of the waves, that clear word from Jesus was forgotten, and his walk of faith in Christ and His Word was a casualty! Am I sure? I am because Jesus provides a very clear post-incident analysis:

"You of little faith," He said, "Why did you doubt?" Matthew 14:31

Continued on the next page.

Back to the Book of Romans

Tuesday, February 10: Read Matthew 14:22-33 (Continued)

Peter started well, that is having a *little faith*, but then doubted. You see, it is called a *walk* because it isn't just an initial response of faith, but a moment-by-moment, step-by-step, steadfast trust in the Word of God and the One who stands behind the Word.

Just to finish our analysis, what would a walk of faith have looked like in this situation? How about something like this:

- I have a word from Jesus—who is the Son of God and Messiah
- I am perfectly secure walking on this water because I am in both my Father's hand and that of my Savior.

That kind of *walk* would mean that Peter is able to confidently walk across the water into the embrace of His Savior despite the wind and waves.

What is the lesson for us? How about:

If we feel as if we are sinking, let's turn back to the promises of God's Word that we might return to trusting Him rather than getting caught up in our circumstances—which quite often have a howl and roar all of their own.

... in quietness and trust is your strength ... Isaiah 30:15

Back to the Book of Romans

Wednesday, February 11: Read **Philippians 1**

Paul wrote the Book of Philippians while under house arrest in Rome. The custom at the time would have been for him to have been chained to a Roman guard—24 hours a day.

Let's run through the series of questions we developed yesterday and see how Paul fared living the Christian Life. Did Paul hear the Gospel and believe? He certainly did. You can read all about his conversion on the road just outside of Damascus in Acts 9. As a believer in Jesus Christ, is he continuing to walk by faith? What do you think of his testimony after many years of ministry facing all kinds of difficulties?

**However, I consider my life
worth nothing to me, if only
I may finish the race and
complete the task the Lord
Jesus has given me—the
task of testifying to the
gospel of God's grace.**

Act 20:24

Finally, Paul is facing the daily threat of death while imprisoned in Rome, and we still find him walking by faith.

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:21

Continue on the next page.



Back to the Book of Romans

Wednesday, February 11: Read **Philippians 1** (Continued)

It would certainly seem that Paul is trusting the Lord in every and all circumstances! Then, our final question: Is He walking by the Spirit—trusting God to produce fruit in his life? The church in Philippi is part of that fruit and Paul quite emphatically tells us:

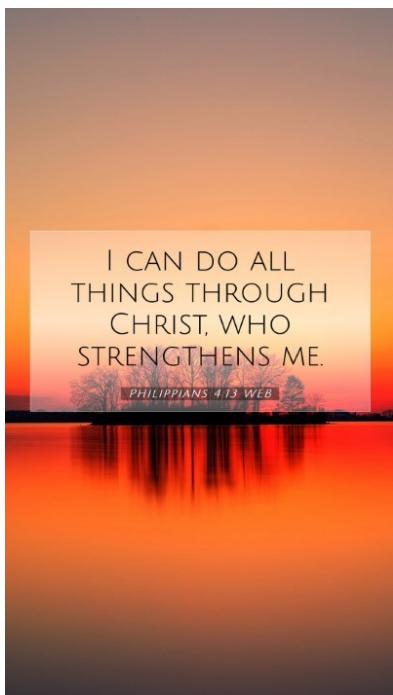
I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:13

Would this be the *Spirit of Christ* who has been outpoured on all those who believe? I believe so. Let me suggest that

Paul is a wonderful example of someone who not only knows the truth, but is daily walking by faith and by the Spirit. This is how a believer in Christ, like Paul, can be imprisoned by man and yet see himself as living for Christ as he writes letters to a church he planted in Philippi and witnesses to the guards to whom he is chained.

This is how he can look forward to his eventual martyrdom as nothing more than *great gain!* Only a walk of faith by the Spirit leads to such an outcome.



Back to the Book of Romans

Thursday, February 12: Read I Kings 18

As a reminder, we have come to understand the *Law of the Spirit of Life* can be broken down into three components: Knowing the Word, Walking by Faith, and Walking by the Spirit!

For our final example we will turn to the Old Testament. This illustration is a bit more involved, so it will take us a number of days to investigate it. But, as you will see, it is an excellent illustration because God reveals the foundational role of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, after reading I Kings, Chapter 18, I think we have ample evidence to answer the questions: Did Elijah know the Word of God, did he believe it, and did he walk by the Spirit? Our answer to all three would have to be a resounding: "Yes!" Allow me to prove that to you:

1. *Did Elijah know the Word?* Today's reading begins with Elijah receiving a word from the Lord and responding to it. He certainly knew that the idolatry of the northern kingdom was in violation of God's Commandments, and so he firmly confronted King Ahab on this matter.
2. *Did Elijah walk by faith?* Of course! How else can you explain his boldness in facing off against the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah at Mt. Carmel? Elijah clearly had his eyes on the Lord and was trusting Him to demonstrate His greatness before the people.

Continued on the next page.

Back to the Book of Romans

Thursday, February 12: Read I Kings 18 (Continued)

- Finally, did Elijah walk by the Spirit? That would normally be a difficult question to answer, especially regarding a situation in the Old Testament. But note the very last verse in today's reading:

Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

I Kings 18:46

It is not difficult to surmise that Elijah's ministry the entire day was accomplished in the power of God's Spirit. Thus, allow me to suggest that we have a wonderful illustration of a man who is able to be used by God to accomplish great things, simply because He responds to the Word of God, by faith, and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The outcome of His ministry is summed up by the response of the people:

"The Lord, He is God! The Lord—He is God!"

I Kings 18:39

What a great day of the Lord manifesting Himself, and the people responding!

Let me close today with two questions:

- Is everything going to be smooth sailing from now on?
- Does a walk by the Spirit one day guarantee it is going to happen the next day?

We shall see the answers to these questions as the story continues tomorrow.

Back to the Book of Romans

Friday, February 13: Read I Kings 19

One way to summarize what we find in today's reading is the following observation:

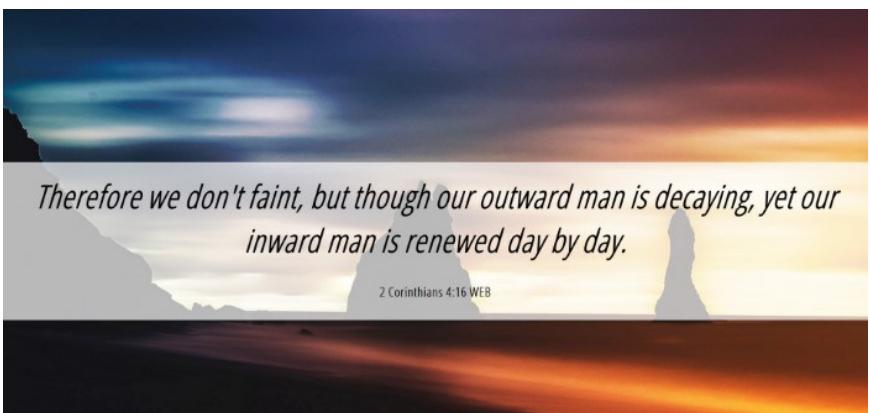
How quickly things can turn with respect to our spiritual lives!

Yesterday, we see Elijah as a mighty man of God. Today, he looks more like a self-centered coward who runs away from God's calling on his life! What happened? The answer is directly related to what we have been learning: Elijah stopped paying attention to God's Word, stopped walking by faith, and walked in his feeble strength rather than that of the Holy Spirit. We should be asking,

How did this come about? How could Elijah be such a spiritual giant one day and such a spiritual pygmy the next?

Let's turn to today's reading for the answers.

Continued on the next page.



Therefore we don't faint, but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day.

2 Corinthians 4:16 WEB

Back to the Book of Romans

Friday, February 13: Read I Kings 19 (Continued)

It all starts with Queen Jezebel's threat to Elijah:

"May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."

I Kings 19:2

This is a threat from Jezebel to kill Elijah, just like the prophets of Baal and Asherah were killed the day before. The problem is not Jezebel's threat, but Elijah's response to it!

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life.

I Kings 19:3

Is Elijah walking by faith? Is he trusting God to preserve him from Jezebel's intent to murder him? The text answers this for us: When fear governs your actions and you run for the hills, you are no longer walking by faith. Further, I think it worth pointing out that Elijah has been threatened by the royal family before. In fact, he has been carrying out ministry for years while many have sought to kill him! Something happened that caused him to run in fear this time. Something happened to cause him to get his eyes off of his great God, and His promises, and to run for his life.

Let's see if we can understand what happened, that we might avoid the same failing. Here is my reason for wanting to do so: If the life of a spiritual giant like Elijah can unravel in a single day, so can ours. Unbelief is potentially always right around the corner. So we really want to understand this, so that we might heed the admonition:

See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

Hebrews 3:12

I trust you are of the same mind.

Back to the Book of Romans

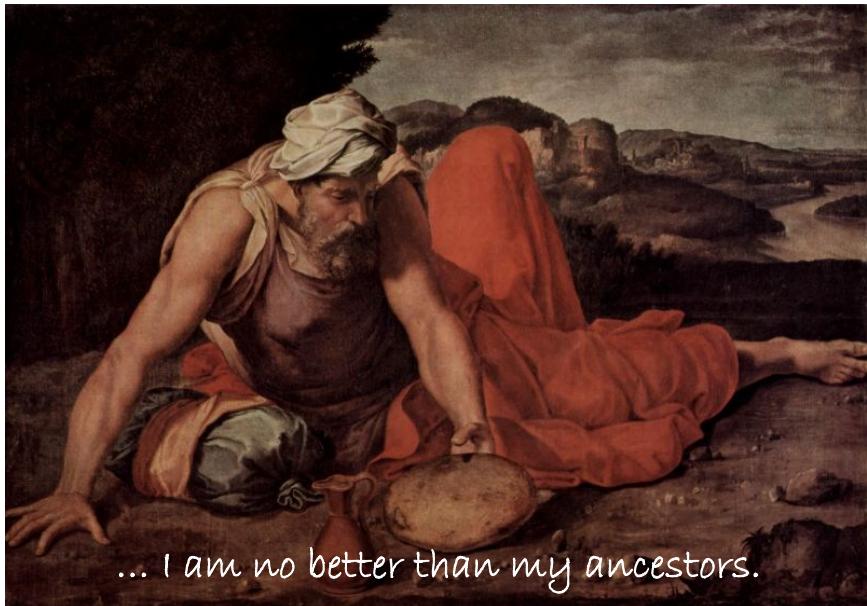
Monday, February 16: Read I Kings 19, a second time

We are seeking to understand what it means to live a spiritual life, and we have defined that to mean: *Knowing and believing the Word of God, Walking by Faith, and Walking by the Spirit*. By looking closely at Elijah's failure to do so in I Kings 19, I think we can identify several key contributors, with the intent of learning from his mistakes that we might avoid the same errors. Let's start with I Kings 19:4:

"Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."

At this point, Elijah has taken up residence in the *pity parlor!* His fear of Jezebel is indicative of his unbelief in the capability of God to protect and his focus on self is clearly revealed by his comparing himself to others.

Continued on the next page.



Back to the Book of Romans

Monday, February 16:

Read I Kings 19 (Continued)

There are two principles for us to learn at this point:

1. We have become a spiritual people, not because we are better than others, but because we have learned to walk by faith and by the Spirit—in all circumstances.
2. Every spiritual victory in our lives will be followed by a counterattack from the world. After the great response of the people at Mt. Carmel, Elijah was caught off guard by Jezebel's response.

Let me suggest that he should have expected a spiritual trial to follow. Let me also suggest that it was God's will for Elijah to be teaching the great multitude that responded so positively at Mt. Carmel. Instead, their teacher has run away and is feeling sorry for himself in the desert. It should be clear how unbelief can squander the opportunity for ministry and the accomplishment of divine good!

Despite Elijah's failure, let me point out the surpassing graciousness of our God. Despite Elijah wallowing in self-pity, God miraculously provides food and drink. And then he does so for a second time in I Kings 19:7:

"Get up and eat, for the journey is too great for you."

In the strength of this meal, Elijah traveled for 40 days and 40 nights, all the way to Mt. Horeb. Here is the principle:

Apart from what God provides, the Christian Life will always be too great for us to manage. We must look to Him to provide, day in and day out, to meet our every need. That's what grace is: God's abundant provision for our ever-changing need.

Back to the Book of Romans

Tuesday, February 17: Read Zechariah 4

Yesterday we talked about the role of faith in living the Christian Life; today let's consider the role of the Holy Spirit as we use Elijah as an illustration for one more day. As you recall from the reading of the past two days, God brought before Elijah a great and powerful wind, an earthquake, and fire. In each case, the text is very careful to say, *but the Lord was not in* any of them.

Finally, after these three manifestations of power from the human perspective, came *a still small voice*. The text makes clear, this was the presence of God. As the dialogue continues, Elijah is rebuked for his unbelief and given a new ministry to accomplish. Allow me to suggest that this *still small voice* is that of the Holy Spirit.

God's answer for Elijah was exactly the same as His answer for Zerubbabel when he returned to Jerusalem after the exile and was trying to both govern and rebuild the capital city. From a human perspective it was a daunting and hopeless task. But did you catch what God told Zerubbabel in today's reading:

**"Not by might, nor by power,
but by My Spirit," says the Lord
of Hosts.**

Zechariah 4:6



*Then he answered and spoke to me, saying,
"This is the word of Yahweh to Zerubbabel,
saying, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by
my Spirit,' says Yahweh of Hosts.*

Zechariah 4:6 WEB



Continued on the next page.

Back to the Book of Romans

Tuesday, February 17: Read Zechariah 4 (Continued)

So we see, whether it is the Old Testament or the New, the way to accomplish God's calling on our lives—the works that He has prepared for us to do—is by the power of His Spirit and not by means of our own strength or wisdom. For what is ours is puny in comparison to the omnipotence and wisdom of the Spirit.

Let me close today by showing you that the Holy Spirit is meant to be the underlying power in the life of every Christian:

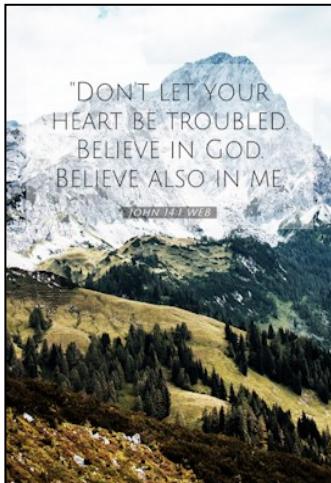
And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you.

Romans 8:11

Despite the fact that we live in a fallen body with a nature to sin, God will manifest the life of His Son in us by means of His Spirit. Ours is to trust Him to do so!

If we liken the Christian Life to a journey, I think it fair to say that the journey was too great for Elijah. It will be too great for us as well. But it is not too great for Elijah's God!

We need to trust God to do, through His Spirit, what only He can do!



Back to the Book of Romans

Wednesday, February 18:

Read Galatians 4

The last few days have been pretty challenging, so let me take one more day to summarize what we have learned:

1. The life we live as Christians will fall into one of two categories: We will walk by faith in the truths and promises we have learned from God's Word or we will turn away in unbelief!
2. Whether we are a spiritual giant like Elijah or a baby Christian, the challenge is the same, and so is the possibility of failure. Remember, the world will always push back against our spiritual growth. If we fall into unbelief, we simply need to confess our sin and return to trusting in the Word of God and our Savior who stands behind the Word.
3. We don't need to be stronger and more powerful as Christians. We simply need the truths of God's Word and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. He is more than strong enough and powerful enough to meet every challenge we will ever face.
4. As we have seen, the choices we make will cause us to line up with the example of Peter, Elijah, and Paul. Let me suggest that our goal is simply to trust in the power of God's Spirit, and not let the *howl of the wind* or the *voice of Jezebel* overpower the *still small voice* that is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to us!

Continued on the next page.

Back to the Book of Romans

Wednesday, February 18: Read Galatians 4 (Continued)

Too hard you say! Allow me to remind you what we learned yesterday:

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells 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 8:11

Allow me to remind you that if we:

... walk by the Spirit we will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Galatians 5:16

If we walk by the Spirit we will bear the fruit of:

... love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control ...

Galatians 5:22-23

Let me leave you with this closing thought that seems to be a good way to summarize my own efforts to progress spiritually:

Even though it takes time to grow to spiritual maturity, and by necessity will only develop through trial, the walk of faith that moves from truth to truth, standing firm upon it, will navigate this life from one oasis of calm assurance to another. This is meant to be the strength of the child of God—which in reality is the strength of our great God's faithfulness and His Spirit steadily perfecting His work in us and through us!

In this way, I can more than offset the declines that might occur with physical aging by the gains made through spiritual growth. And that's a worthy goal!

The Missions and Disciplines

Thursday, February 19: Read I Thessalonians 5

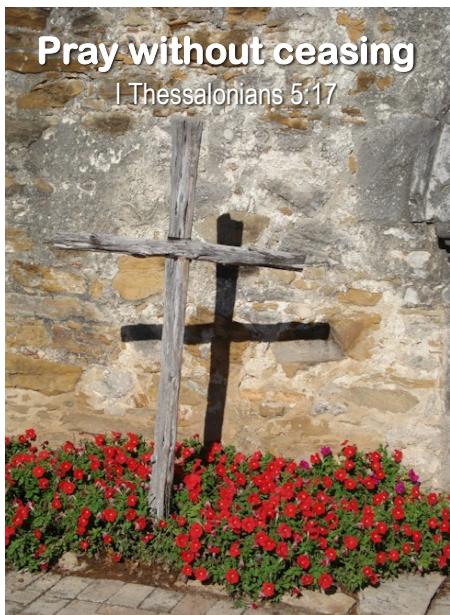
Today we begin a segment on the Missions and Discipline of the Christian Life. Let me remind you that, as a church fellowship, we have one singular *mission*—to make disciples! That includes both the lost turning to faith in Christ as well as assisting those saved to grow in grace and knowledge. There are, however, many *disciplines* associated with the Christian Life.

In the same way a soldier is not ready for his mission of close combat unless he has mastered the disciplines of marksmanship, carrying a heavy pack, and so forth, neither is the Christian ready to disciple without a daily time of maturing his or her own faith, prayer, worship, and a number of other disciplines.

That's what this study is about, a reminder of our mission and a closer look at some of the disciplines that enable us to achieve our mission.

Let's consider prayer as one of the critical disciplines of the Christian Life. I am sure you have heard a message on I Thessalonians 5:17, *pray without ceasing*. We sometimes

Continued on the next page.



The Missions and Disciplines

Thursday, February 19:

Read I Thessalonians 5 (Continued)

try to obey this admonition as if it were a stand-alone command. Consider this. If we were fully engaged in the mission of making disciples, sharing Christ with neighbors and grandchildren, and abiding in Christ on a daily basis, then praying without ceasing becomes the most natural thing in the world to do.

Furthermore, your prayers aren't so much going to be about you, but about that lost neighbor, that needy grandchild, and a host of other mission-focused needs. Prayer isn't something that is meant to stand in isolation, it is part of being in the battle to win souls and help them grow. I read recently of a missionary agency that interviewed 50 candidates for missionary work, three of them had regular prayer and devotional times. Contrast that with what you find in Scripture when Moses, Jacob, Daniel, and many others wrestled with God in prayer, sometimes through the night, because of God's call on their lives.

I am suggesting we are not really prepared for our mission of reaching others unless we improve our facility with prayer. M'Cheyne said it this way:

What a man is on his knees alone before God, that he is, and no more.

So, here is our simple approach: We are going to spend the next few days looking at one of the model prayers that has been preserved for us in Scripture. Our hope is to learn both how to pray and how to think about the content of our prayers.

The Missions and Disciplines

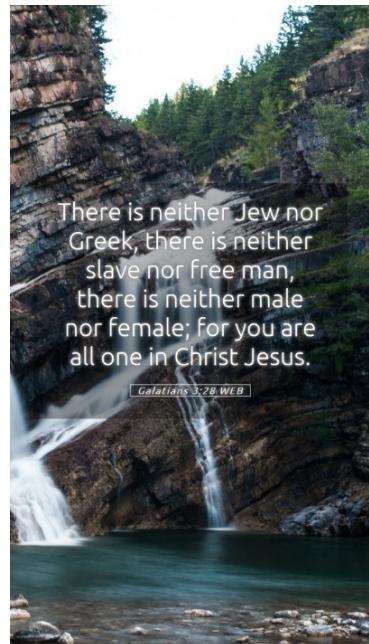
Friday, February 20: Read John 13

In II Thessalonians 1:3, Paul warms up to the subject of prayer:

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.

We tend to give thanks for material well-being and comfort. Paul gives thanks for evidence of faith and brotherly love. Now, there is nothing wrong with giving thanks for physical blessings. I am simply suggesting that we give thanks for things we value, but, have we extended our thinking to match Paul's in that we value manifestations of faith and love among God's people? As a simple point of application, give thanks for simple indications of faith on the part of others and ask for others to grow their faith when you know they are facing difficult situations.

As for a love that is increasing among us, consider our fellowship for a moment. We have people from all parts of the country, all kinds of work backgrounds, and even many different denominational backgrounds. This is not usually a recipe for unity! How is it, then, that we can have unity, fellowship, and shared ministry?



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The Missions and Disciplines

Friday, February 20: Read John 13

(Continued)

In part, it is because this is a natural outworking of being followers of Jesus Christ.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.

John 13:34-35

This is what makes it so wretched when there is dissension in a church, the process of discipleship is short-circuited and witness to the Lord compromised. So, here is a second point of application, pray for God to increase our love for one another within this fellowship. And, give Him thanks when it is manifest, for this is the stuff of revival!



The Missions and Disciplines

Monday, February 23: Read II Thessalonians 1

We find our model prayer in Verses 11-12. Paul and his team are praying for a small body of believers in Thessalonica:

With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of His calling, and that by His power He may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

II Thessalonians 1:11-12

What is it that Paul has in mind? It is what he has just mentioned in the previous ten verses: the faith and love of the Thessalonian believers, their steadfast perseverance in the face of persecution, and their faith in the certain coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So what is the substance of Paul's prayer that I am suggesting be a model for us? He is praying for this body to be found worthy of God's calling. What is God's calling to the saved child of God? There are many aspects to this calling, but let me use II Corinthians 5:15 as a very good summary:

... those who live (as the result of being born again) should no longer live for themselves but for Him (the Lord Jesus Christ) who died for them ...

So Paul is praying that this group of believers would be found, by God, to be living for Christ.

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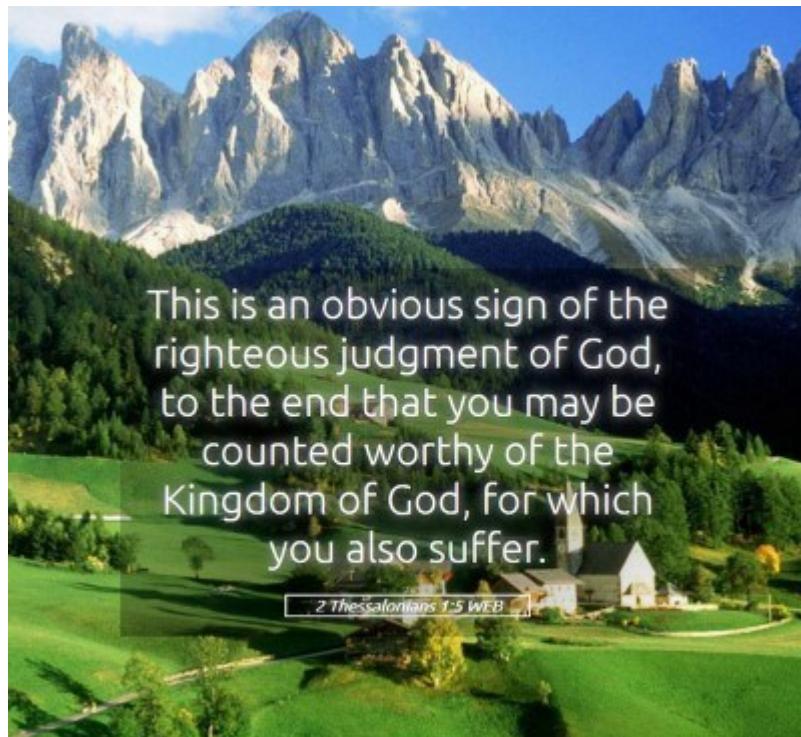
The Missions and Disciplines

Monday, February 23:

Read II Thessalonians 1 (Continued)

The word translated *count worthy* has its origin in the marketplace. It means to get an amount of commodity equal in value to the money paid. It means when each of our lives is put on the divine scales, it will balance out with God's call to live for Him. Wow!

Any kind of personal introspection would lead us to realize that at times we fail. What a challenge! On the other hand, what a great prayer request for believing children, grandchildren, and our church fellowship—that God would find them and us measuring up!



The Missions and Disciplines

Tuesday, February 24: Read Ephesians 1

I hope you have been considering, since yesterday, the challenge of living a life that God Himself will find to have *measured up*. (Actually the idea in the text is to be of equivalent weight. In our day, we might use the similar idea of measuring up.)

Just a couple of very practical things for today:

- We need to be very clear on exactly who is the arbiter of whether or not we have *measured up*. Who gets to decide? All too often, I get the impression we think that we get to decide! The text in II Thessalonians 1 sets us straight. It is God alone who is going to decide:

... that our God may count you worthy.

II Thessalonians 1:5

That being the case, this is its own matter for prayer when spending time with the Lord. Ask Him if you are living up to your calling in Christ. He will let you know.

- Now to our reading for today in Ephesians 1. Part of our calling, who we are in Christ, can be found in Ephesians 1:4-f. These verses describe the identity of every child of God, and include the fact that *in Christ*: we are holy and blameless, adopted as sons, accepted in the Beloved, redeemed, forgiven of our sins, and any number of other spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ. Here is what might be considered one of the great paradoxes of the Christian Life: it is God's intent that we mature into what we already are in Christ.

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The Missions and Disciplines

Tuesday, February 24:

Read Ephesians 1 (Continued)

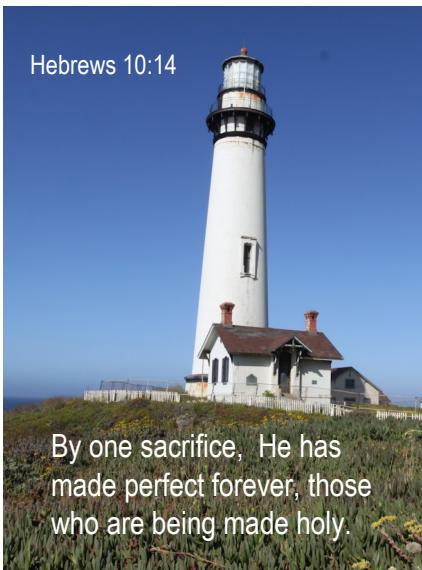
Hebrews 10:14 says it this way:

By one sacrifice, He has made perfect forever, those who are being made holy.

Perfect, yet being made holy. If we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are perfect and yet we need, through the Word of God and the Spirit of God, to have our lives transformed so we would become like Him.

Now you see a truly important aspect of prayer. We are not to pray that our problems would go away but, rather, we are to pray for the grace to live consistently with our identity in Christ. When we are living consistently with our identity in Christ, our problems may be part of God's answer.

Who needs this kind of prayer? Each of us, our extended families, and our church fellowship need this kind of prayer. What a measure of God's glory we would reflect to our community should we manifest our true identity in Christ!



The Missions and Disciplines

Wednesday, February 25:

Read Ephesians 2

Do you see the truth that this II Thessalonians 1:11-12 prayer is more *packed* then we thought? Not only have we introduced prayer to live *worthy* of our calling, but now we move on to two related phrases: *every good purpose* and *every act prompted by faith*. What are those about? I can show the source of good purposes:

... for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Philippians 2:12-13

I can also show you the source of works that would be prompted by faith: We are

... created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:10

Do you see this? All too often we think that God saved us and now it is up to us to live the Christian Life as best we can. On the contrary! If we are walking in the Spirit, then God is going to be at work with respect to the purposes that well up within. We are going to be prompted to exercise faith in the carrying out of certain works, and all this by the God who dwells within us as He manifests Himself through us.

Do we do this in our own strength? Absolutely not. Look again at I Thessalonians 1:12. It is by His power!

Continued on the next page.

The Missions and Disciplines

Wednesday, February 25:

Read Ephesians 2 (Continued)

This opens a mighty new prayer front for us. We would put ourselves in a position (in fellowship with God, walking in the Spirit, trusting in the truths of His Word) so that His power would bring to fruition that which He has put in our hearts and has led us to do. Do you see it? Purpose and works brought to fruition.

This is a mighty prayer to finish what has been started. What a great focus for our fellowship as we seek to finish well and bring glory to God. God's glory will be the focus of our next devotional.



The Missions and Disciplines

Thursday, February 26: Read II Corinthians 3

In II Thessalonians 1, Verse 12, Paul says:

We pray this so that ...

The word translated *so that* is a conjunction that indicates purpose. Paul is telling us the purpose or intent behind his prayer. It is so that the name (think reputation) of the Lord Jesus Christ would be glorified in the life of each believer. To glorify means to elevate and then to point to that which has been elevated.

Put the last few days together. When we appropriate the power of God to live a life worthy of His calling, and when we fulfill those purposes for which He has gifted and enabled, and when our faith leads us to complete acts far beyond our own abilities, then we are showing the world what God can do through those who will trust and follow after Him. This brings glory to God!

Let it never be said of this church fellowship that we labor for our own glory, but rather that we labor to give glory to our Lord and Savior.

This would have been a fine place to stop this prayer, but there is one more extraordinary thing. It goes on to say,

**... that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in
you, and you in Him ...**

II Thessalonians 1:12

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The Missions and Disciplines

Thursday, February 26:

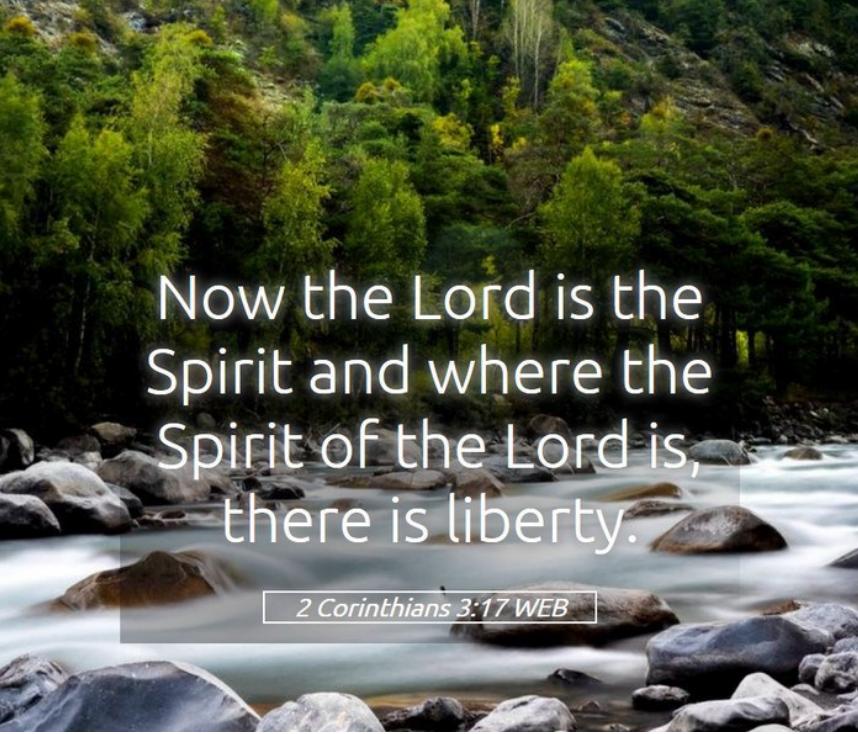
Read II Corinthians 3 (Continued)

How could this be? Did God not firmly say, "I will not share My glory with another ..." in Isaiah 42:8? He did, but for those who are following after Him, living the *worthy* life we talked about, then consider this:

... and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed in His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

II Corinthians 3:17-18

Do you see it? God will not share His glory with a competitor, but He will manifest it in the life of His followers! This is how we are glorified—in Him!



Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

2 Corinthians 3:17 WEB

The Missions and Disciplines

Friday, February 27: Read Job 31

For the past few days, I have been developing for you the prayer in II Thessalonians 1:11-12 in the hope that you might use it as a model. It has wide applicability, but I find it to be particularly compelling in terms of family. Perhaps you are wondering, how do I use this as a model? Let me give you an example, using a hypothetical granddaughter named Katie.

Heavenly Father, in light of Jesus' soon return, I pray for Katie's walk of faith and perseverance through trial.

Specifically, I pray that her walk would measure up to Your calling on her life. Teach her to trust You and walk in the power of the Spirit, that the works you have prepared for her before the foundation of time would be accomplished to her blessing and Your glory. And Father, as she walks with You, I trust you to transform her into the woman You want her to be, a woman who brings credit to Your name and reflects Your glory to all who know her. As Paul prayed for those on his heart, I pray for the one You have put on my heart, in Jesus' name!

There is an infinite amount of variation from these verses, but the point is simply to show you how using this as a model can focus your prayer efforts for others.

There is one more prayer topic I would like you to consider in the next few days. There are times when those going through a very difficult time will say to me, "I have given up praying." This happens when the trials have been both prolonged and severe. At times we all wonder if God is really listening and whether He can really reach into our existence and act? (See Job 31:35-36) We are all potentially one crisis away from facing this kind of challenge. How do we prepare ourselves? One possibility is to answer the question—"Prayer, Why Bother?" More on this on Monday.

VISTOSO Community Church

A decorative horizontal graphic consisting of a green vine with green leaves and clusters of blue grapes, positioned between the word 'Community' and 'Church'.

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

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