

HIDE THE WORD



**“THY WORD HAVE I HID IN MY
HEART”**

Dave Matthews

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to my loving wife of forty-eight years, Cheryl Kay Matthews. We met my senior year at the Air Force Academy. We married the day after I graduated. Cheryl moved with me around the world in the Air Force, raised our four children while I flew around the world for UPS and never failed to take care of our home, many times while I was gone.

Cheryl was my partner in all my life. We shared a deep love and devotion to our Savior. She also had many verses hidden in her heart that I will never forget. The Lord took her ahead of me to heaven January 2025 after four years struggling from the effects of a stroke. She was my inspiration in so many ways, my comfort in times of trouble, the “sunshine of my life” every time I needed it. I will miss her greatly and this book is dedicated to her memory. I know I will see her soon.

Love you sweetheart,

Dave

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Introduction

I have been memorizing Bible Scriptures my whole life. Well, maybe not from age one to five, but I think I can definitely remember Words from the Word being “hidden in my heart” pretty soon after that.

Being raised a preacher’s son, I was always hearing Scriptures being preached, taught and sung. As children in Children’s Church, we regularly had “Sword Drills” where we competed to see who could quote Scriptures from memory. My brother Dan always seemed to quote “Jesus wept” before I could get it out!

As I grew older and matured more in the faith, I learned the extremely valuable skill of memorizing Scripture, not just for competitions but for the value of its application in my life.

The Bible talks a lot about reasons to memorize the Word. Here are seven of them. Psalm 119:11 tells us to hide God’s Word in our hearts that we might not sin against Him...the memorized Word can help **keep us from sinning!** Psalm 119:105 says that the Word **gives us guidance**, it is a “lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

The Word is an invaluable tool to **help us minister and reach others**. Take a look at Romans 10:14-17. “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.” The Word is probably the **most mighty weapon we have to defend ourselves, especially against the devil**.

Hebrews 4:12 describes the word as quick, powerful and sharp!

The Word is vital in **lifting up and practicing our praise and worship of Him**. Read Psalm 145 and “sing of His righteousness.” The book of Psalms is filled with hundreds of references of using its words to lift up and praise our King. The Word is a constant **source of comfort and peace** to us throughout

our lives. Read Psalm 23 again, memorize it, quote it when you next experience the need for green pastures, the fear of the valley of the shadow of death or standing in the presence of your enemies.

Last, and maybe most importantly, the Word greatly **helps us draw closer to the Lord**. Read the entire chapter of Psalm 119. See how many times the Psalmist declares his thankfulness for “thy word.” Verse 114 declares “thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word.”

Seven Reasons to Memorize the Word

To not sin

To receive guidance

To minister and reach others

To defend myself, especially against the devil

To use and practice in praise and worship

To comfort and give me peace

To draw nearer to my Lord

The purpose of this book is to motivate and encourage you to memorize the Word. Our goal, “our mission should you decide to accept it” is to memorize 100 Scriptures.

I would encourage you to make this a two year task, memorizing one passage of Scripture every week for a year (You get two of the 52 weeks in a year as “slack”). There is no requirement to make this a legalistic demand. Such a commitment will always remain between you and the Lord. But I can testify that the rewards for adopting this spiritual discipline in your life are immeasurable.

We can acknowledge at the start that such a task is difficult...seemingly impossible. Of course, we know from

Matthew 17:20 that “nothing shall be impossible unto you.” Mark 10:27 says, “with men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.” And Luke 1:37 reminds us that “with God nothing shall be impossible.”

You can do this! You can memorize many verses of the Bible. We have already seen that the results and rewards make it worth it. Why would we not want to take on so important a task? Once you start memorizing God’s Word, hard as that may be to remain faithful to, you will see the rewards and continue on.

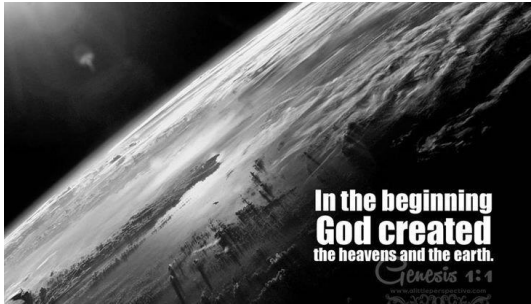
There is a secondary purpose of this book: to provide a source of study and devotionals for the owner. Many times I have provided Bible studies and teaching lessons for Sunday School classes, youth camp classes and personal devotionals. It is my hope that these volumes will facilitate those needs as well. Please feel free to use these books in that way. Each lesson provides probing study questions, supporting additional Scriptures, techniques for ways to learn and memorize the Word to hide it deeply in your heart.

A third purpose for producing these studies is to provide a possible resource for some of the central doctrines of the faith. This might prove a valuable resource for a Sunday School Class or small Bible Study group. As difficult as memorizing Scripture might become, one can also use these resources as a study to drive deeper into understanding some fundamental as well as deeper truths of the Word. Our study of the Bible can so often be surface level at best. I encourage you to **STUDY** the **WORD**, devote dedicated time to understanding it, make it so personal that when the Holy Spirit brings it back to your remembrance, it is the spiritual gold that He intends it to be.

So, I encourage any who want to follow, press on! Take the challenge. Even if you fail, come back and try again. I think you will find that it is better to KNOW the Word than it is to just know about it. You will be amazed at the benefits ahead. As Paul encouraged Timothy, “study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Tim 2:15)

CHAPTER ONE

THE BEGINNING



GENESIS 1:1 “IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH.” (KJV, NKJV, NIV, NASB)

Where else would one start a book on memorizing Scripture than the beginning? Add to this, the fact that this passage of Scripture is probably the best-known Scripture in all of the faiths founded by Moses and Abraham, and you have a naturally great place to start.

This passage also answers the question man has asked throughout all of time: ‘Where did we come from?’ God answered the question for us. He and He alone was at the beginning.

I have heard many preachers preach this central doctrine of our faith, “In the beginning, GOD.....” Fundamentally, we believe that God created all that is. We are essentially required to accept this truth simply by faith, because our understanding cannot reach to explain creation....and it is the most logical explanation for how all that we see came to be. As hard as we try, we continue to fail when we propose a different explanation for where we came from.

Theologians call this “first cause.” In the beginning God... Only God was before all other things...and all things came from Him. Scientists, especially since the era of liberal humanism began in the 1960s, have spent countless hours trying to convince us that they can logically explain how this all began. It is shameful that when scientists are asked what they feel the most significant scientific discovery in modern times has been, more than half of them site Darwin’s Theory of Evolution as the only explanation.

Although no transitional evidence has ever been proved or discovered between species on earth, they still insist that man had to evolve from lower species...apes, fish and proteins. When asked where the proteins came from, their best conclusion is from outer space. Logic defies science to explain original, first cause, because it defies logical explanation. We accept as fact, as does most of thinking humanity, that something so amazingly complex as life like we see it must have come from intelligent design. We know the Designer, primarily because we get to experience a personal relationship with Him.

As previously mentioned, this Scripture is extremely well known and is the easiest place for us to begin our adventure of devoted memorization of the Word. Maybe another reason it is so well known is because it is quoted exactly the same way in every version we researched.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. It won’t take you long repeating this verse to be able to quote it back from memory. You won’t have to work hard to remember the reference either. Genesis 1:1. We couldn’t make it any easier for you to start.

Because this verse takes so little time to commit to memory, spend some quality time meditating on the reality God chose for

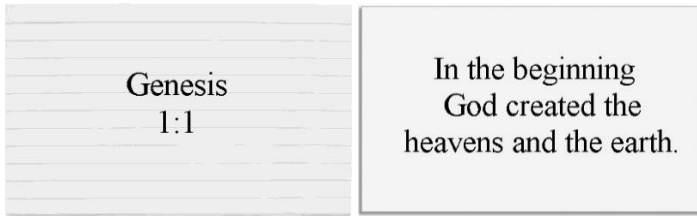
us to receive. He did not explain how He was able to create it all...He just did.

Maybe take a look at the entire first chapter of Genesis. My favorite creation was light, which He created first. He said, “let there be light,” and there was light. Such revelation sets the stage for all that follows.

He is God and we are not. Anyone who could speak the cosmos into existence has all power, so we can trust Him. When He reveals miracles in the Word, should we be surprised? He created all that we see, so obviously He controls it. What an awesome God we serve. Revel in that thought for a while today.

Questions to consider: What is the history and supposed “facts” of Darwin’s Theory of Evolution? Why do they so starkly disagree with the creation doctrine established in Genesis 1? What should our attitude be toward science and its dispute with Scriptural history of creation? Can the two theories exist simultaneously? Does it take just as much faith to believe evolution as the Genesis account? Are our minds capable of understanding a concept of something being created from nothing? Isn’t that what we are asked to believe regarding a “Big Bang” theory...that something came from nothing? Is there anything wrong with trying to reconcile theories of science with what we read from the Bible?

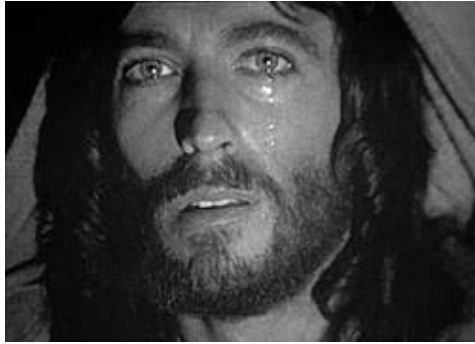
Other Scriptures to consider: John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word.” John 1:2 “Through him all things were made.” 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 3:9; Colossians 1:16 “For by him were all things created...” Hebrews 1:1-2 “...by whom also he made the worlds.”



(Author’s note: At the end of every chapter, I plan to include an image of both sides of a 3x5 card. One side has the Scripture reference and the other has the verse. I used 3x5’s to memorize important memory items while I was in the Air Force flying fighters and training aircraft as well as at UPS flying big heavies. These were often called “Bold Face” steps in checklists which were required to be memorized so we could perform them immediately, and without reference to a written checklist. I have found them very useful in memorizing Scriptures as well.)

CHAPTER TWO

JESUS WEPT



JOHN 11:35 “JESUS WEPT.” (KJV, NKJV, NIV, NASB, NET)

I really wanted to start this book on memorizing Scripture with John 11:35. Well known as the shortest verse in the Bible, this would have been the easiest place to start what, for many, seems a daunting task...memorizing the Word. Start with the easiest.

I will always remember Sunday School “Sword Drills,” or Scripture Memory contests. I was never fast enough, or called on first, so I could quote John 11:35 before one of my brothers did. However, you couldn’t have come up with an easier verse...just two words...that could have said so much in such a short sentence.

By the way, for the trivia experts in our midst, this is not the only Scripture in the Bible with just two words. 1 Thessalonians 5:16 says, “Rejoice evermore.” Of course, the real scholars among

us would quickly point out that this Scripture is only two words long in ENGLISH!

Aha! If we were to look at the “original Greek” that this was written in, we would find this Scripture is even shorter. “Jesus wept” translates from the single Greek word meaning “shed tears”.

What a great contrast to the first Scripture we memorized. There, the God of creation speaks words and creation comes into existence. Here, that same God, now come in flesh to live among us, is so much like us that he cries at the death of Lazarus.

Unquestionably, Jesus knew what was to follow...He was preparing to raise Lazarus from the dead. However, had we been there watching him cry over the loss of one He loved so much, we might have agreed with what the Jews said in the following Scripture: “See, how he loved him!” But I think Jesus’ tears went way beyond this specific event and way beyond his love, deep as it was, for Lazarus.

The God-Man who now came in the flesh for our salvation could feel exactly the same pain we all feel at the loss of the one we loved the most. If you have never experienced that pain, you will. When that time comes, remember Jesus felt it too and will feel it with you.

Maybe the pain that caused Jesus to weep might even have come because no one on earth knew better than He did how unnecessary that pain was. The pain of death was the direct result of our disobedience as much as it was of Adam and Eve’s. Jesus knew that, as much pain as death causes us as humans, He was coming to ensure that we could enjoy eternal life. AND, He knew that there would be a day...even as we now wait for that day to come...when after wiping away every tear like the one He shed that day, He would destroy the last enemy, death.

Oh weary husband, who weeps because the love of his many years of life is now gone, Jesus weeps with you. Parent, whose child has been unjustly or suddenly ripped out of your life through accident or tragedy, know that Jesus weeps with you. And even as He demonstrated with Lazarus that He alone has all power over death and the grave...even as He alone demonstrated by raising Himself from the grave after a gruesome death...He has proved to us that death has no power over Him and He will wipe away every tear, just like the ones He experienced with us. Jesus wept. John 11:35.

Questions to consider: Can you visualize this scene depicted for us in John? Do you identify more with our Savior because He cried at Lazarus' tomb? Were there any other times in the Scripture where Jesus wept? The central doctrine demonstrated by this Scripture is our identification with the humanity of Jesus. As both God and Man, do you tend to see Jesus more as one than the other? Which one? Describe some of the characteristics of Jesus which contrast His humanity with His deity. The shortest verse in the Bible, why does it not use more words and go into more detail to describe what Jesus did here?

Other Scriptures to Consider: Hebrews 4:15 "For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities..." Galatians 6:2 "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ." Luke 7:11-15 "...his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry." Matthew 23:37 "...how often I have longed to gather your children together..."

John
11:35

Jesus wept.

CHAPTER THREE

HIDE THE WORD



PSALMS 119:11 “THY WORD HAVE I HID IN MINE HEART, THAT I MIGHT NOT SIN AGAINST THEE.” (KJV)

“Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!” (NJKJV)

“I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” (NIV)

“I have thought much about your words and stored them in my heart so that they would hold me back from sin.” (TLB)

“I have laid up thy word in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.” (RSV)

“Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You.” (NASB)

“Thy word have I laid up in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.” (ASV)

The most obvious motivation for memorizing Scripture to a Christian must be so we might not sin. As obvious as this

reasoning is, I am always amazed at actions of those who call themselves Christians and how easily we fall into sin.

I know I may be taking something for granted here, but I assume that having received the wonderful grace of Jesus, we would naturally desire to live a life that would be pleasing to Him. Certainly, those whose lives were deeply lost in sin, depravity, hopelessness and loss, having been freed from those chains, know the urge within them to not return to their slavery.

Jesus said that those to whom much was forgiven know a deep feeling of gratitude and desire to live as far away from that sin as possible. I can only assume that after Jesus freed the woman caught in years of sexual promiscuity and told her to go and sin no more, that at least she never returned to that lifestyle.

I have to say that my experience has been that I love the Lord and thank Him so much for forgiving my sin and paying the price for it on the cross, that I want to not sin against Him again. That doesn't, however, mean that I am always successful.

We are creatures born of Adam's race and our desire to please ourselves never completely goes away. Returning to our sinful ways is rightfully described as being like "a dog returning to his own vomit." How we need to feel that disgust with any action, word or thought that might be displeasing to the Lord that we want nothing more than to NOT SIN AGAIN! Unfortunately, that isn't always the case among us as Christians. But it needs to be.

King David was the one described in the Bible as being a "man after God's own heart." I would love for that testimony to be said about me. He is reported to have written these words that we now memorize. I'm sure that the "words" that he says he was hiding in his heart were taught to him at a young age.

Perhaps he read the words transcribed for centuries before him while tending the sheep on the hillsides of Israel. Other Scriptures

tell us that he meditated on the words of God day and night, or constantly. He found them beautiful. He found those words to be a source of life and great joy. He probably put some of those words to song as he played the harp and sang for King Saul.

I wonder when he first discovered that hiding the words of God in his heart resulted in giving him power to not sin against the God he loved so much. Now, recorded for all time in this Scripture, David tells us that if we hide God's word in our hearts, we will find the secret to not sinning against Him. Do you want that?

I wonder if these words of David came back to him after he found himself lusting after another man's wife, having her husband killed and then taking her for himself, only to be caught and corrected by the prophet? We do find that after these acts resulted in God's judgment of him and the loss of the resulting child, David returned to Scripture he knew so well to trust in forgiveness from God for him, atonement for his sins and restoration as king. Will we do the same?

Hide God's word in your heart so you will not sin against Him. Memorize Psalm 119:11 so it will be a reminder that we have a solution to our tendency to sin. When tempted in your weakness, the Lord would hope that you would remember this Scripture and quote it to your spirit so you would then have the strength to say no to the temptation.

Through this verse and many, many others that we can memorize...and hide in our hearts...we can have victory over sin and temptation that seems to overcome us so easily. Imagine the pain and suffering that completed sin brings into our lives that might be so easily avoided by quoting the Word at just the right time and using it to bring victory over temptation and actually not sinning.

This Scripture speaks more to us than just having a discipline that is so necessary to living a victorious Christian life. It speaks even more to us about getting God's word so far into us, into our very heart, the center of who we are, that it reveals a power and peace that is indescribable. I hide Your Word in my heart, so I might be able to not sin against You. Help me to make it so.

Questions to ponder: Do you think David memorized the ten commandments, handed down from God through Moses centuries before he lived? Do you think that had David quoted, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife" right before he took that longing look at Bathsheba, he might have been able to avoid all that followed? Does the Holy Spirit bring up Scriptures we previously memorized at just the right moment to help us say "NO" to the temptation at the moment? Thinking of a particular temptation or sin that "so easily besets you," what Scripture do you know that would speak to that temptation and help you overcome it?

Other Scriptures to Consider: Psalm 119:105 says that the Word gives us guidance, it is a "lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Romans 10:14-17. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." The Word is probably the most mighty weapon we have to defend ourselves, especially against the devil. Hebrews 4:12 describes the word as quick, powerful and sharp! Psalm 119:114 declares "thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word."

**Psalm
119:11**

Your word I have hidden
in my heart, that I might
not sin against You!

CHAPTER FOUR

POWER



PHILIPPIANS 4:13 “I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHICH STRENGTHENETH ME.” (KJV)

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (NJKJV)

“I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” (NIV)

“I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me strength and power.” (TLB)

“I can do all things in him who strengthens me.” (RSV)

“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” (NASB)

“I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me.” (ASV)

Our ministerial group, the Bethel Ministerial Association, is proud to say that one of our pastors/ministers/evangelists who grew up in our association was Keenan Smith, the founder of first, The Power Team and later, Team Impact. Their ministries have had the awesome blessing of reaching out to literally millions of young people around the world to share the Gospel.

Through “feats of strength,” they demonstrate first what is possible with enough muscle in your body....bending iron bars, breaking baseball bats, folding frying pans, etc. That is impressive. But their message also tells young people about the incredible power that comes from following Jesus in your life.

Many of their speakers/strong men were on the road to ruin when they gave their lives to Jesus. And now, they each testify that the power of Jesus in their lives is far greater than any physical power they ever possessed. It is the power that helps them live fruitful, victorious lives where everything else they had previously chosen did not. Let that be your message as well as you memorize Philippians 4:13.

This Scripture is a little longer than the first three, but not that difficult to memorize. If you haven’t already incorporated this technique, write the verse down on a 3x5 card. Write the words, “Philippians 4:13” on the other side so you can quiz yourself to remember the Scripture reference (where the Scripture is found in the Bible.)

One thing you have to decide that was not an issue in the first three verses we memorized is which version of this verse you want to memorize. I have listed seven of them. Don’t let this scare you. They use different words. Choose which one you like most. But, very importantly, realize that they can say different things.

One of my complaints about the different versions of the Bible that are now so readily available to us is that you can’t use different words in the Scripture and not say different things. This discussion may influence your decision about which version to read as well.

First, don’t be afraid of the word “strengtheneth.” This word is found in the old King James Version and there isn’t anything wrong with it. Strengtheneth is an older word that we don’t use

much anymore, so I don't have any problem substituting our more commonly used word, "strengthens". I CAN do all things through Christ which strengthen me. That's where the "rub" comes in.

I think most of us would agree that this Scripture specifically teaches us that Jesus gives us the POWER to do things that we cannot do in our own strength. Hence, the testimony of the Power Team and many Christians who can testify of other feats of strength, even if they aren't "strong men." But, be patient with me here.

The version of this Scripture you choose to memorize can say different things when different words are used. Make a wise, Spirit-led decision which version of the Bible you choose. Then, let the Holy Spirit teach you what the Scripture is actually saying, and use that wisdom to guide your life.

The KJV could easily suggest that Christ helps us do all things which strengthen us. The implication would be that He might not help us do things which do not strengthen us. This can tend to emphasize the things He helps us with instead of His specific help. Do you see how those words have that meaning? Because of this, (and by the way, you don't have to agree with me), I think the more accurate meaning of the Scripture is that Christ helps us do all things that He needs and wants us to do. So, I like the NKJV which says "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." In other words, I have no problem using this version and substituting the word "who" for "which." You might make that choice also.

Now, not to belabor the point too much, but to use the NIV as our source to memorize and apply to our lives, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" could suggest that Jesus gives us strength to do everything. Without doubt, the emphasis of this Scripture is that Jesus gives us amazing strength

to do what we always find out we cannot do alone. I cannot resist temptations that take me down so easily unless Jesus helps me. I can't witness to others unless He gives me strength. I can't memorize these Scriptures without the help of my Lord.

We should never diminish the amazing things Jesus can give us power to do. But I have found that He does not give me power to do EVERYTHING! Pastor Keenan Smith can bench press 200 pounds of weight. I have no doubt that Jesus COULD give me power to do the same....but He does not.

There are some things in life that Jesus does not want me to do. He does not give me strength to do those. There are other things that, although He could give me power to do (after all He is God, He created all things, there is nothing too hard for Him!) there is no reason for Him to do so.

So, in my opinion, I will not quote the NIV version of this Scripture because I do not feel it is as accurate to what God is saying here as is the NKJV. Don't be offended! I won't criticize you if you love the NIV and want to memorize that version. This is one of the reasons I include other versions of Scriptures, so you can have a choice. I'm just saying, I prefer the NKJV. You choose.

The same discussion applies to three other versions. The NASB says almost the same thing as the NKJV: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." This may give you ammunition to think that this may also be a reason to accept this use of words...because it gives the accepted or correct meaning of the Scripture, having been used in more than one source.

The RSV and the ASV do change the meaning again, even if only slightly when they say, "I can do all things in him who strengthens me." (RSV) or "...that strengtheneth me." (ASV)

I will say that I resist memorizing Scripture from paraphrased versions of the Bible. Paraphrase versions often add words to

clarify meaning, as do expanded versions of the Bible. They use more words to try to make the meaning of the Scripture clearer to the reader. But in taking this liberty, they can get the meaning wrong. I don't take that chance.

The Living Bible says, "I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me strength and power." This probably makes the meaning of this Scripture clearer, but it can also interject the same arguments as we previously discussed. I am absolutely sure that a new memorizer of Scripture will not choose this version, mostly because it is twice as long as the other versions and might prove to be harder to memorize. Go ahead....prove me wrong by memorizing it anyway. Again, you choose.

The reason I chose to spend this much time discussing this topic is because it is important what you choose to memorize. By storing these words in your heart, you will refer to them later to help you live a Christian life. I want to be accurate when I do that. Some versions delete portions of Scripture found in other places. That can be dangerous to do! Don't let that hinder you from memorizing the Word.

This Scripture is often quoted as a favorite Scripture by many because it speaks to an amazing truth in living the Christian life. Jesus does help us do all things in our walk with Him because He gives us the strength to do them. Praise the Lord for that!

When I think I can't be faithful, through Him and the strength He provides, I find out I can. We do not have to live powerless Christian lives because we just realize we are too weak. We are strong through Him. I know I am prone to sin....to return to those things that displease the Lord that He saved me from. I don't believe, doctrinally, that I will achieve perfection...a life always without sin...this side of the grave. But, I also don't think the Lord

expects us to so rely on His grace and take it for granted...living powerless, sinful lives content to know that His grace will cover it, so we can live any way we want to.

We do not have to live that kind of life. His strength is sufficient to help me do ALL THINGS...even chose to NOT SIN! That's what He meant when He said, "I will provide a way to escape." (We will learn that Scripture later.)

Yes, Jesus does give Keenan the POWER to do great feats of strength! He gave me power to learn how to fly jets. He will give you power to do things for Him in your life you never thought you could do. He chooses not to give me power to do the same things He gives you power to do. But what I have found He does, is provide power to every one of us to do the things we need to do to live for Him.

Don't give up. Don't think He can't work through you. Don't think He won't provide. You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you!

Questions to consider: Does it make a difference which version of any Scripture we choose to memorize? Does using different words in different versions change the meaning of the verse? What are some things Jesus might not give me strength to do? Is this Scripture about self-sufficiency? Is it my tendency to try to do everything by myself? How quickly do we find out how strong we aren't when we try to do things by ourselves? What is the most significant event the Lord has demonstrated this Scripture by in your life?



**Phil
4:13**

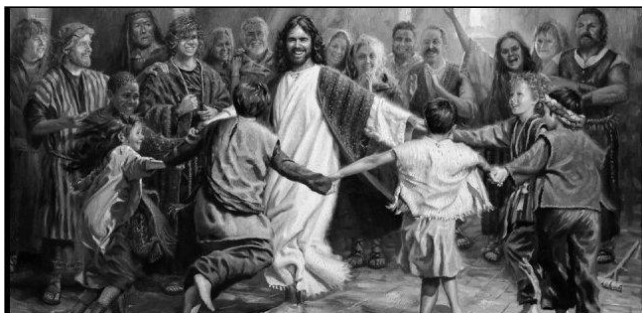
I can do all things
through Christ
who strengthens me.



Pastor Keenan Smith

CHAPTER FIVE

REJOICE EVERMORE



1 Thessalonians 5:16 “Rejoice evermore.” (KJV)

“Rejoice always.” (NKJV, ASV, ESV, NASB, NET, NIV)

“Be joyful always.” (GNB)

“Be cheerful no matter what.” (MSG)

“Always be joyful.” (NLT)

Another Scripture with only two words in it! Week 5 should be an easy one for memorizing Scriptures! Any task is easier if you start easier. A statement of the obvious, huh? Well, little steps are better at the start. We will work up to bigger steps soon. For now though, another verse with two words in it. Of course, if you insist on using the GNB, MSG or NLT, your version is more than two words. That should convince you to use the King James Version, huh?

This is probably the right time to emphasize strict discipline in memorizing the reference of the Scripture. That will take a little more work, but still not too much yet.

First Thessalonians 5:16 says “rejoice evermore.” Say that sentence ten times. Repetition is crucial to memorizing the Word. Experts say it takes more than twenty repetitions to put

information into our short-term memory. For it to be permanently memorized takes many more repetitions...more for some of us than others. But there is no more guaranteed way to memorize something than repeating it over and over again.

This might also be the time to mention techniques for committing sentences from the Bible to memory. I have always liked flash cards....empty 3x5 cards are easily purchased at any department store. The Scripture reference should go on one side and the memorized verse goes on the other. That way, you can quote Scriptures when you give yourself the reference, then turn the cards over and quote references from the Scriptures....a technique for quizzing yourself.

I have a set of digital pictures stored on my computer that I use in the same way to help memorize Scriptures in a digital way. Cards are helpful when you hand them to your best friend, wife or husband, and have them read the reference to which you respond with the verse.

As a professional pilot for forty years, first in the Air Force and then later flying for UPS, I used this technique many times to memorize and quiz myself on memory items that I was required to know by heart. Give some of these techniques a try and see what works best for you.

Let me discuss one other very valuable technique for memorizing the Word which people have used for millennia. Memorize the Word by singing it. The reason I bring this up now is because my wife and I used to hold Bible Study nights in our home for years. I would try to begin the evening rather informally by singing some songs that I tried to also play on the guitar.

I am a very good trombone player, but my guitar skills are fairly rudimentary. We sang one song every week both because it was an easily chorded song and because it helped us memorize

this passage of Scripture. This song actually started with 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (which I will encourage you to learn later). The words and chords for this songs are below:

In (D) everything give thanks, for this is the will of (A)God,
In (A) everything give thanks, for this is the will of (D)God,
In (D)everything give thanks, for this is the will of (G) God,
In (D)Christ Jesus, (A)concerning (D) you.

Rejoice evermore, for this is the will of God,
Rejoice evermore, for this is the will of God,
Rejoice evermore, for this is the will of God,
In Christ Jesus, concerning you.

I would also encourage you to look at this reference on the internet if you would like to hear someone singing the song and to help you learn it.

<http://www.daveweb1a.com/hide/Thanks.m4a>

You will observe, if you follow the chords and listen to the song, that we sing 1 Thess 5:18 first. The second verse of the song then follows singing 1 Thess 5:16, then verse 17, etc through the verses that I want us to learn in the next few weeks. What could cause us to rejoice more than singing a happy song, huh?

Sometimes I wonder where rejoicing has gone in the church? The photo I used above isn't meant to be sacrilegious, but sometimes I think we love a Jesus we think never laughed. I'm sure that nothing could be farther from the truth though. If the angels rejoice over one lost sinner being saved, why would Jesus not have rejoiced when He actually came to save them? Yes, we know that Jesus came to suffer and die for us. But I can't help but

think that He found numerous opportunities to have a little bit of fun along the way with the disciples.


Wouldn't you be tempted to smile just a little bit when you turned a few fishes and loaves of bread into food enough for thousands and just get to enjoy the amazement displayed on the faces of the disciples as they handed them out? I can imagine Jesus really rejoicing when the large number of those he sent out came back expressing their amazement at how prayers were answered, people were healed, miracles were performed in His name! Surely He rejoiced when the little children were brought to Him and He got to enjoy their child-like innocence that He wants us all to feel.

It is a tragedy that the church doesn't enjoy real rejoicing more. The Lord performs miracles among us every day that sometimes, we don't even see. If we would take more chances to tell our friends, neighbors and strangers on the street about Jesus' love for them, imagine the rejoicing we could experience with Jesus as they turned from their sins and gave their lives to Him, instantly experiencing eternal life.

Let us start rejoicing more every day over all the blessings Jesus has given us. Let us start expressing true happiness that we will live forever in Heaven with Him someday soon. Let us find more and more to rejoice over that He brings into our lives and stop spending so much time seeing what we discern to be the tragedies of our lives. Let us learn what it means to REJOICE EVERMORE!

Questions to ponder: What keeps you from rejoicing? Do situations and circumstances seem to be bigger than God sometimes? Why do we tend toward negativity instead of seeing the miraculous all around us? Intentionally take a few moments to stop all the inputs of negativity that come at us like floods and just

count all the blessings God has given us. Can you see beyond the immediate conclusion you might make about a situation to see how the Lord is really working something bigger and better in your life, in your church and in the world? Give verbal expression today of something you absolutely know God has blessed you with that causes you to rejoice in Him.

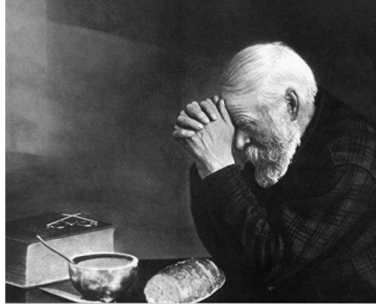


1 Thess
5:16

Rejoice
evermore.

CHAPTER SIX

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING



1 Thessalonians 5:17 “Pray without ceasing.” (KJV, NKJV, NASB, ASV)

“Pray continually.” (NIV)

“Pray constantly.” (RSV)

“Always keep on praying.” (TLB)

You would think that Christians would not have to be told to pray. The disciples watched the example of Jesus praying, seemingly all the time, and then asked him to teach them how to pray. The Bible is full of examples of God’s people and their prayers. This is not the only place in the Bible where we are told to pray.

“Men ought always to pray...” “The fervent, effectual prayers of a righteous man availeth much.” So it shouldn’t be surprising that the Apostle Paul here says, “Pray.” It might be a little surprising however, that he says, “Pray without ceasing.”

You must assume that the early apostles had learned to do this. With their lives under constant threat and seeing daily the miracles Jesus was working through them, you might expect that they spent a lot of time in prayer. We suspect also that it was the Holy Spirit who moved them into a life of praying all the time...praying without ceasing.

Now, if Paul tells us, by the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we need to pray without ceasing, what could possibly inhibit us from doing so? Indeed, would you honestly testify that you have ever had a period of time where you prayed, and prayed so much that it seemed you never stopped praying? Maybe the time was in some deep despair, or after a sudden loss of someone you loved, or maybe when threats to you were great.

I have never experienced bullets flying over my head intended to end my life, but I understand the saying that there are no foxhole atheists. When the threats are dire and you think your life may end at any moment, many testify that they had no problem praying to God for rescue. That may be the key to honest, intense and ceaseless prayer...that when one knows that only God can rescue, the seriousness of our prayer is at its greatest. Is it possible, then, to have that kind of intensity all the time?

I also remember those times that many I know had when we got away from the world (at a youth camp or revival meeting) and recognized our need for the Lord so much that we were willing to forsake all else until we received everything the Lord had for us to receive. That type of earnestness in prayer generally only materializes among the young, who are so easily influenced by others that they might actually take seriously the belief that the Lord might reward those who “diligently seek Him.” Why, after experiencing such a blessing then, would we want anything else?

I believe that Paul is telling us in I Thess 5 that the “normal” Christian approach to prayer would be that we do it always. That probably requires more dedication, devotion and discipline in us as we grow older. We allow the “cares of this life” to not only choke that spirit out, but in some cases, we can even find ourselves not communicating with the Master at all. The little children’s song used to say, “Read your Bible, pray every day, and you’ll grow, grow, grow...”

I believe that for me and many like me, who have truly given their lives to the Lord and heartfully want to serve Him, it is way past time for us to include in our disciplined lives the exercise of constant prayer.

Our Lord is a person. He walks closely with us daily. He longs for fellowship with us and left us the tool of prayer to make that happen.

On occasions, my wife feels such love for me that she wants to talk, and talk, and talk for long periods of time, just because she longs for the fellowship. I believe Jesus is the same. He would help us, if we asked, to find a way to be so close to Him that we could pray constantly, consistently and communicatively...so much that we would find it easy to do all the time. Do you want that kind of relationship with Him? Is it worth your time or are you too busy? You think about that.

Questions to ponder: Have you ever experienced times like we described above where constant prayer seemed possible? If so, what made that earnestness fade away? List all the things that crowd out something so important as prayer. Jesus knows you by name, if you have trusted in Him for eternal salvation. Does He also know you by your voice? Have you ever felt like you got so close to Jesus through your earnest prayer that you felt like you

didn't want to go away? Is it possible to be that way all the time? I don't believe Paul would have instructed us to "Pray without ceasing" if it was impossible to do. Will you obey that instruction?

Other Scriptures to Consider: Luke 18:1, The persistent widow, "...men ought always to pray, and not to faint." James 5:16-20, "effectual fervent prayer" Luke 11:1, "Lord, teach us to pray" Matthew 6:5-13, Not for show, In a closet, No vain repetitions, Like Lord's Prayer. Matthew 14:23, Pray alone, Matthew 26:41, "watch and pray" Mark 11:24 "pray, believe..."

A song to remember: Let me share another verse of that earlier chorus with you that helps us memorize this passage. Pray without ceasing:

<http://www.daveweb1a.com/hide/Pray.m4a>

1 Thess
5:17

Pray without
ceasing.

CHAPTER SEVEN

OUR FATHER



Matthew 6:9 “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.” (KJV, ASV, RSV)

“Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be your name.” (NKJV, NIV)

“Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.” (NASB)

“Our Father in heaven, we honor your holy name.” (TLB)

Luke 11:2 “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.” (KJV)

Right after we learn “Pray without ceasing,” one might ask, “How do we pray?” We would share that request with the disciples (or at least one of them...look it up) when they asked Him, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

In Matthew, it does not record that one of them asked, but Jesus spent verses 5-8 with some pretty specific instructions to his disciples about prayer: Don’t pray to be seen. Pray in secret. Do not use vain repetitions. Ask the Father.

Isn’t it interesting how we have turned the words of Jesus as He instructed the disciples how to pray into what we commonly

call the “model prayer.” I would in no way criticize us for praying the Lord’s prayer, as it is also called. However, it might be worth examining our hearts about our prayers if it was the only prayer we ever prayed, or even if it became a “holy sacrament” that we held above actually PRAYING. Could this model prayer even become “vain repetitions” as the Lord warned us about right before teaching it to us?

I acknowledge that the beginning of Matt 6:9 states, “After this manner therefore pray ye.” After Jesus’ instructions in verses 5-8, He states, “Pray like this...” So, obviously, Jesus put great importance on the words that followed in the model prayer.

In the Scripture-memorizing vein, I will also acknowledge that the purists of those of us learning to memorize Scripture might want to include those words, “After this manner therefore pray ye...” when memorizing Matt 6:9. However, I think it would be completely sufficient to add to our list of memorized Scriptures one which we probably already know very well and thus, a good Scripture to commit to heart: “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.”

It is also probably noteworthy that we know that this prayer is also recorded in Luke 11:2. As we have stated before, it is extremely important to also memorize the location/verse of the Bible where our memorized Scriptures come from. Remember though, what we are aiming for is “hiding Thy Words in my heart.”

Like the very familiar Genesis 1:1 verse, we are intimately familiar with these words as well. It makes it initially easier to remember Scriptures that we probably have already quoted and prayed hundreds of times. That does not diminish the importance of hiding the Scripture and the reference where we might need it at any time.

The teaching of Jesus here is very clear. We should pray, and if we question how we should pray, here is the model. Many have shared books, teachings and preaching from the Lord's prayer, and that should be respected. There is much to learn from all the words of this prayer and it would benefit every Christian to do an exhaustive study of them.

From this first verse, however, we learn that our Father (we are those who believe that He is and He is rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, so we acknowledge him as OUR Father) is in heaven and that His name is Hallowed or Holy. That last part should make us always careful about how we treat His name. We should honor, sacrifice to and be "fearful" of His name. It is Holy and not be treated with anything but the highest respect.

We have been told that the angels stand around the throne of the Lord and continually cry "Holy, Holy, Holy." We should be doing the same. As already part of the Kingdom of God, we should never be fraught with fear and anxiety but should cry, "Holy is Your Name, Oh Most High!" Once we establish the direction or target of our prayer, now we can continue with our acknowledged needs and requests.

Questions to ponder: What is it that hinders us from seeing the true holiness of our Father in Heaven? In our previous chapter's theme of praying without ceasing, should not we spend great amounts of prayer time recognizing and praising the holiness of God's Name? If Jesus is His Name and if it is holy and righteous, how should that affect the way we live? In what way will starting our prayer with the recognition of God's holiness affect how we pray in keeping with the rest of the Lord's prayer? Have you ever prayed the Lord's prayer and recognized after doing so, you have just repeated the words and not truly worshipped, praised and

lifted up the Name of the Lord? Read and pray the rest of the prayer from the perspective of lifting it up to One whose name we consider “hallowed.” How does calling God your Father affect how you pray? Do you truly recognize God as your Father? Do you think Jesus actually prayed this prayer? Pray the Lord’s Prayer now...do you recognize that you actually have FIVE Scriptures memorized here? Well on our way to 100!

Matthew
6:9

Our Father which art
in heaven, Hallowed be
thy Name.

CHAPTER EIGHT

GIVE THANKS



1 Thessalonians 5:18 “In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” (KJV, NKJV)

“In everything give thanks: for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” (NASU, NASB)

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (RSV, NIV)

“No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” (TLB)

Have you learned that old chorus yet? If not, check it out at the following website:

<http://www.daveweb1a.com/hide/Thanks.m4a>

I have learned a LOT of Scripture from choruses I sang in church in my life. Honestly, not to be overly critical, I believe that one of the reasons the church has often lacked power in the past is because we have diluted the songs we sing in praise and worship. Many of them contain no Scripture at all, lots of them are hard to sing and we have once again, relegated that part of our meetings to those who do it much better than we do.

I will “get off of that soapbox” by just saying that if you will devote some time learning Scripturally-based songs and finding the Scriptures in the ones you already sing, you will find it easier to adopt the discipline of Scripture memorization.

I didn’t know this, but there apparently is an internationally recognized symbol for thankfulness or gratefulness. The sign is shown above with one’s hands crossed over your heart toward the persons or things you are thankful for. Amazing what you can learn on Google, huh?

“Thank you!” Thanks for all you do! “Thank you Lord for saving my soul.” It doesn’t seem like such a big thing. But unknown to most of us, the world perceives Americans as the most ungrateful people in the world! That isn’t a very positive image.

Maybe it is because we have been blessed with so much that we gripe the loudest when we don’t have everything we want and need. But, having lived abroad, I have seen demonstrated lots of times how quickly we Americans become very unhappy about circumstances and complain loudly about how those things need to be made better.

I have also spoken to lots of Americans who have lived for a while in a foreign country who always remark about how grateful they are to live in a country that is so abundantly blessed... especially when we return home and get to experience all the things we have to be thankful for that aren’t available outside our borders.

So, whenever we have it good, we should be very thankful! Paul, though, had the gall to suggest that we needed to be thankful in EVERYTHING! Surely not! I’m sure it is easy to be thankful when things are going well. But, let stuff start falling apart, or let me get a disease that can only be cured by aggressive surgery, or

let my kids and family abandon me, and it is only reasonable that we might not be the first to shout thanks for those situations.

But Thessalonians 5:18 tells us, not only should we give thanks, but we should give thanks in everything. AND we should give thanks recognizing that it is God's will for us to do so! You might be saying, "I don't think so!"

If you are thinking this way, I definitely do not suggest that you read the book of James. He starts his epistle by telling us to "count it all joy when we fall into trials." I didn't want my patience and to be perfect anyway.

Paul was writing from a prison cell when he told us he had learned to be content wherever he was and in whatsoever "state" or situation he was. David wrote in Psalm 119 that before he was afflicted he went astray.

As Christians we should be the most thankful people in the world, setting the gold standard for gratefulness. Can we say we are thankful for the price that Jesus paid for our salvation? Yes. Can we say we are blessed beyond anything we deserve and that drives us to say "thank you" for all He has done for us?

As we "count our blessings," do we say thank you for each of them? When things turn bad for us, can we keep on thanking the Lord, knowing that He will provide everything we need for our survival, our blessings, our happiness, for our escape?

How many times have you seen children who, the minute they don't have their way or get exactly what they want, they start crying, whining or throwing little temper tantrums because everything isn't going their way? We can understand a little bit because they are children and they haven't learned all of life's lessons, especially about being grateful for all they have instead of focusing on what they don't have at that moment. But, as adults, striving to grow into the very image of Jesus, we need to grow up

sometimes and see all that we have and not so quickly complain about the little that we do not.

Give thanks! Give thanks for all you have. “Give thanks with a grateful heart!” When things go wrong, give thanks, not focusing on momentary loss, but remembering all that you still have! Give thanks because God has given us the spiritual vision to see beyond the temporal, short-term setbacks of life to the great glory that awaits us for all eternity in heaven. In everything, give thanks. Why? Because this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for us!

Questions to ponder: When was the last time you actually counted your blessings by writing them down? Do it. Does this change your perspective on your current problems? How much loss can we handle before it becomes impossible to still give thanks? The song encouraged us to “give thanks with a grateful heart.” Is it possible that we don’t give thanks in everything because our hearts are suffering from chronic ungratefulness? What are the symptoms of this illness? The prescription to fix it is giving thanks!

1 Thessalonians
5:18

In everything give thanks:
for this is the will of God
in Christ Jesus concerning you.

CHAPTER NINE

DON'T QUENCH IT!



1 Thessalonians 5:19 “Quench not the Spirit.” (KJV, ASV)

“Do not quench the Spirit.” (NKJV, NASB, RSV)

“Do not smother the Holy Spirit.” (TLB)

“Do not put out the Spirit’s fire.” (NIV)

The image I get when you use the word “quench” is like the photo you see above. I have worked out in enough heat to know what it means to really be thirsty when I came inside. As a teenage cross country runner, I remember many times after a good three or five mile run, coming inside the house, standing directly over the air conditioning register in the kitchen and drinking some of mom’s ice cold tea that seemed to always be over-saturated with lots of sugar. Now, that was quenching!

Now, imagine the scene two thousand years ago where the Holy Spirit fell on hundreds with the power of Pentecost, causing some to speak with foreign tongues, and visually seeing the

evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit like tongues of fire sitting on the heads of the apostles. If you have ever had that experience, you know that the last thing you want to happen is for someone to quench that thirst. Now, imagine the scribes and Pharisees running around with bottles of water like the one you see above, dousing out as many of those tongues of fire as they could get to. The Apostle Peter would surely tell them, “Don’t do that! Don’t quench that Spirit. Don’t put out the Spirit’s fire.”

As seemingly far-fetched as that example might seem, it isn’t beyond our imagination to remember a time in our past where the enthusiasm of a new thing that the Holy Spirit might be doing among our teens might have been easily “smothered” because it was too far “out of place” for the decorum of the church environment.

Here’s another example. At my age, I don’t really care for the recent wave of Praise and Worship songs the church has latched onto. They tend to be pretty narrow in doctrine, the range of music tends to be out of reach of most, the sound board guy always has a terrible balance between the voices and the instruments and the overall level of volume is high enough that it registers on the decibel meter on my cell phone as “very dangerous.”

I have led P&W myself and this isn’t the way it should be done. I know the leaders are being blessed, but if you look around among the congregation, no one else is. And worst of all, they never ask me to help lead any more. Come on, Holy Spirit, why can’t you move among us like you used to?

If I really asked the Lord why His Spirit isn’t moving among our midst, I’m afraid He might point to me and say, “You are quenching it!” Like the doctor to whom we explain that it hurts when we “do this”, Jesus might also tell us, “then, don’t do that!”

Simply, do not quench the Spirit. And, notice that the reference here isn't just the spirit of enthusiasm, the spirit of the gathering, the excitement of the crowd. The reference here is our ability to actually quench Him, the Holy Spirit Himself in what He is trying to do. Imagine how we might feel if it actually was revealed to us that the reason someone did not come to give their life to the Lord was because the action of our smothering His work in their hearts kept them from Him!

We really need to be careful when we start telling everyone to curb their enthusiasm. We need to let the Lord tell us when our attitudes become too overwhelming that even He cannot do what He wants to do in our midst.

In Mark 10:13, "They brought young children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.' And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them."

Be careful saint. I know you have been around a long time and I know things don't always go the way you like them to go. But the Spirit moves in many different ways. And if we aren't careful, we can not only grumble and complain about what we don't like, but we can actually hinder and restrain the Lord and what He wants to do among us and maybe even what He wants to do for us personally.

Don't do that! Don't quench the Spirit. We probably don't know everything He wants to do all the time. Maybe the better approach would be to watch, listen, see beyond the immediate surface appearance of what seems to be going on and adjust our

spiritual eyes so we can see what He really is trying to do. He might actually be trying to do something in or for me! Don't smother that. Don't put that fire out, even if it only comes across as a little ember. Don't quench the Spirit.

Questions to ponder: The illustration used here was our corporate meetings together as the body of Christ. Are there other areas where we can quench the Spirit? How would you like to see worship go? What songs do you miss singing? Why does loud volumed music offend you or hurt your ears? When was the last time you actually examined the words of music that you don't like to see what we are actually singing? Take some time to read about the history of the church and how singing/hymns/music has evolved through the centuries. How much of our praise and worship should be a reflection of our culture? Is there one specific, proper method of worshiping in spirit and truth? How will we worship in heaven?

Other texts/Scriptures to examine on the topic: Isaiah 63:10, "...they rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit."; Eph 4:30, "...and grieve not the Holy Spirit."; Eph 6:16, "...wherewith you shall be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked."; Mark 10:13, "...receive the kingdom of God as a little child..."; 1 Thess 5:21, "Prove all things..."

A song to remember: Just one more verse of me singing:
Quench not the Spirit:

<http://www.daveweb1a.com/hide/Quench.m4a>

1 Thessalonians
5:19

Quench not
the Spirit.

CHAPTER TEN

MY SHEPHERD



Psalm 23:1 “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”
(KJV, NKJV, ESV, NASB)

“The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.” (NET, NIV)

“Jehovah is my shepherd, I shall not want.” (ASV)

“The Lord is my shepherd, I have everything I need.” (GNB)

“God, my shepherd! I don’t need a thing.” (MSG)

“The Lord is my shepherd, I have all that I need.” (NLT)

This may be the best-known Scripture in the Bible....maybe even better known than Genesis 1:1. We hear this verse at every funeral. Songs have been written about it. There have been some really great sermons delivered about the Shepherd that have resounded through church history. Memorize this one, even if it is easy. Keep it close to your heart.

No man knew better about the relationship between the Shepherd and his sheep than David of the Old Testament. The Shepherd protected the sheep, led them, corrected them and maybe even came to love them. In our modern day, we have a hard time identifying with David’s sentiment here. The closest thing

we might come to shepherding is our children. And, all troubles and heartache aside, there probably isn't very much we wouldn't do to ensure their safety, growth and love.

I was touched at the funeral of my own mother at the reading by the minister who delivered Psalm 23. I have known my dear Brother Joe Greene for all my life. I can't think of a better man for my father to have chosen to deliver that message than Brother Joe. I love him, maybe more than any other person outside my own family because of all he has meant to me over all the years of my life. I also love him because he so closely resembles and models the servant-Shepherd love of our Jesus. So, it deeply touched me at mom's funeral when he quoted, "The Lord is MY shepherd..." I knew instantly what he was trying to say.

As close as I have come to my parents, siblings, even Brother Joe in my life, I know the Lord as MY Shepherd. I don't know if you know the Lord that intimately or not. I hope you do. Because, when you do, it touches you when you are reminded of the personal, deep, loving care we receive from the very creator of the universe who I can call MY Shepherd. No wonder David says in Psalm 8:4, "What is man that though art mindful of him".....yet, my Jesus is mindful of me every moment of every day. He is MY Shepherd.

Now, like David I need to follow this If/Then statement up with the rest of the thought. The Lord is MY Shepherd, therefore I shall not want. That's a pretty huge statement! Especially in our western, materialistic-oriented society, to say that I will not want is hard to realize, maybe even harder to live out.

A silly commercial on TV shows a woman, Ms. More who no matter what she is doing or receiving is saying, "I want more!" As a life-long collector of "stuff," I can identify with that thought.

When we are poor and think we have great need, it is easy to say, “I want more.” More to our problem as Americans, we say, “I want more” because we know we can have it. We have been so blessed as a nation.

It is not an exaggeration to say America is the richest nation in the world. Yet, no matter how much we have, we always seem to think we don’t yet have enough...especially when we can be convinced that what we think we want is always within our reach.

Paul stated that he knew that whatever state or situation he was in, he could be content. He learned how to have and how to have nothing. Here’s a verse to add to your memory: 1 Timothy 6:6 says, “But godliness with contentment is great gain.” Yet even in the church, we tend to act like the most discontented lot in the world. This ought not to be.

One could assume that the reason we can be so discontented with our lot in life is because our “shepherd” isn’t enough for us. When the shepherd was near, the sheep were contented and wanted for nothing.

I need Jesus to be enough for me that I want nothing more! How foreign is that concept to you? “Jesus is my Shepherd, but I want Him to give me a wife or husband!” Jesus is enough for me but I really need/want a new car...or any car.” “I love the Lord. I will follow Him anywhere, but the way we are heading just doesn’t seem like what I WANT in my life.” The problem isn’t the Shepherd. It is our “want.”

Draw close to Jesus. Draw closer every day. Make Him all in your life. Give up a few of those things you just thought you couldn’t live without. Oh my, if He told me to sell all I have and give it to the poor and follow Him, would I do it?

The reason the shepherd had to leave the 99 and go pursue the one lost sheep was because the sheep didn’t think the shepherd

was enough for him not to want something, somewhere else. How we desperately need to learn to become so dependent on the Shepherd, so in love with his care for us, so devoted to following Him that it becomes very easy for us to at least eventually get to the point where we can confess, “I do not have any wants.”

Questions to Ponder: Explain the difference between our wants and our needs. David wrote of his Shepherd and learning not to want in Psalm 23. How long did that last for David? What do you remember that David wanted that the Shepherd wasn’t enough for? To yourself, confess the things that take the place of the Shepherd in your life that just seem like “wants.” Be honest enough to realize what you need to do to get rid of everything that might replace the Shepherd’s ability to make us realize what we really do not want. Is that achievable in our lives? Is that a type of living or just a distant dream? What might you need to give up so the Shepherd can become enough for you?

Other texts/Scriptures to examine on the topic: 1 Tim 6:6-11 “...and having food and raiment let us be therewith content.” Phil 4:11-13 “...I know how to be abased and I know how to abound.” Luke 18:22-25 “...sell all that thou hast.”

Psalm
23:1

The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

GOD SO LOVED



John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” (KJV/NKJV)

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (ASV/NASB)

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (NIV)

The Christian church has a problem with John 3:16. The message of this Scripture is huge. God loved us. He sent/gave His Son for us. If we believe on Him, and all that includes, we will not perish. That stresses that we are all perishing without Him. And, through Jesus and what He did on the cross, He has promised us eternal or everlasting life if we believe on Him. It is a mystery why every man, woman and child would not desire to receive this free gift of grace. But we understand that most will choose to reject it.

The issue with the “problem” mentioned in the first sentence is not with the message. The problem is with how it is being

delivered to the world. Jesus told us that if He was lifted up (John 3:14), He would draw all men unto Himself (John 12:32). He does this.

If we are true disciples, we are trying to lift Him up to the world. One would think that the message of the cross would be enough. But, through well-meaning hearts of evangelism, it is hard to remember the last sporting event where “John 3:16” was not prominently displayed somewhere, along with other signs like “D-Fence.” Seems to kind of diminish the message of Jesus’ sacrifice and gift of grace.

We should never be overly critical of the efforts of those who take our call to evangelize to extremes we might not be willing to match. However, it is entirely possible for extremism in this area to actually detract from the message, if not even push people away from Jesus. That must never happen.

Every person is dying and on their way to an eternal hell without Him. Our job is to give them the message that they really don’t have to go there...and they can have a significantly different, often joyous and ultimately redeemed life here if they will “believe on Him.”

I find myself feeling that I don’t witness enough, if I choose to be honest with myself. The other extreme however can be so overwhelming that others see the delivery but not the message.

I’m convinced that if we ask a non-believer at a football game what the sign “John 3:16” means, not only would they tell us they don’t know but would also share that they don’t care.

Like Nicodemus, only the Holy Spirit’s drawing can bring a soul to the point of asking, “what must I do to inherit eternal life.” Like him, the world responds with non-sensical questions like, “must I be reborn of my mother?” And like Jesus did with

Nicodemus, we must tell them, “whoever lives by the truth comes into the light.”

I’m sad that the interview with Nicodemus comes to an abrupt end at John 3:21. I would have much preferred that the story ended with Nicodemus becoming a follower of Jesus.

Jesus loved me long before I ever knew Him, while I was dead in my sins (Eph 2:5). He comes to each of us, at some time in our lives, and by the Spirit calls us to be “born again.” We need to pass that on to the next person who needs that same experience.

May we rest in the completed act that, because we have “believed on Him,” we now have everlasting life. May we spread that word to others, so they too can have everlasting life through Jesus, the only acceptable sacrifice for our sins. And let us do that with love and integrity, living a life that matches our message.

Questions to ponder: What are the methods of sharing the Gospel that the Lord has used in your life? Have you ever met a “Nicodemus” in your life who came to you asking about Jesus? Did you lead them to the Lord? Is any measure to promote the Gospel acceptable?



For many years, this man took on the extreme version of the John 3:16 signs at every event he could attend. Unfortunately, as some others testified, “he looked like an idiot, his message was unclear and his life did not match his message.” The Gospel is “precious gold” we have been trusted with. Not sharing is not an

option. But, we also should not drive people away. How much is too much?

Other texts/Scriptures to examine on the topic: Read all of John 3:1-20. What do you reckon Nicodemus' response to Jesus' message was? Eph 2: 1-10. Share how the Holy Spirit "quickened" you while you were dead in trespasses and sins. John 4, the very next chapter, Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well. How was that encounter different from the one with Nicodemus?

**John
3:16**

For God so loved the world
that He gave His only begotten son,
that whosoever believes on Him
should not perish but have everlasting life.

CHAPTER TWELVE

LIFE VERSE



Proverbs 3:5-6 “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” (KJV/NKJV)

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.” (NASB/NIV)

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths.” (RSV)

“Trust the Lord completely; don’t ever trust yourself. In everything you do, put God first, and he will direct you and crown your efforts with success. (TLB)

Ok, we’ve had enough softball memory verses. Now, for some tough ones. Actually, the suggestion that I might be calling any previous memory verses easy is just not true. The fact is that the previous verses were either very well-known already or short enough that they made for a real good start for this path of

Scripture memorization. In contrast, this memory verse in Proverbs is probably a tougher one because it is longer and because it addresses several issues in our lives.

I really did not want to go any further in this writing or in this process without talking about memorizing a particular Scripture that you might claim as your “life verse.” That generally means that this Scripture has some special meaning, it came to you in a great time of need, it guided you like no other verse did or you learned it and the Lord made it YOUR verse. Proverbs 3:5-6 is that verse for me.

I was a very young 20 year old going through four tough years at the U.S. Air Force Academy when, late one summer, the girlfriend I thought I loved more than anyone else on earth decided to break up with me. I won’t bore you with the details, but I was pretty sure my happy life was over and didn’t know what to do.

My dear, sweet mother wrote me a letter very quickly after this event and shared with me her life verse, Prov 3:5-6. She recommended that I memorize it, quote it and “hide it in my heart” to help me through this part of my life.

I followed mom’s recommendation. It took me a while to memorize. After all, it is two verses and I was trying to memorize it with “thine” and “thy” in there too. (I find it perfectly fine to substitute “my” for those words. You can too.)

Memorizing that Scripture, saying it to myself, over and over again so many times, not only did I end up learning the verse, but it also worked its way deep into my heart, where it could minister to my need, give me comfort, assurance and direction and show me that it would stay with me as a guiding principle for the rest of my life.

If you don’t get anything else from my writing on this topic, this has always been, for me, the absolutely most important reason

for memorizing and hiding the Word in my heart. This is why I am so passionate about it. I know that not only will this keep me from sin, not only will it comfort me in times of need, not only will it give me direction in life, but it will always remain with me as I walk through this life trying to become more and more like my Savior and Lord.

Well, shortly after this event, Sharon and I got back together and started dating again. You can relate my memorizing that Scripture to success with getting back together with Sharon any way you want. The real lesson I learned is that this Scripture was true...if I trusted in the Lord, with all my heart, if I didn't try to use my understanding to see everything, if I acknowledged the Lord in everything in my life, He promised to direct my paths.

I did consider that His direction might not include me getting back with my girlfriend like I wanted to. But I wanted Jesus to direct my paths more than I wanted to have my way. And, like so many more times later in my life, He proved that this Scripture was for me and that it was true! You need a verse that does that for you.

A little over one year later, Sharon was driving to a Baptist Student Union Bible Study in Colorado Springs when a drunk driver crossed into her lane, hit her car head on and killed her instantly. My heart was broken, but I trusted Him with all of it. I sure didn't understand why He would have taken the woman I was sure I would marry someday away from me, but He showed me I didn't need to understand.

I cried a lot. I sang at her funeral. I did my best through that trial to acknowledge Him in everything I did and said. Through all of that, He directed my paths again. The Word is true! It always will be. You can put all your faith in Him alone. And, He definitely has a plan and a path for you that will help you walk through life.

I have kept this verse closest to my heart and He has never failed to fulfill its promise. This verse helped me through four hard years at the Academy to graduation. It helped me through all the successes and failures, all the ups and downs in a 23 year Air Force career. It helped me go along those paths where He led while flying for UPS for 22 years.

That verse helped me and my wonderful wife Cheryl as we raised four great children and tried to be examples to them. It is helping us both now as we struggle with the effects of a stroke Cheryl had and how I am handling prostate cancer. The promises of Proverbs 3:5-6 will take us to the end of our lives and bring us safely home to heaven, having spent all these years following the paths He has directed us in.

This is one exception to this book I am writing about memorizing Scripture. You do not have to memorize MY life verse. Read the Word, let the Spirit speak to your heart, pray over this and let the Lord lead you to YOUR life verse. Memorize it here, for this particular lesson. My father's life verse has been 1 Peter 5:7, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." What will your life verse be?

Questions to Ponder: What is your life verse? How does it reflect the testimony of your life? You already know I have a problem with memorizing from the Living Bible. This verse states there that the Lord will "crown your efforts with success." That hasn't always been the case for me. I probably have learned more from my failures than I have from my successes. I don't find elsewhere where the Lord always promises us success. Does this ring true with you too? Several other versions say the Lord will "make your paths straight" instead of "He will direct your paths." Like me, have you found while following the Lord that many

times the way He directs you in appears to be anything but straight. Does it seem like lots of turns and stops make up the way of His paths for you?

Other texts/Scriptures to examine on the topic: Feel free to choose any Scripture for your life verse from this book. But remember, this is YOUR life verse. Find the one the Lord speaks to you clearly about. The advice of dear friends, parents or other family members can be helpful. Find the verse that speaks most to your heart and to your life.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
lean not to your own understanding,
in all your ways acknowledge Him
and He shall direct your paths.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

LOVE GOD



DEUTERONOMY 6:5 “AND THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD WITH ALL THINE HEART, AND WITH ALL THY SOUL, AND WITH ALL THY MIGHT.” (KJV)

“You shall love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” (NKJV)

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” (NASB, RSV)

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” (NIV)

“You must love him with all your heart, soul, and might.” (TLB)

Please read the verses that follow: “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Deut 6:6-9)

If there was ever a call to those of us who follow the Lord to memorize and hide the very Words of God in our lives and hearts,

here it is in Deuteronomy! Reading through the Bible, we recognize that the Ten Commandments were already given to Moses for the Israelites in Exodus 20. Read them to understand that the first commandments were instructions about their relationship with Him: No other gods, no idols, don't take God's Name in vain.

Here in Deuteronomy, Moses is instructing the new generation of Israelites just before they cross the river Jordan into the Promised Land. Notice, he is not adding commandments, but stressing what God has shown and taught them through forty years in the wilderness. He, God, must be first in their lives.

Flash forward to Jesus' words in Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30 and Luke 10:27: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment."

Notice it is not just listed first/the first to come into the mind of God. It is first because it is the greatest commandment. It is first because before it, we cannot do anything else. We cannot love our neighbors as our selves before we love God this way. We cannot keep all the other commandments before we obey the first one. We cannot find our way to heaven without first coming to the Father who loves us so much that He came and died for us. We cannot love Him partially or some of the time. It is a complete and totally understandable command...Love Me Completely!

He commands us, and expects us to love Him with our heart, our soul, our mind and with all our strength. When we give our lives to Him, we can accept it as reasonable that we will spend the rest of our lives learning how to do this. And oh, how short of fulfilling that commandment we come!

In Mark, a scribe said to Jesus, "You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him

with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." Interesting that Jesus responded to him by telling him he was "not far from the kingdom of God." Do we want to get close to the kingdom? I wonder if, like we should, the scribe examined his own life and determined if he fell short of that standard?

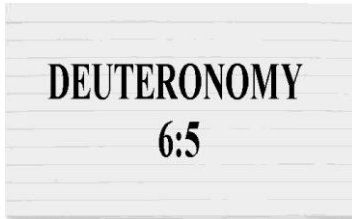
With all our heart, soul, mind and strength. How quickly any one of those four can be diverted away from God toward our own desires. How quickly we can forget that He must always come first. How quickly Satan can lure our thoughts, our efforts, our heart toward the things of the world, and we don't even recognize it without some serious self-examination.

Memorize this verse! Write it on your heart! Examine how far we are away from its fulfillment in our lives. Fall in love with the Lord again and renew a closeness that is willing to give Him your all. Give Him your heart, your soul, your mind AND all of your strength. You will find it amazing how the rest of the commands and a right way of living follow that approach to your Christian life!

Questions to ponder: When Jesus reminded them of this command, so many answered with confidence that they were fulfilling that first command. Do you think they were fooling themselves? How were their words testimony of loving God with everything but their actions and the testimony of their lives proof that they weren't even close? What can make us think we are loving God as this command directs us yet with careful self-examination, we admit how short we fall of its fulfillment? This side of heaven, will we ever completely fulfill this command? Is

this, among many other things in our faith, something we see growing every day in our lives?

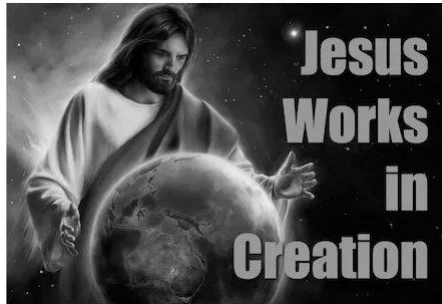
Other Texts/Scriptures to examine and study: Exodus 20: 1-17, The Ten Commandments; Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30 and Luke 10:27 the words of Jesus about this command; Other references to this commandment: Deut 11:1-22, 13:3, 19:9, 30:6-20, Joshua 22:5 and 23:11, Psalm 31:23, 97:10 and 116:1.



AND THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD
WITH ALL THINE HEART,
AND WITH ALL THY SOUL,
AND WITH ALL THY MIGHT.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE WORD



JOHN 1:1 "IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD, AND THE WORD WAS WITH GOD, AND THE WORD WAS GOD." (KJV, NKJV, NIV, NASB, ASV, RSV)

"Before anything else existed, there was Christ, with God. He has always been alive and is himself God." (TLB)

OK, I understand that the Doctrine of the Trinity has been discussed and debated for two thousand years. I recognize that Jesus used words and terminology during His earthly ministry that certainly seemed to indicate that He and the Father should be considered as separate beings of the Godhead. But, I also have to recognize that there are many, many words that He and others used to identify Him as God Himself. This Scripture is just one of those.

Jesus said, "I will pray to the Father." See John 14:16 "I will pray the Father and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever." and John 16:26 "...I will pray the Father for you, for the Father Himself loveth you, because you have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father." In Jesus' High Priestly

Prayer in John 15 He says, “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you.” and “...all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.”

No one, either side of the Trinitarian doctrinal view, denies that Jesus was all human/man and all God. The difficulty comes when we try to make the triune God into three distinct beings. The very bedrock of the Bible and the Jewish faith is stated in Deuteronomy 6:4 – “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord.”

Colossians 2:9 tells us “For in Him (Jesus Christ) dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” We know that God is spirit (John 4:24) and the Holy Spirit is revealed as Spirit....only the Son, Jesus, is manifested fully as the “Godhead bodily.”

In John 8, when the Pharisees were grilling Jesus over who His Father was, He revealed that if they had known Him, they would have known the Father (Verse 19). Ultimately, to make it totally clear, Jesus revealed in verse 58, “Before Abraham was, I AM.” This is the same “I AM” that God told Moses when he asked what His name was. It is no wonder that, through their blindness to what Jesus was declaring to them, they picked up stones to cast at Him.

In John 14:9, Philip decides to make it easy for them by simply asking Jesus, “Show us the Father.” Jesus responds by asking Philip, “Have I been with you so long and yet you have not known me? He who has seen me has seen the Father...I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.”

Jesus was the MAN-GOD. He was both fully man, and fully God. All fundamental Christians believe that fact. We even agree that Jesus and the Father are equal. We come into great difficulty however, when Jesus himself declares that He and the Father are ONE. God was fully manifested bodily in Jesus Christ.

The only fully physical, bodily representation or manifestation of the Godhead was declared in Jesus Christ. Only by recognizing that the Father and the Son (as well as the Holy Spirit) are ONE can we harmonize the Scriptures. Hence the revelation of John 1. This brings us back to our memory verse.

In Genesis 1:1, which we have already memorized, we remember that “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Now John tells us in John 1:1-3, “...the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” And, “All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made.” Again, in verse 10, “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.” And just in case we want to add another named figure to the Godhead, “the Word,” John makes it clear in verse 14, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.”

Jesus is the “Word” or “Logos.” John makes it very clear here that “all things were made by Him.” There is nothing that was made/created that was not made by Jesus. Jesus created the earth. He created sunshine, the water and the mountains. He did a pretty good job too!

The law of relativity must be observed then. Gen 1:1 says that God created the heavens and the earth. John 1:1 says that the Word, which was in the beginning, created all things that were created. Hence, Jesus is God. He was and is fully man. He was and is fully God. If we see Him, we see the Father.

Rodney Griffin wrote in song, “He was so much man that He slept in a boat, yet He was so much God that the waves ceased when He spoke. He was so much man that He wept when Lazarus died, yet He was so much God, Lazarus came forth when He cried. He was so much man that He thirsted at the well, Yet He was so much God that he saved her soul from hell. He was so much man

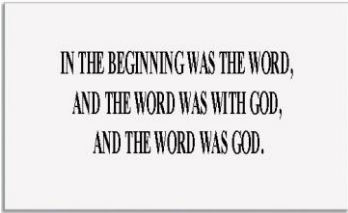
that He died upon a tree, yet He was so much God that He rose in victory.

Questions to Ponder: The doctrine of the Trinity is a complex one. It attempts to understand the existence of the Godhead. Is it an important doctrine to debate? Are Trinity and Oneness doctrines that different? If Jesus is God manifested in the flesh, why did He describe Himself, seemingly, in a manner to make us think He and the Father were distinct? Is it “Three in One” or “One as Three”? What is the difference? Just how do you reckon Jesus created the earth and all its fascinating features? When Genesis 1 tells us that God said, “Let there be light” yet John 1 tells us Jesus created it all, does that mean Jesus said, “Let there be light?” Is your head hurting thinking about all of this? Is the Godhead simply too difficult to understand? Or, is it a wondrously awesome thing that the Lord made us even able to consider and desire to actually know the nature of God? To whom do you pray?

Other texts and Scriptures to examine and study: Matthew 6:9, The “Lord’s Prayer.” John 20:26-28, Thomas’ confession. Matthew 1:23, Jesus declared, “God with us.” Colossians 1:15, “He is the image of the invisible God...”



**John
1:1**



IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD,
AND THE WORD WAS WITH GOD,
AND THE WORD WAS GOD.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD



ROMANS 8:28 “AND WE KNOW THAT ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THEM THAT LOVE GOD, TO THEM WHO ARE THE CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE.” (KJV, NKJV)

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (NIV)

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (NASU)

And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, (even) to them that are called according to (his) purpose. (ASV)

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. (RSV)

And we know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God are fitting into his plans. (TLB)

This is a Scripture Verse that I recommend ALL Christians memorize. All Scripture is worthy of our memory. But this one

universally applies so much to every circumstance in our Christian lives that it is vital for our survival and growth. Big claim, huh?

I also heartily recommend this verse to any Christian who would be a preacher or teacher for memorization. It is so well organized that it gives instant organization to any lesson or sermon and is, again, so universally applicable to all situations in our lives. I love Scriptures which handily give themselves to “three points, a poem and a prayer.” But this one organizes itself into five ready truths:

1. We can KNOW this Truth
2. ALL THINGS – Everything, not just some things or some of the time.
3. Work Together. He works all things together.
4. They work together for our good!
5. For Whom? Those who love Him, Called for His purpose, check out following verses

I also find it interesting that this particular verse is stated slightly differently in many of the versions of the Bible. As before, I will not tell you which version you should use or teach and preach from. But notice how the different wording between versions can change what this Scripture is saying to the reader. Appropriate warning given.

Ok, so back to the beginning of the verse. We KNOW! Live the Christian life long enough and work through all the things life brings our way and we will eventually, absolutely know that God is working in them and for our good. We don’t have to guess He is. We don’t have to think He might. We don’t have to hope He will some day. We don’t even have to wait long enough or make it to heaven to absolutely see and know that He is working all things for our good. We can know that truth.

He is actually working in ALL THINGS. Paul doesn't say some of the things in our lives. He doesn't suggest God only works in the good things, but maybe not the things that appear to us to not be so good. He doesn't even say that this applies to only holy things. He says we can absolutely know that He works His work in ALL things in our lives. And boy do we need to stand on this truth when cancer comes, or we lose our job or everything around us starts to come apart.

We can learn from this truth that if we keep trusting in Him, he will take whatever "all things" means to us at this time and show us how He is working it to our good. And you know what? He doesn't need our advice about how to do it. He doesn't need us to tell Him what "Good" is. He knows. We are the ones who take all the things in our lives that don't seem so good and translate them into some bad that He obviously does not have under His control.

This is the strong point where testimony of God's goodness in our lives needs to support the evidence of this truth. And, if you have not experienced the seemingly bad things that come along and make us think the Lord isn't in control, believe me, they will come to you soon enough. Have this verse memorized so you can count on the truth in it when those times come!

Don't pass up the truth of the words, "work together." It is too easy to think, well, God will somehow bring this all together for my good. I have been impressed so many times when I look back on God's hands at work in so many thousands of details about what I have gone through that I never saw how he "WORKED" it together.

I quite often see (if I will take the time and stop and take a good look at what He is really doing here) the Master Hands of the universe working this detail and that circumstance into a

network that I almost never see to bring about an end that I never would have suspected, or even hoped for. Like all of us, so many times, I see the end work of what He has done and never see the intricate details of everything and every circumstance He chose to use to bring that end together.

We think we work...and yes, He has blessed us to be able to work to do what He has called us to do. But way too many times, we think that the ultimate end to what He has accomplished might have been our work, or even circumstances which just happened to bring about His good. How often do we cheat ourselves by not pausing to look at all the miraculous details He works together to bring about what ends up being our end result? How often do we miss seeing how he even uses us to bring about His good, not only in our lives, but in the lives of so many around us?

And yes, He works all things for good. Suggesting that these things work “for the good” might make us think that although bad things happen that are for our own good, they aren’t exactly good in themselves. Ask Job what he thought about that. This is where a good measure of faith must step in.

When I think all is bad around me, I need to stand on this truth and find how God is working it for GOOD. It doesn’t take the same measure of faith to believe God is working when He lets us in on all the details of what He is doing...like He would ever think He needed to do that. Real faith is when we cannot see where the Lord is going with this and trust Him to work all things together for my good.

When you have lost all your children in a terrible catastrophe, thieves have come in and stolen all your earthly possessions, you are sitting in the trash heap of life, have boils all over your body and your loving wife is telling you to “curse God and die,” it takes

the greatest faith in the world to say, “even if He slays me, I will still serve Him!”

Now notice the qualifier: “those who love God and are called according to His purpose.” There is a whole month’s worth of teaching in verses 29 and 30. God foreknew us, He predestined us (you go Calvinists!), He called us, He justified us and He has/is/will glorify us!

There is a lot there and it would take a long time for any seminary student to work through all the meanings of what Paul is saying here. But, don’t make it too complicated. The real qualifier here is that we are those who LOVE GOD, and therefore, are also called to or for HIS PURPOSE. We can’t get too lost in things that don’t seem to work out like we like them to if we remember we are to first love God and make sure of our calling in Him.

We can absolutely KNOW that in ALL THINGS, God WORKS TOGETHER all the details of all the circumstances of our lives and works them together to bring about GOOD, not just for us, but GOOD that is His good. And, He does this because we love Him and He loves us and we are CALLED according to His purpose.

At the end of our troubles, having put our faith and trust in the One who “laid the foundations of the world” (Job 38:4), maybe, even if we don’t get all the answers to our “WHY”, having learned that He can “do everything” and that “no purpose of His can be withheld from Him,” we can say with Job, “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You.” (Job 42:1-6) Like Job, knowing all this, His working should be good enough for us...for anything He walks with us through!

Questions to Ponder: Why does God choose not to tell us all the details of what He works through in our lives? Did Job ever find out why he had to go through the trials he faced? Is ultimately knowing God good enough an answer for what we go through in life? I wrote more on this memory verse than any other so far. Is that because I have needed this verse more often than others? Is there always comfort when it seems like everything happening to me is bad? Why do bad things happen to good people?

Other texts and Scriptures to examine and study: Read the entire book of Job, especially when disasters, trials and difficulties come your way that seem to be out of His control. Is anything too hard for God? Look at Genesis 18:14 and Jeremiah 32:27. Read the rest of Romans 8, verses 31-39. Something about more than conquerors and nothing being able to separate us from the love of our Lord.

Romans 8:28

And we know that all things work together
for good to those who love God,
to those who are called
according to His purpose.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SWIFT TO HEAR, SLOW TO SPEAK

SLOW TO WRATH



JAMES 1:19-20 “WHEREFORE, MY BELOVED BRETHREN, LET EVERY MAN BE SWIFT TO HEAR, SLOW TO SPEAK, SLOW TO WRATH. FOR THE WRATH OF MAN WORKETH NOT THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.” (KJV)

“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” (NKJV)

“This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.” (NASB, RSV)

“Ye know this, my beloved brethren. But let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” (ASV)

“Dear brothers, don’t ever forget that it is best to listen much, speak little, and not become angry, for anger doesn’t make us good, as God demands that we must be.” (TLB)

“My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” (NIV)

Another brilliantly organized “three point” sermon from the Word. Hear swiftly, be slow to speak and even slower to wrath. I have to admit, however, that the biggest reason I memorized this verse is because it speaks so directly to me. I tend to not listen very well, speak quickly, often and loudly, and have yet to completely control my anger. Humph!

One other point here: You can get “credit” for two verses memorized here if you memorize both verse 19 and 20. And honestly, we need to memorize them both.

Point 1: Be swift to hear. Especially as men, we have to admit that we do not listen well. Some of us do not listen at all! James tells us, don’t just listen...HEAR! And even more, “Be swift to hear.”

Men, ask your wife how much you actually listen. I haven’t been to a marriage seminar yet where the need for us to listen better isn’t strongly stressed. That is because we have built into us genetically the inability to listen. Regularly, our wives start telling us what’s on their minds and we rapidly give them the answer they are obviously looking for. Men are “solvers.” “I know you want the answer, here it is!”

Every counselor tells us that after our wives pour out their hearts to us, it would be wise for us to say something like, “now, what I hear you saying is...”, followed by what we thought we heard. I’ve gotten this wrong more times than I have gotten it right because, honestly, I don’t listen well and I am NOT swift to hear.

The implication of the instruction here is that before we rapidly rush into anything else, just stop, listen and hear what is being said. This takes practice! It takes patience. Sometimes, the “hearing” means not just what the words described but what is really being said in the context of the words. No wonder it is hard!

Go ahead men. Rush right in there. Don't speak. Swiftly, purposely, HEAR! Some eye contact might be helpful. The other person's mannerisms, mood, facial expressions, hand gestures might be actually saying more than the actual words. Listen to hear. Take your time doing it. Maybe delay your immediate response. Possibly show some thought before you speak. That brings us to what James says we should do next.

Point 2: Be slow to speak. It doesn't mean speak slowly, although sometimes that helps. It means, give some thought, reflect on what is really being said, save some of your opinions in favor of speaking to the real issue. Think before you speak. Don't speak at all if that is the best option.

I have to admit, I am terrible at this. The real reason is, just like most of us men, I know I have the answers to your problems! Let me tell you, help you understand and maybe fix it for you. Far more often, the other person is really more interested that you heard them than they are that you have their answer. I know, again, this is true in most marriages.

Sometimes, the best listeners become the best speakers because they pause long enough to provide the speech that is most helpful, not necessarily the one that gives the "obvious" answer. Listening really well can often lead the listener to understand that the real problem is way beyond what the other person actually described. Stop. Think for a minute. Instead of the obvious answer, what does this person actually want or need to hear to actually bring resolution and peace of mind?

Point 3: Be slow to wrath. I am a red head. Actually, the hair is all white now, but it is still pretty red inside my head. And everything you have heard about us is true...we are quick to wrath or anger. I have spent a lifetime attempting to bring that part of my personality under complete control. Maybe in heaven. But this

is the third reason I committed James 1:19-20 to memory a long time ago. I need to be reminded every bit of it. Be slow to anger or wrath.

I added memorizing verse 20 as well because I need to be reminded that I cannot work God's righteousness in me if I am swift to wrath...quick to rush into anger. Again, the solution is to stop, wait, think about it, focus on Christ-likeness, put David-likeness to death and to not be angry. Getting angry about it (whatever "it" is) has never solved whatever the issue was and, more often than not, has gotten me into trouble I didn't need to bring on myself in the first place.

Christ in me means I need to be swift to hear, slow to speak and even slower to anger. As a great speaker says, "you think about that!" More importantly, memorize this one! When tempted to do the reverse of what the Scripture tells us, remind yourself what that Word says. Bring that truth to life, not what we are more likely to do.

Questions to ponder: What is it about our human nature that makes us so easy to upset? I know we are not all that way. So, why are some of us easier in nature and temperament than I am? How can I become that way. Our faulty hearing, speaking and anger are ever-present demonstrations of the flesh, still alive and well in us. What does the Scripture tell us to do with the flesh? What is it that makes winning an argument so pleasurable? Is it possible that we can say far more by actually not saying anything than we can by speaking right up and letting everyone know what we think? What avenues of our lives most exhibit the bad side of these characteristics (other than obviously our marriage)? Name five people who are well known for their ability to hear well and speak wisely. Seems like those qualities go against everything our

culture teaches us. Has “counting to ten” ever worked to make you slow to wrath? Have you ever seen the technique of saying, “What I heard you say was....” work well?

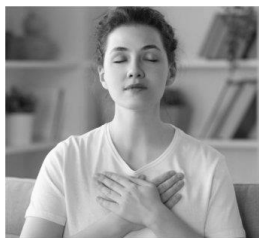
Other Texts/Scriptures to examine and study: Matthw 10:19; Mark 13:11; Proverbs 17:1; Isaiah 30:15 “...in quietness and confidence shall be your strength.”; Luke 21:19 “In your patience possess ye your souls.”; Matthew 6:7 “...they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.”

James 1:19-20

WHEREFORE, MY BELOVED BRETHREN,
LET EVERY MAN BE SWIFT TO HEAR,
SLOW TO SPEAK, SLOW TO WRATH.
FOR THE WRATH OF MAN WORKETH NOT
THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

PURE IN HEART



MATTHEW 5:8 “BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD.” (KJV, NKJV, NASB, ASV, RSV)

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” (NIV)

Jesus made some interesting, and perhaps startling, statements in His Sermon on the Mount. There have been many studies aimed at helping us understand what Jesus was saying on this occasion. At first glance, what Matthew tells us in Verse 8 seems fairly simple. If we want to “see” God, we can only do it with a pure heart.

This really makes sense. Since God is pure and holy, we cannot approach him without some purity in our hearts as well. The only holiness that matters to Him is the holiness imputed to us by Jesus. But it seems that what Jesus is saying here is that if we want to see God, if we want to come close to His presence, we cannot do it with anything less than a pure heart.

Others have said this: Purity in a person means “without malice, treachery, or evil intent; honest; sincere; guileless.” Being pure in heart involves a singleness of heart toward God. Billy Graham wrote: “A pure heart is a reflection of doing what God wants us to do. Our inner being is the root of all our actions. From

our hearts come our motives, our desires, our goals, and our emotions...day by day, as we follow the Holy Spirit, He helps us turn from evil and seek what is good. God does want us to have pure hearts, and He blesses the 'pure in heart,' just as the Bible says."

David wrote in Psalm 24:3-4, we cannot even approach God without a pure heart. "Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully."

Timothy speaks to this in 1 Timothy 5 when he states that our love must come "from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith." Peter commands us to "love one another fervently with a pure heart." (1 Peter 1:22) How often have we found in the church those who can't love one another at all, let alone with a pure heart?

In three of the four Gospels, Jesus told his disciples, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." (Matt 19:14, Mark 10:14, Luke 18:16) How much purer heart can there be than an innocent child, one who has yet to learn that above all things, our hearts are deceitfully wicked? (Jeremiah 17:9)

So, how do we get there? Of course, first we must be drawn to Jesus and accept Him as our Savior and Lord. One could argue that it is only with a pure heart, drawn to Him, recognizing the wickedness of our own selves that we can even receive so great a salvation.

Purity of the heart means *being made clean through the Spirit and the Word*. That work must come from God. It is impossible for us to do this on our own without the miracle of conversion of our hearts. A pure heart is God's throne and

dwelling place, eternal dwelling place, for that matter, but He can only knock there (Rev. 3:20) if we open the door through a clean, pure heart.

Once we give our heart to Jesus, we are very quickly reminded of the wickedness of the old self. Like David, we cry again and again, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10) We are not saved over and over again. But we must renew a right mind, a right spirit, in us, seemingly every day. Remember, we are blessed and see God if, and because, we have a pure heart. With an impure heart, we will miss him...fail to see Him and most likely try to do it all in our own strength.

Third, we need to learn to practice clean heartedness. This is tough because the world and Satan work very hard to drag us back into the wickedness from which Jesus saved us. I believe it is a life-long battle that we fight every day. To be pure in heart means our heart doesn't seek anything other than the Lord Jesus. It means we take Him as the unique goal of our life.

2 Tim 2:22-26 lists lots of things for us to flee (youthful lusts, foolish disputes, quarrels). Away from these things we can be one of “those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” I do not seek a pure heart so I can be blessed. I seek and develop a pure heart because of the promise that I “will see God.” What greater goal in life could we have than that one?

Questions to ponder: What is the difference between a pure heart and holiness? How does the Holy Spirit fill us with His presence so we even have a remote chance of possessing a clean, pure heart? How do impurities in our heart push away others from receiving Jesus themselves? What are the evidences of one who has a pure heart? How can you see this in one another?

Other Scriptures to consider: Psalm 73:1 “...God is good to those who are of a clean heart.” Matthew 15:8 “...their lips honor me but their heart is far from me.” 1 Peter 1:22, What does loving each other fervently with a pure heart look like?

**Matthew
5:8**

BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART
FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

LOT'S WIFE



LUKE 17:32 “REMEMBER LOT’S WIFE.” (KJVK, NKJV, NIV,NASB)

OK, this week we will return to memorizing an easy Scripture. As we have said many times, the work of memorizing Scripture is not an easy one. And, I would never minimize the importance of this task, no matter how long or how short the verse is. But this week, let’s memorize a short one again...three words: Remember Lot’s Wife.

Short though the verse may be, it packs a very important lesson for us to apply to our lives. You can’t move forward by looking backward. The cares of this life can drag you away from God’s will for you. Judgment will come! It is possible to escape God’s judgment, but not if we can’t resist the lure of the world.

Remarkably, it was the Pharisees this time who asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come in Verse 20. He answered very interestingly, “the kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation.” He then explains to his disciples in verse 24,

that He would come like the lightning flashing across the sky. Then He equated His coming to two stories they all knew very well...Noah and Lot.

The lesson we were supposed to learn from both was that life is going to be going on just like normal, eating and drinking, marrying and living life, and then judgment would come without warning. Verse 27 warns that “then the flood came and destroyed them all.”

With Lot it was fire from heaven that brought destruction. The lesson again was, when destruction and judgment comes, it is here...there is no time left to change. But Jesus adds an interesting addition to the lesson with three short words of warning: Remember Lot’s Wife! If you try to keep your life, you will lose it. If the things of this world are more important to you, even more important than your own destruction, that you can’t obey but just have to look back one last time, like Lot’s wife, you will be judged and destroyed.

My imagination takes me to the very next minute in the ended life of Lot’s wife. Like all of us, her soul was eternal. What was left of her body remained as a witness to Lot, to their family and to all of us throughout all time...It wasn’t a real good idea to look back. Whatever thrills and pleasures her life in Sodom brought to her memory, looking back to enjoy them just one more time was one look too many.

Or maybe the lure was the excitement and horror of seeing the “fire and sulfur raining down from heaven and destroying them all” (verse 29) that made her just have to get one more look. We can certainly understand that coming from a culture that is constantly looking to be entertained by the “next big thing”; or that just can’t resist looking at horrors that we would never want

to happen to us, but can't resist watching it happen to someone else.

How many today get a thrill out of watching axe murderers dismember people on the big screen? How many can find entertainment in cannibalism, while they'd never entertain the notion themselves? And how many of us watch just a little bit of pornography and wonder why fidelity in our own marriages and families might be a problem?

As much as we want to be entertained, Remember Lot's Wife! At one moment in the future, the end will come. It will be too late to live right then. We spend so much time saving the things of this life when it can all be gone in a second. Remember Lot's Wife!

Imagine waiting one second too long to accept Jesus as your Savior because the joys of this world are more important to you to give them up...just one more look! And the next second after our destruction, there is Lot's wife standing next to us saying, "It got you too, huh?" It will be too late then. Remember Lot's Wife!

Jesus will come back for his chosen ones very soon. We have heard it all our lives, but life just keeps on being lived like it always has. His return will happen as quickly as lightning passing from one corner of the sky to the other. I plan on being gone when He comes back. And, then all Hell will break loose in a tribulation time that is unlike anything mankind has ever seen.

You won't escape this judgment by being turned into a pillar of salt. This time, Hell will come to earth for seven years. Having looked back to the world instead of to Jesus, many will Remember Lot's Wife, and wish they had heeded Jesus' warnings. "Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left." There will be plenty of time to look backwards then...but you won't like what you see.

Sinner, give your life to Jesus today. He is the only salvation available. Like Lot's wife, you know it is coming, you know destruction is near. The only thing you have to do is keep looking ahead to Jesus. Yet so many, like Lot's wife, will follow the world's allure and realize one second after it is too late that they made the wrong decision. Remember Lot's Wife!

Questions to ponder: The imminent return of Jesus is a central doctrine to the Christian faith. The angels told the gaping disciples that He would return just like He left. Why is it that delay makes us lose sight of holding onto that truth? How will the wrath of judgment of the Great Tribulation be different than what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah? Does it seem like there is less emphasis given to end time prophecies today than there was in the past? Do other prophecies about end time warnings seem to be coming to pass?

Other Scripture Texts to consider: Genesis 19:26, "But Lot's wife looked back and she became a pillar of salt." Great epitaph! 1 Peter 4:7, "The end of all things is near..." Matthew 25:1-13, "Watch, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming." 1 Thessalonians 5:2, "...as a thief in the night." 2 Peter 3:10, "...the elements will melt with fervent heat..." (kind of like Sodom).

**Luke
17:32**

**Remember
Lot's Wife.**

CHAPTER NINETEEN

SPIRITUAL LAUNDRY LIST



GALATIANS 5:22-23 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” (KJV)

“...love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control...” (ASV)

“...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...” (NASB, RSV, NIV, NKJV)

Oh, come on Dave! You follow a very easy Scripture memory verse with a long, hard one. Seriously?

My answer: don’t blame me. It came from the Holy Spirit. I can honestly confess that when I started memorizing Scriptures, I didn’t always memorize the easy ones or shortest ones. But this one was sent to me to USE.

I jokingly call some of these scriptures “Paul’s Laundry Lists.” There are a lot of them through the New Testament...long lists of features, characteristics, behaviors that we are supposed to model as Spirit-filled, Spirit-led believers. So, I encourage you to do what I did. Get in there, work hard and long and memorize this

list of “fruits” so you can start meditating on them and learn to model them in your life.

Another problem with laundry lists is that they are easy to write down and list but also very easy to ignore and overlook. That is not the idea. Instead, when I followed the Lord’s leading, I would recall this list, work on making sure I had it memorized correctly and then start analyzing the life I was leading against its standards.

Am I showing love in my life? Is joy present or am I acting like a curmudgeon (look it up!). The way my life is going, I don’t really have much peace...what can I do about that? Meekness and gentleness are NOT qualities of a USAF fighter pilot. Yet, they need to be qualities of my life. I remember praying, “Lord, will you help make me more gentle like my mom?” I’m still working on that one. I think that is the point.

Longsuffering, or patience, is one of those fruits I remember praying that the Lord would hurry up and give me soon. A famous star of film and screen once said, “Goodness has got nothing to do with it.” Being “good” was something I had to learn because it doesn’t always serve my intentions and needs. Faith is huge...without it, we cannot please God. Lord, increase my faith!

Meekness has been a hard one to come by with this Type-A personality. Meekness rarely serves my immediate goals and intentions. Without it, I can get so much done while stepping on so many others. But that isn’t real Christ like, is it? Temperance is a word I needed to look up. The words “self control” help us understand it better. Remember that temper I mentioned evident in this red-head?

As a Boy Scout, I had to memorize the “Scout Law.” That list is even LONGER! Am I screaming? “A scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful,

thrifty, brave, clean and reverent.” I bet you Paul was a Boy Scout!!

So, why all these lists? Is it any wonder I call them laundry lists? I memorized the Scout Law so I memorized the “Fruits of the Spirit.” Then I tried to apply them to my life. My mother tried to help me adopt all of these traits...from both lists...as I grew older. She didn’t use the lists. She just tried to teach me how to be more kind. Dad tried to teach me how to have more self control.

I didn’t actually enjoy memorizing a laundry list. It is hard to memorize long lists perfectly. But, since I had to memorize them, I expected the next, young Boy Scouts who came along to memorize them too. More importantly, I expected them to start modeling them in their lives. The Holy Spirit expects us to do the same with the fruits. Why? Because like fruit, they were the produce or product of a Holy life.

These lists were measuring sticks for “how I’m doing.” I don’t use a 1 to 10 scale, but I can certainly see when I’m really showing the fruit of hatefulness instead of love and joy. It’s real easy to see when I give in to excesses instead of living a life of discipline and self control. It really didn’t take a laundry list with “goodness” on it to tell me I ought to be good...but it sure did come in handy as a reminder when I thought being bad was a better idea.

Bottom line: the Lord wants us to adapt personalities, character and lifestyles that demonstrate a set of fruits in our lives that Paul just happened to list for us. Does memorizing a long list of the fruits of the Spirit make me any kinder? No, but knowing the list and the discipline of remembering them certainly helps remind me that I need to be kinder. Eventually, it can even help adjust my behavior so I can learn to be kinder.

So, get the list, write it down, start going over it and over it again and again. Memorize it for the sake of memorizing it. Then

the Lord will bring them to mind when you need them, so you can remember to show the fruit when you'd rather do the opposite. Demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit in our lives is the way to become more Christ like and demonstrate His personality to the world through us. That was His plan.

Questions to ponder: Are some Scriptures harder to memorize than others? Do lists like the fruit of the Spirit seem to be tedious? How can memorizing a list of traits help me adapt those traits into my life? How can a list of words be used by the Holy Spirit to inspire us to make them true in our lives? How can the Holy Spirit give us the power to have these fruits when the world tends to promote behaviors exactly the opposite? Can the discipline of memorizing a long list translate into the discipline of turning our lives into Christ-pleasing, Christ-modeling examples?

Other Scriptures to examine: Galatians 5:22-26. Look at the rest of the chapter. Does learning these fruits bring about the kind of walking in the Spirit spoken of in verse 25? Can exercising these fruits help us crucify the flesh that seems to war against this kind of life style? Romans 12: 1-2. Don't be conformed to the world but be transformed, by the renewing of your mind. Fruits of the Spirit come from a renewed mind. James 3:7...another long list we will memorize later. "The wisdom that is from above..." John 15:1-5, a look at bearing fruit and what happens to those who don't bear fruit. 2 Peter 1:5-7, another great list.

Galatians 5: 22-23

**But the fruit of the Spirit is
love, joy, peace,
longsuffering, gentleness, goodness,
faith, meekness, temperance;
against such there is no law.**

CHAPTER TWENTY

SEEK FIRST



MATTHEW 6:33 “BUT SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS; AND ALL THESE THINGS SHALL BE ADDED UNTO YOU.” (KJV)

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (NKJV)

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (NIV)

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (NASB, ASV)

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.” (RSV)

Steven Covey was a famous writer who specialized in teaching people proper time management in the business world. In his book, “First Things First” he states: “a meaningful life is not a matter of speed or efficiency. It’s much more a matter of what you do and why you do it, than how fast you get it done.” He emphasizes to his readers that “principles produce both personal peace and dramatic results.” Scripture would tell us much the same.

Matthew related such words of Jesus as He spoke in the Sermon on the Mount. He taught that life was more than the accumulation of things, that worry is bad and doesn't add joy to your life. "All these things" the Lord was referring to in the previous and following verses included the clothes we wear, what we eat and drink and worrying about tomorrow.

Jesus says in verse 33 that it is most important to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. If we do this, all the things that tend to do their best try to take first place in our thoughts and minds will be taken care of for us by the Father. "Your heavenly Father knows that you need them."

It is amazing some of the things we will let take first place in our lives. The future we prepare for so much can occupy all our time. We can get so intense providing for our family and loved ones that living a righteous life can become an afterthought. Entertainment and socializing can become so preeminent that we can forget the Lord completely. After all, we say, He is always there for us to come back to. Even competing in the work place or in other activities can become so intense that it can dominate all of our attention, passion and love. And let's not even mention how striving for riches, wealth and possessions can replace almost everything else we say is important to us.

I guess it isn't too far a stretch of our imagination to see how even worrying over what we wear, what we eat and what we drink can become first in our lives. Jesus quickly redirected our priorities to remind us that if we want the things we need, let alone all the other things we want, we really need to seek His kingdom first and His righteousness.

Seeking the kingdom of God often means forsaking all the other things we thought were so important. Self-sacrifice is so foreign a concept, even in the church, that it is easy for us to be

caught up in competing for everything from time, treasures, talents, attention... Very often this mis-focused attention on everything else but the Lord's kingdom can even become destructive. How many men and women, even leaders in the church, have found themselves lost in defeat, tragedy and destruction before they even realized that seeking the kingdom first had been the last thing on their minds?

Memorize this verse! Repeat it to yourself over and over, not just so you can remember it, but so its message will sink way down deep into the daily routines of your life.

Reading the Word first in the day can help you seek the kingdom first. Aligning your relationships to those the Lord would give priority in your life can help you keep the most important people first in your life. When making important decisions, ask the Lord what His will is in the matter...well before thinking about how the decision will make us better or meet perceived needs.

The disciplines of discipleship can help us leave behind many things that we eventually will find should never have taken first place in the first place. Seeking the kingdom first might even lead to sacrificing a lot of the things that we think are important so we can find God's will for our life instead of our own all the time. Imagine the Lord coming to us and telling us, you need to sell all you have and give it to the poor and come follow me. Could you do that?

Seek His kingdom first. He will make sure you have all the things you need that you think must take so much priority over Him. If we seek His kingdom first and His righteousness, we might be amazed at all the things He will add to us!

Questions to ponder: Why does worry overtake us so much? What has taken first place in your life instead of the kingdom? The

kingdom of God doesn't always mean just our lives in the church. How is everything we say and do during the day something the Lord would like to include in our perception of what the kingdom is supposed to be? A kingdom must have a king. We know that Jesus is supposed to be our king. But how many times have you realized that you are on the throne and not the Lord? Is what we wear so important that it is possible it can become the throne in our life we can't let go?

Other Scriptures to consider: Luke 11: 9-13 encourages us to ask, seek and knock. Luke 12:7, we are more valuable than sparrows, but the Lord guards them. 1 Peter 5:7, Casting our cares on Him, because He cares for you. That kind of rules out worry, doesn't it? Luke 12:22-31, the parallel verse to this one. Don't worry about clothing, food, drink. Don't have an anxious mind. Seek the kingdom first!

A song to remember: You might get the idea that a lot of memory verses we would like to learn have been incorporated into songs that have been sung for years. Watch and listen to this YouTube video many times this week as you memorize Matthew 6:33:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3S1wfXmYPw>

**Matthew
6:33**

**But seek ye first the kingdom of God,
and his righteousness;
and all these things
shall be added unto you.**

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT



EPHESIANS 5:18 “AND BE NOT DRUNK WITH WINE, WHEREIN IS EXCESS: BUT BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT.” (KJV)

“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.” (NKJV, NASB)

“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” (NIV, RSV)

“And be not drunken with wine, wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit.” (ASV)

“Don’t drink too much wine, for many evils lie along that path; be filled instead with the Holy Spirit and controlled by him.” (TLB)

This is not the first or only Scripture in the Bible where Paul gives us “Do’s and Don’ts.” He is very clear here: Do not be drunk. Do be filled with the Spirit.

I will not delve into the doctrine of abstinence for this study. I will admit that I come from a holiness background in which I was raised that insists on abstinence. I am licensed as a minister with an association that believes, “since tobacco, alcoholic beverages and drugs are poisonous and habit forming and

components of the old sinful nature, no Christian can advance spiritually and continue their use because using either in any manner is a lustful habit of the flesh. Therefore, we refrain from the use of tobacco, alcoholic beverages and hallucinogenic drugs in any form.”

Whether you agree with drinking to this extent or not, Paul makes it very clear that drunkenness is wrong. Dissipation refers to a wasteful or thoughtless spending or activity. Debauchery means excessive indulgence in sinful pleasures.

I’m sure in the Roman-influenced world of Paul’s time, he had to deal with lots of leftover indulgences that needed to be left behind when one was converted to the faith. We aren’t much different.

I tried to use a fairly innocent picture above to portray one with drunkenness. There are many, many more examples I could have used of far worse conditions of those who give themselves over to the excess of alcohol...or any other excess the world offers that so easily drags us away from any semblance of Christ-likeness. I’m sure we all know of some who have ruined their lives with drinking, gambling, smoking, promiscuous sex and drugs. What they thought was an innocent pleasure soon controlled them so that they destroyed themselves.

Surely, Paul was not talking to Christians in this Scripture! In fact, he was. We recognize that when we get saved we become a new creature. “Old things are passed away and all things become new.” Yet every one of us knows how some of that old nature takes longer to eliminate than the miraculous, instant experience of salvation. To that extent, Paul may be using drunkenness as his example in Ephesians, but he could just have easily used foul language, lust, or a hundred other temptations that we can bring along with us into the new life that absolutely need to be eliminated.

Read the previous three verses. “Be careful how you live, as wise.” (15) “Don’t be foolish” and “Understand what the Lord’s will

is.” (17) Sometimes, the life Paul exhorts Christians to live is a pretty tall order. And, in ourselves, we often find it is impossible to measure up to those standards. There must be some answer.

The answer is not just “don’t do that” (First lady Nancy Reagan told teens about drugs, “Just say ‘no’.”) After telling us not to be drunk with wine, he states “Be filled with the Spirit.” In fact, the filling of the Holy Spirit is the only solution, the only way for us to have the kind of victory over any kind of “dissipation” that disables Christ-likeness in us.

Be filled with the Holy Spirit. “Baptism in the Spirit is the new birth which places one in the Body of Christ, which is the Church (1 Corinthians 12:13, Galatians 3:27). The evidence of the new birth or baptism in the Spirit is the love of God (1 John 3:14, Colossians 1:4, Galatians 5:22,23). On the day of Pentecost there was a two-fold operation of the Spirit which formed the Church, the Body of Christ, and they were also immediately filled with the Spirit (Acts 1:5, Acts 2:4). Every Christian who has received the Spirit through the new birth, or baptism into Christ, should yield to the Spirit to be possessed or filled with the Spirit.”

Your background, upbringing or the part of the body of Christ to which you may belong can teach many different approaches to what Paul meant by being filled with the Spirit. That’s OK. What we probably cannot deny however, is that Paul recognized (not just here in his writing to the Ephesians) that trying to live a Christian life that overcomes all the habits of our past cannot happen without the power and assistance of the Holy Spirit.

Ephesian, Christian, Baptist, Methodist...do not be drunk with wine! Do not let excesses rule your life. That kind of behavior is not what the Lord wants for you. We are the temple of God. He lives in us now. You might need to do a little “house cleaning.” Being able to do that housecleaning and live the kind of holy life the Lord wants

you to live is most likely only going to come about by applying the rest of Ephesians 5:18. Be filled with the Spirit! You work out what that means in your life. But I can promise you, doing it with your willpower, with your own strength doesn't work for very long. Only by being filled with the Spirit, every day, can we ever expect to live victorious lives like the Lord wants us to. Be filled with the Spirit.

Questions to ponder: Paul says don't be drunk. Surely, a little wine cannot be a bad thing. How much wine can I have before it is sin? Ask that question about some other potential sins in our lives: How much looking at another man's wife can I have before it is sin? Is total abstinence the answer to all issues that can bring harm or sin back into my life? Can I even be able to live a life without sin? See Titus 1:7-9 to learn how to be blameless. There sure is a lot more Scripture on this topic than I realized (see below). Why do we not emphasize holiness in our churches any more?

Other Scriptures to consider: 1 Tim 3:8, Qualifications for a Deacon. 1 Tim 5:23, Wine for your stomach's sake? Titus 1:7-9, Qualifications for bishops. Blameless? Is that every Christians' goal? Titus 2:3-8, Qualities of normal Christians (aged women?) 1 Peter 4:3-How we used to walk. Luke 7:33-34 John the Baptist and Jesus. Romans 14:14.

**Ephesians
5:18**

**And be not drunk with wine
wherein is excess,
but be filled with
the Spirit.**

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

ASK, SEEK, FIND



MATTHEW 7:7 “ASK, AND IT SHALL BE GIVEN YOU; SEEK, AND YE SHALL FIND; KNOCK, AND IT SHALL BE OPENED UNTO YOU.” (KJV, ASV)

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.” (NKJV, NIV, NASB, ASV, RSV)

For us Bible verse memorizers, this Scripture is a gold mine. In addition to being found in Matthew 7:7, which should be easy to remember (77), the verse comes with a built-in acrostic! The letters A, S and K literally remind us of what we are trying to remember: Ask, Seek and Knock. You have half the work done at the start!

I’m sure the acrostic is a happy coincidence...Jesus spoke those words in the Sermon on the Mount, most likely in Aramaic. Matthew wrote them in Greek. Ask is “aiteo” meaning to beg, pray, urge or request. Seek is “zeteo” meaning to request, look for, call for or beg. Knock is “krouo” meaning to beat, strike or bump to gain admittance. We should knock loudly and keep knocking. I would encourage you to memorize the easy acrostic: Ask, Seek and Knock.

It is impossible to miss the instruction here. Jesus seems to be encouraging anyone who will hear to ASK for what they want and need. In our modern culture, we would think that would be it...I ask, you give me. If we take it literally, that is exactly what He is saying. "Ask, and it shall be given to you." I need no more encouragement. I have asked, please give me. And, there are numerous cases in Jesus' ministry where the asker simply had to ask and He gave them what they asked for.

However, if you live life, it doesn't take too many times asking and not being immediately given what we ask for to understand that there might be something more here. In fact, Jesus did not heal everyone who needed healing. In some cases, He had to literally ask the plaintiff what they wanted Him to do for them.

The danger of extremes here, of course, is literally thinking that we can make Jesus our "Genie in a bottle." He is not the granter of three wishes. On the other hand, everything about His ministry seemed to demonstrate that He was anxious to give wonderful gifts to those He met.

He seems to be saying here, "go ahead and Ask". Then keep going...Seek what you want. Put some feet to your faith. I am not your waiter...get up and go seek for what you want. Add seeking to your asking. You might even need to get a little aggressive about what you ask for...go Knock on the door. Maybe He would tell us to "go after it."

I have never been what is currently called a "name it and claim it" preacher. I agree that there is power in our words, both good and bad. But I hold no illusions that just because I believe in what I want enough and claim that it is mine, Jesus is obligated to give it to me. But He sure does say "ask" a lot!

In Matthew 6:8, He says that the Father knows what we need even before we ask Him. Matthew 7:11 says that, like we give

good gifts to our children, the Father wants to give good things to those who ask Him. Matthew 18:19, Jesus says that if two of us agree on what we ask, it will be done for them by the Father.

Matthew 21:22 says that ALL THINGS that we ask in prayer, believing, we shall receive. In Mark 11:24 He said whatever we desire, when we pray, believe that we have them and we shall have them. Sounds like this asking thing is pretty powerful. But it might also require some believing on our part too.

So, why don't we have when we ask? John 14:13-14 adjures us to ask in Jesus' name. He says, "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it." James 4:2 warns us that we "have not, because we asked not." I try to make sure I am never guilty of not asking. He also notes that we do not have because we "ask amiss," most likely because of impure or false motives. He blames that we ask so we can consume our request upon our own lusts. How many times have we not had the answer to our prayer because it would bring harm upon us?

John 15:7 seems to give a qualifier to our asking: "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you shall ask whatever you will and it shall be done unto you." How's that for a motivator for memorizing the Word? How can we make His words abide in us if we don't know them? What a great way to abide in the word! Memorize it, meditate on it, call it to heart all day long. Seek the wisdom of its instruction. Then ask.

James 1:5-6 tells us to "ask in faith, nothing wavering." 1 John 5:14 advises us to "ask any thing according to His will." One would think it might be important to be in the will of the Father before asking for something.

The instructions of Jesus and the New Testament writers seem to be very clear. We have the right to ask. We have been told to

ask. We have also been told to seek and knock. Why would we not do so?

As an elder, I tended to be the one to whom children would come up to during prayer time. In their innocence, they were never afraid to ask for prayer for the thing they found so important. I never turned one away. I have often prayed for the sick and disabled. I have never felt it was ever inappropriate to ask the Lord for their needs. I don't believe it is ever inappropriate to ask the Lord to heal us. It may not be His will to heal us, but we can always ask.

As we all know, however, we don't always get the answer we want. We don't always get an answer immediately. We hopefully do not get answers because we ask wrongly or in a way that is against the Father's will. Hopefully, we can't be accused of not having what we want or need because we didn't even ask.

This memory verse is very important. Ask and it will be given to us. Seek, go after it, chase it down...and we shall find. Knock...knock the door down if you need to (remember the insistent neighbor who got his needs answered because of his persistence?) Put feet to your faith. The answers to our prayers are worth the asking, seeking and knocking.

Questions to ponder: The number one question to discuss—why does it appear that the Lord does not answer our prayers? What are some of the reasons that have been revealed to you why the Lord waited some period of time to answer? Is there any prayer the Lord will not hear? If the Lord already knows what we need, why does He think we need to ask? How much of our prayers depends on us asking? Does the Lord answer prayers we never ask? How can our prayers affect the hearts and souls of others

leading to their salvation? What possible purpose can the Lord have for not granting healing to one who is sick?

Other Scriptures to consider: James 5:16 “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Matthew 6:8, Father knows before we ask. Matthew 18:19 Two agreeing. Matthew 21:22 Ask in prayer believing. Mark 10:35-40, James and John asked. Luke 11:9. Luke 11:13 Asking for the Holy Spirit. John 11:22, Jesus gets what He asks the Father for. John 16:24 Ask that your JOY may be full.

A song to remember: We introduced this song in Chapter 20. Listen to it again and apply the second verse to memorizing Matthew 7:7:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3S1wfXmYPw>

Matthew
7:7

Ask and it will be given to you;
seek and you will find;
knock and the door will be opened to you.

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

DON'T WORRY



PHILIPPIANS 4:6 “DON’T WORRY ABOUT ANYTHING; INSTEAD, PRAY ABOUT EVERYTHING; TELL GOD YOUR NEEDS, AND DON’T FORGET TO THANK HIM FOR HIS ANSWERS.” (TLB)

“Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” (KJV)

“Be anxious for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” (NKJV, NASB, ASV, NIV)

“Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” (RSV)

Yeah, I caught that! I listed a memory verse from the Living Bible first! I don’t do that very often, but its simplicity makes it an excellent version to memorize in this case. “Don’t worry about anything! But pray about everything.” We will address the other versions in a minute.

Honestly, I want to address something I’ve been worrying about here lately: I worry a lot! It is not lost on me that if any group of people should be the happiest, least worried people in the

world, it should be us Christians. Yet, if we hang around fellow Christians for very long, we will learn that sometimes, the exact opposite is true.

I agree, life is tough, not some of the time, but it often seems tough all of the time. The world hates us because we claim to have the exclusive words of truth about life. Satan hates us because we believe we can proclaim Jesus' life-saving Gospel to every person who desperately needs it. What is so hard to understand is why we often demonstrate that we kind of don't like each other.

Without doubt, living a life of faith is sometimes tough, hard work. Jesus gives us "the Words of Life," and once we accept them and turn from our wicked ways, He also brings us eternal life, freedom from sin and death and a life that, although pretty tough sometimes, promises to bring us victory. We should be the happiest people on earth!

Using the Living Bible version of Phil 4:6 as our memory verse, I can't help but be reminded of a simple little song titled "Be Happy." It was released in 1988 by a singer named Bobby McFerrin with a definite Caribbean flavor. I doubt that any of us has not heard this little ditty. Select the link listed below and listen to it again:

<https://youtu.be/Kxln1IiyKls?si=oR0gxp3AxyWpRM9R>

"Here's a little song I wrote, you might want to sing it note for note, Don't worry, Be Happy.

In every life we have some trouble, but when you worry you make it double, Don't worry, Be Happy."

Although Mr. McFerrin's song and lyrics lack any substantial spiritual advice, it can't be denied that there is still some truth in the thoughts. Whether Christian or not, all of us experience lives

where we have some trouble. If you haven't experienced any in a while, hold on...it's coming.

We have to admit the next part too. When we worry, we make it double...we double our trouble. Unfortunately, we have all found that just singing, "Don't worry, be happy" rarely does the trick. Yet Paul was saying kind of the same thing. "Don't worry about anything." Right! How's that working out for you?

The other versions of this verse provide us with a little bit better understanding of what Paul may have been trying to imply. The KJV does suggest a truth, that the cares of this life can overwhelm us and, as a result, we do need to find out how to "be careful for nothing." But that can possibly lead us to think carelessness is a good thing. Most often, it is not. Most of the other versions use the word "anxious." Now that is very easy to understand.

In our busy, hectic world, anxiousness is easy to give into. I look a lot more like the guy in the picture on the left than I do a happy little gopher without a care in the world. The mortgage, the family, the job, the trials and sicknesses of normal life can weigh anyone down. And, if they last long enough, we can soon find a life full of anxiety and care that seems too much to bear.

Although the philosophy of "just being happy" rarely relieves the anxiety, I do think that every once in a while, we need to just step back, look at how great we really have it and tell ourselves, "Be Happy Dude!" Because it rarely works to just tell ourselves, "Don't worry, be happy," it might help to follow the advice Paul gives us in the rest of the verse.

"Don't worry about anything, instead, pray about everything." I tend to want to handle it all on my own by worrying about it, planning how to fix it and then getting anxious and frustrated about it when it doesn't work out. Paul tells us to use prayer,

supplication and thanksgiving. Replace the first three with the second three.

Literally, pray about everything. It is amazing how much lighter the burden becomes when I take it to the Lord in prayer. Supplication is an old-style word meaning “the action of asking or begging for something earnestly or humbly.” And thanksgiving: it isn’t just for November. Look at how much you have before you start groaning about how much you don’t. A thankful, grateful heart can relieve loads of stress and anxiety, if we will just let it.

Questions to ponder:

Why should the world have the secret to no worry and being happy? Surely, our Christian faith gives us the best reasons to be happy. So, why aren’t we? Is it possible that the only reason we aren’t happy sometimes is because we don’t want to be? Can happiness just come from making a decision to be happy?

Other Scriptures to consider: Scriptures tell us that in the world we will have troubles, pain and sorrow. The world will hate us but Jesus said, “Take heart, because I have overcome the world.” (John 16:36) Scriptures also tell us, “The joy of the Lord is our strength.” (Nehemiah 8:10)

Rejoice evermore! (1 Thess 5:16) Rejoice in the Lord. (Ps 33:1, Ps 97:12, Isa 41:16, Isa 61:10 Joel 2:23, Hab 3:18 “I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the Lord your God.”

PHILIPPIANS
4:6

DON'T WORRY ABOUT ANYTHING;
INSTEAD, PRAY ABOUT EVERYTHING;
TELL GOD YOUR NEEDS, AND DON'T FORGET
TO THANK HIM FOR HIS ANSWERS.

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT



1 TIMOTHY 6:6 “BUT GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT IS GREAT GAIN.” (KJV, ASV, NKJV, NIV)

“But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. (NASV)

“There is great gain in godliness with contentment. (RSV)

“Do you want to be truly rich? You already are if you are happy and good. (TLB)

Paul warns Timothy to beware of teachers of false doctrine in the preceding verses. Those kinds of “teachers” would believe that godliness is a means to financial gain. Wow! Has that worked out that way for you?

It would seem that the more godly I would become, the less wealthy I would probably be. Yet, we don’t have to look too far in our American culture today to see those who show themselves leaders in the Christian church who are definitely wealthy.

The verses following this one are some of the most often quoted verses in the Bible: “We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.” “The love of money is the root of all evil.” “Fight the good fight of faith.” It is not surprising that Paul would start with, “godliness with contentment is great gain.”

Who of us does not want to gain greatly in the faith? Who pursues poverty in order to obtain a higher righteousness (asceticism)? Is it possible to be totally content with just godliness, or do we need material possessions in order to achieve happiness?

The problem isn't much different today than when Paul wrote these words. As followers of Jesus Christ, we should be seeking godliness...holiness...righteousness. In the world, however, we seek as much materially as we can get sometimes, making us no different than those who do not know Jesus. Verse 8 amplifies the thought a little more: "If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that."

I'm pretty sure that asceticism isn't what Paul is talking about here. That is the practice of self-denial as a measure of personal and spiritual discipline; rigorous abstention from self-indulgence. It is hard to believe that any form of contentedness can come from severe self-denial, let alone perhaps godliness. However, I'd say that as a culture, we Americans are definitely on the way-opposite, reverse side of this spectrum.

How difficult is it for us to ever find contentment? Rarely are we contented with just enough food. Entertainment is our driving force in way too many cases and we are never content with unsatisfactory diversions, especially if we have to pay for them. How many fans are contented if "their" team loses? And let's not forget the real focus of this discussion. How much money do we have to make before we can feel contented? Are you feeling a little bit guilty yet? I am.

Let's not forget that this goal of great gain, however, is achievable by both aspects of these emotional scales, godliness AND contentment. The goal is not to achieve one or the other, godliness or contentment. We might even say that it is not just our goal to achieve godliness AND contentment. But, Paul makes us

think that our goal is to achieve godliness WITH contentment...we want them both together.

Maybe it is true that we cannot come to some level of godliness without also finding contentment. Can we really find contentment with just food and clothing, the barest necessities of life? Most of us will never know. However, it certainly seems that, as Christians who would pursue Christ-likeness, we will never know great gain apart from godliness WITH contentment. I want them both. I want them working together to bring about the me God wants me to be. How about you?

Questions to ponder: How much is enough? Is food and clothing, the barest necessities of life, really enough so that with it, we can be content? How does contentment lead to godliness? Is contentment a form of godliness, equal with holiness, purity and sanctification? Does godliness in our lives have a measurable scale? How can I tell if I am becoming more godly? Has that ever really been a goal in your Christian life? How did Jesus demonstrate godliness and contentment?

Other Scriptures to consider: Phil 4:11, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am in therewith to be content." Luke 3:14 "...be content with your wages." Hebrews 13:5 "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have." Luke 16:11 "If you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?"

**1 Timothy
6:6**

**BUT GODLINESS WITH
CONTENTMENT IS GREAT GAIN.**

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

A LIGHT/A LAMP



PSALM 119:105 “THY WORD IS A LAMP UNTO MY FEET, AND A LIGHT UNTO MY PATH.” (KJV, NKJV, NASB, RSV, TLB, NIV)

That’s right! Every version of the Bible I could find quotes this verse the same way. How about that! We started this journey in Chapter 3 with the first reason to “hide the Word”: So that we might not sin against God...Psalm 119:11. In this passage, in the same chapter of Psalms, we learn another reason: **DIRECTION**.

The phrase “God’s word is a lamp unto my feet” is a metaphorical statement meant to emphasize the wisdom that comes from following God’s instruction. The metaphor is the Word as a lamp. Note it is a lamp to my feet.

Unless we are struck with some serious tragedy that makes us lame, we were all born to walk. At some age, early in life, we will stop crawling, stand up erect and take our first steps. For some of us, it is off to the races...and we race through life for the rest of our lives. Others of us might take a little longer to figure that balance thing out. There might be a little trepidation in moving one foot in front of the other. But eventually, we move. Just ask any parent of their first-born child. We were born to move.

The metaphor implies that the Christian life is meant to be a mobile one as well...where we need direction to even know how to put one foot in front of the other, in the right direction to provide us with proper movement through life.

Just as, quite often, the world seems like a dark place, so can be our spiritual walk in the Lord. Satan and this fallen world do all they can to drag us back into the abyss of darkness, where we don't know where to go or how to get anywhere. It might seem so dark that we don't know which way to walk. But don't be fearful...the psalmist tells us that God has provided His Word so it will be a lamp...a lamp to our feet so we know how to move forward.

The metaphor emphasizes that the Word is also light to my path. Not only does the Word light up HOW we should walk, but it also lights up the WAY we should walk. We already discussed the Lord's willingness to direct our paths from Proverbs 3:5-6. Many times the immediate way He accomplishes this is through His Word.

HOW he wants us to walk is illuminated throughout the Bible. In Genesis 17:1, God tells us to "walk before me and be blameless." Leviticus 26:12, God says, "I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people." Deut 5:33 says, "Walk in all the way that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land..." Psalm 1:1 says, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly..."

The WAY or WHERE He wants us to walk is equally explained throughout the Scriptures:

Psa 23:4 says, "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me..." Lest we fail to understand, Psa 82:5 explains to us, we "walk about in

darkness; all the foundations of the earth are unstable.” That sounds like a walk that definitely needs some light...the light of the Word! Ps 86:11 tells us “teach me Your way O Lord; I will walk in Your truth.”

In the New Testament, we see this guiding light many times. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world: he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” (John 8:12) In 1 John 1:7 we learn that, “if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

Later, we will memorize and devote ourselves to further revelation to the power, authority and sufficiency of the Word of God. Know that the Word is alive, active and sharp (Hebrews 4:12). The Word is essential to our daily life, more sufficient than bread and water (Matthew 4:4). The Word is God breathed and useful to us in so many different ways (2 Timothy 3:16). In the end, heaven and earthy will pass away, but the Word will remain forever! (Mark 13:31)

Today, let’s commit Psalm 119:105 not only to memory but to everlasting application to our lives. Search the Word, hunger for the Word, commit more and more of it to your heart and memory. Let its LIGHT shine to teach us how we should walk, where we should walk and guard us against walking where we should not. The Word is a lamp to my feet!

Questions to ponder: Do you have difficulty understand Scriptural metaphors and applying their truths to your life? How can the light of the Word both reveal the correct pathway of our lives and keep us from the ways we should not go? Jesus is the Word, He is the light. Can we receive light from revealed truth directly from Him? How does He use the Word to bring about the

revelation of its truth in application to every part of our lives? Again, how will memorizing the Word provide greater power to all the areas of my life in which I need direction?

Other Scriptures to consider: 1 John 2:6 “Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did.” 2 John 6. John 8:12. Proverbs 28:18 Psalm 86:11 Proverbs 3:5-6.

A song to remember: This is one of my favorite choruses using one of our memory verses. I have sung it for years. It doesn’t just help me remember the words...it also helps me understand that the Lord is always leading me by His word. Enjoy:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKlQpjl_oqY

**Psalm
119:105**

“THY WORD IS A LAMP UNTO MY FEET,
AND A LIGHT UNTO MY PATH.”

SUMMARY

CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER



ECCLESIASTES 12:13 “LET US HEAR THE
CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER....” (KJV)

So, how are we doing? Did you memorize all twenty five of the verses in this first book? Did you find this a good book for Bible Study and devotional time? Did this prove to be a helpful aid to your Sunday School class or Group Study?

Obviously, in keeping with our goal, we are only one fourth of the way to memorizing 100 Bible verses. I hope you are one of those who has taken this goal seriously and decided to plunge into the spiritual discipline of Bible verse memorization. To you I say, keep it up! If you have memorized 25 verses you can't help but already notice the golden value of what we are doing and already see benefits coming into your life from being faithful to this goal. I encourage you to purchase the next book or forge forward online to memorize the next 25 verses toward our goal of one hundred.

If you are one of those who has used this book as a devotional or personal Bible Study, I hope you have found it to be as valuable as I have. I know that many of these chapters express my personal

opinions and my doctrinal understanding of what the Bible says to us through these treasured Scriptures. Please feel free to study them further, again and again. I have found that we cannot over-study God's Word and often find even more "spiritual nuggets" as we study it another time. Feel free to send me your opinions of the book and tell me how we can make it better for all of us in "the church."

The last group – Sunday School classes or Bible Study groups – I would ask you as well, is this a valuable resource for teaching and preaching? I hope I have stimulated discussion. It is important to consider different viewpoints of interpretation of the Scripture without sacrificing the value of its truth. Is there sufficient material here to help teach a great lesson? Have we been clear and concise without sacrificing the depth of spiritual application of each verse? Please also share with me how we can make this the most valuable spiritual tool for the Lord to use.

Hopefully, you have already found the online link to "Sword Drill" in the contents section. If not, please give it a try. I know that we all probably have different ways to memorize the Word. I hope the index card method might have worked for you. I tried to give you a computer-based approach to help make this easy online as well.

I jokingly titled this section as the Conclusion. Obviously, this is not the conclusion to our goal, study of the Word or writing of books. If the Lord is willing, I hope to continue writing the second, third and fourth books, each with 25 memory verses for our use in memorizing one hundred verses of the Bible. So, I encourage you to PRESS ON! Let's go to Book 2, HIDE THE WORD, Part 2. Join me and watch your spirit grow as you memorize and know more and more of His Word!

God bless you in your faithfulness to Him, Dave Matthews.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

King James Version references all taken from The **King James Version (KJV)**, also the **King James Bible (KJB)** and the **Authorized Version (AV)**, an early modern English translation of the Christian Bible for the Church of England, which was commissioned in 1604 and published in 1611, by sponsorship of King James I.

The **New King James Version (NKJV)** is a translation of the Bible in contemporary English. Published by Thomas Nelson, the complete NKJV was released in 1982. With regard to its textual basis, the NKJV relies on a modern critical edition for the Old Testament, while opting to use the Textus Receptus for the New Testament.

The **New International Version (NIV)** is a translation of the Bible into contemporary English. Published by Biblica, the complete NIV was released on October 27, 1978 with a minor revision in 1984 and a major revision in 2011. The NIV offers a balance between a word-for-word and thought-for-thought translation and is considered by many as a highly accurate and smooth-reading version of the Bible in modern English.

The **Revised Standard Version (RSV)** is an English translation of the Bible published in 1952 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. This translation is a revision of the **American Standard Version (ASV)** of 1901, and was intended to be a readable and literally accurate modern English translation.

The RSV was the first translation of the Bible to make use of the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah. The New Testament was first published in 1946, the Old Testament in 1952, and the Apocrypha in 1957. In later years, the RSV served as the basis

for two revisions—the **New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)** of 1989, and the **English Standard Version (ESV)** of 2001.

The **New American Standard Bible (NASB)**, also simply **NAS** for "New American Standard") is a translation of the Bible in contemporary English. Published by the Lockman Foundation, the complete NASB was released in 1971. New revisions were published in 1995 and 2020. The NASB relies on recently published critical editions of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. It is known for preferring a literal translation style that generally preserves the structure of the original language when possible (formal equivalence), rather than an idiomatic style that attempts to match natural English usage.

The Living Bible (TLB or LB) is a personal paraphrase, not a translation, of the Bible in English by Kenneth N. Taylor and first published in 1971. Taylor used the American Standard Version of 1901 as his base text.

The **English Standard Version (ESV)** is a translation of the Bible in contemporary English. Published in 2001 by Crossway, the ESV was "created by a team of more than 100 leading evangelical scholars and pastors." The ESV relies on recently published critical editions of the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



David L. Matthews, born in 1954, grew up in the pastor's home of Rev Don G. Matthews, one of five brothers. He graduated from Southport High School in Indianapolis in 1972 and the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1976. He married Cheryl Meurer of Colorado Springs the day after he graduated.

Dave and Cheryl lived through 19 years of a successful Air Force career and raised four wonderful children, Chris, Andrea, Joshua and Nathanael, while traveling around the world. Dave was an instructor pilot, fighter pilot, flight examiner, commander, executive officer and squadron operations officer until he retired from the Air Force in 1995.

The family moved to southern Indiana and Dave began a 22 year career, flying for United Parcel Service until he retired in 2017. During that time he flew the Boeing 727, MD-11 and the Airbus 300.

Dave has been associated with the Bethel Ministerial Association his entire life. He holds ministerial credentials with them and has been both a lay-preacher and pastor for his entire adult life. He credits the majority of his training in the Christian faith, as well as his abilities to preach, teach and speak to the eighteen years of sitting under his father's ministry.

Dave's writing skills started at the Air Force Academy and continued through training in the Air Force, primarily in technical writing and teaching. He has continued that training, now to include this experiment in writing discourses and lessons on memorizing and applying well known Scriptures from the Bible. He believes the Lord has called him to challenge fellow Christians to memorize 100 Bible Verses through this book.

Dave's interests include private flying, exercise, participation in local politics and serving regularly with the BMA and at his home church, Graceland Church of New Albany, Indiana. He sadly lost his wife of nearly 49 years, Cheryl, to complications from a stroke and dearly misses "the love of his life", second only to his love for Jesus. He dedicates this book to her memory and the memories of decades of living lives dedicated together to the Lord, living around the world and raising four great children.