

FOREWORD FOR THE URBAN DEVOTIONAL BIBLE

The Bible never changes. The Word of God never moves. People in the military have traditionally been trained to find the bright North Star because it is the one star in the sky that doesn't move. All the other stars seem to revolve around it. Someone lost in the northern hemisphere can look toward the North Star and find his or her way home. The Bible is like the North Star; no matter where you are or find yourself in life, it will remain steady. When you are lost in this world you can look up to the Word of God and realize that it ain't moving! It is the brightest light shining, and you can depend on it. The Word of God will help you navigate your way home. The Bible was written by 40 different authors over 1,500 years and has never flinched in its one message: God loves us and desires to have a relationship with his people through his Son Jesus Christ! You just will not get that comfort and stability from the latest gossip magazines displayed on a store shelf.

Even though the Bible never changes, the world around us does. Each generation needs to read and relate to the Bible for the here and now, to grasp its meaning in a way that brings understanding and power to live it out. The *ESV Urban Devotional Bible* brings you the best of two worlds: The English Standard Version combined with practical insights of urban leaders from around the country—real people with real truth. From these leaders you're getting real talk about the truth that is biblically accurate and culturally sensitive.

Use these devotionals to go deeper in the Word. Look at them not as an end-all but as a start-all! The late William Sloane Coffin, pastor in New York City and civil rights activist, stated "We have learned to soar through the air like birds, to swim through the seas like fish, to soar through space like comets. Now it is high time we learned to walk the earth as the children of our God." It is our prayer that you will prioritize time with God in his Word in this very unique *ESV Urban Devotional Bible* and walk as a powerful child of God!

Pastor Phil Jackson, The House Covenant Church, Chicago

ACTS

Introduction

Acts picks up where Luke's Gospel leaves off, recording the early progress of the gospel as Jesus' disciples took it from Jerusalem throughout Judea, Samaria, and the rest of the Mediterranean world. The story begins with Christ's ascension and the events of Pentecost. As Gentiles begin responding to the gospel, the focus shifts to Paul and his missionary journeys. Acts forms a bridge between the four Gospels and the rest of the New Testament, showing how the apostles carried on Christ's work and providing a historical background for Romans through Revelation. The Acts of the Apostles is the second of two New Testament books written by Luke. Like his Gospel, Acts was a letter to Luke's friend Theophilus, written sometime in A.D. 62–64.

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

1 In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ²until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

⁴And while staying¹ with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with² the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

The Ascension

⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." ⁹And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Matthias Chosen to Replace Judas

¹²Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. ¹³And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of

Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.³

¹⁵In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, ¹⁶"Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry." ¹⁸(Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong⁴ he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. ¹⁹And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) ²⁰"For it is written in the Book of Psalms,

"^a"May his camp become desolate,
and let there be no one to dwell in it;

and

"^b"Let another take his office."

²¹So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²²beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection." ²³And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." ²⁶And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

¹Or eating ²Or in ³Or brothers and sisters. The plural Greek word *adelphoi* (translated "brothers") refers to siblings in a family. In New Testament usage, depending on the context, *adelphoi* may refer either to men or to both men and women who are siblings (brothers and sisters) in God's family, the church; also verse 15 ⁴Or swelling up ^aPs. 69:25 ^bPs. 109:8

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

2 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. **3** And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. **4** And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested¹ on each one of them. **5** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

6 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. **7** And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. **8** And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" **9** And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? **10** Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **11** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, **12** both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." **13** And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" **14** But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

Peter's Sermon at Pentecost

15 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. **16** For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day." **17** But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

17a "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; **18** even on my male servants³ and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. **19** And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; **20** the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. **21** And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— **23** this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. **24** God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. **25** For David says concerning him,

26 "I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. **27** For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. **28** You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence."

29 "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. **30** Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, **31** he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. **32** This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. **33** Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. **34** For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

35 "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."

36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" **38** And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **39** For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." **40** And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." **41** So those who received his word were baptized,

¹Or And tongues as of fire appeared to them, distributed among them, and rested ²That is, 9 A.M. ³Greek bondservants; twice in this verse ⁴Joel 2:28-32 ⁵Ps. 16:8-11 ⁶Ps. 110:1



We hear of “soul food,” “soul music,” and “soul brothers,” but what about having a “soul faith” or a faithful soul? Our devotionals in this section start with an ancient command to choose “life and good” over “death and evil.” Other selections draw out aspects of what it means to walk out our faith, how we can share it with others, and how we can grow in Christ, as we are “rooted and built up in him” (Col. 2:7).

See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

CHOOSE TO LIVE


Can you imagine having to take a swimming exam, but you can't swim very well? Your imagination runs wild: What if I drown? What if no one hears me scream? Out of fear, you try to back out, but the fitness instructor indeed calls your name. What do you do? Should you proceed with the swimming exam or walk away? By taking the exam, you can earn a passing grade, but if you decline, you will fail. The instructor has given you direction. He wants you to jump in and try, but the choice is yours. Do you rely on your emotions or trust the leading of your instructor? Either way, you will have to make a decision.

Daily we face situations that require us to make decisions. It is common to base our decisions on emotions—what we feel, who we like, what we want—but as believers we must learn to make God's Word the final authority in our lives.

In Deuteronomy 30 Moses presented the people of Israel with a choice: "life and good" or "death and evil." He wanted them to make an informed decision based on God's Word. By choosing life, they agree to love God, obey him, and commit to his will.

The benefit of their decision would be a prospering life and favor for their descendants. But if they choose





death, the people of Israel and their descendants would experience disaster and curses. The people had a choice in the matter. They were not forced to accept God's will, but they would have to deal with the consequences of the wrong decision.

Are you faced with a decision that can potentially change your life? If so, pause for a moment. Examine the situation based on God's Word. The Bible has wisdom for all of life. By knowing what Scripture has to say,

"God calls for total obedience to his commands"

you can evaluate the pros and cons, the positives and negatives, the potential risks and consequences of your choices. Moses wanted the people of Israel to realize that their decisions—no matter what—would have a specific outcome. So they needed to make every effort to align their choices with God's Word. We must do the same. God calls for total obedience to his commands, yet the final decision is ours. Though we decide whether to follow him or to reject him, he still desires that we choose life—and choose it today.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- We have to make choices every day. Some are bigger than others, but they will all influence our lives in some way. The biggest decision you will ever make is whether or not you will follow God and serve him. Have you made this decision? If you're ready to do so, see the clear gospel presentation on pages 897-900.
- If you have made the big decision to obey God, you will have many smaller opportunities to live out this obedience. How does your day-to-day life reflect your decision to follow Christ?
- What does "choose life and good" mean for you today?

64 Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains might quake at your presence—
2¹ as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your adversaries,
and that the nations might tremble at your presence!
3 When you did awesome things that we did not look for,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.
4 From of old no one has heard
or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides you,
who acts for those who wait for him.
5 You meet him who joyfully works righteousness,
those who remember you in your ways.
Behold, you were angry, and we sinned;
in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?²
6 We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
7 There is no one who calls upon your name,
who rouses himself to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have made us melt in³ the hand of our iniquities.
8 But now, O LORD, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
9 Be not so terribly angry, O LORD,
and remember not iniquity forever.
Behold, please look, we are all your people.
10 Your holy cities have become a wilderness;
Zion has become a wilderness,
Jerusalem a desolation.
11 Our holy and beautiful⁴ house,
where our fathers praised you,
has been burned by fire,
and all our pleasant places have become ruins.
12 Will you restrain yourself at these things,
O LORD?
Will you keep silent, and afflict us so terribly?

Judgment and Salvation

65 I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me;
I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me.

I said, "Here am I, here am I."
to a nation that was not called by⁵ my name.
2 I spread out my hands all the day
to a rebellious people,
who walk in a way that is not good,
following their own devices;
3 a people who provoke me
to my face continually,
sacrificing in gardens
and making offerings on bricks;
4 who sit in tombs,
and spend the night in secret places;
who eat pig's flesh,
and broth of tainted meat is in their vessels;
5 who say, "Keep to yourself,
do not come near me, for I am too holy for you."
These are a smoke in my nostrils,
a fire that burns all the day.
6 Behold, it is written before me:
"I will not keep silent, but I will repay;
I will indeed repay into their bosom
7 both your iniquities and your fathers' iniquities together,
says the LORD;
because they made offerings on the mountains
and insulted me on the hills,
I will measure into their bosom
payment for their former deeds."⁶
8 Thus says the LORD:
"As the new wine is found in the cluster,
and they say, 'Do not destroy it,
for there is a blessing in it,'
so I will do for my servants' sake,
and not destroy them all.
9 I will bring forth offspring from Jacob,
and from Judah possessors of my mountains;
my chosen shall possess it,
and my servants shall dwell there.
10 Sharon shall become a pasture for flocks,
and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down,
for my people who have sought me.
11 But you who forsake the LORD,
who forget my holy mountain,
who set a table for Fortune
and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny,
12 I will destine you to the sword,
and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter,
because, when I called, you did not answer;
when I spoke, you did not listen,
but you did what was evil in my eyes
and chose what I did not delight in."
13 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD:
"Behold, my servants shall eat,

¹Ch 64:1 in Hebrew ²Or in your ways is continuance, that we might be saved ³Masoretic Text; Septuagint, Syriac, Targum have delivered us into ⁴Or holy and glorious ⁵Or that did not call upon ⁶Or I will first measure their payment into their bosom

but you shall be hungry;
 behold, my servants shall drink,
 but you shall be thirsty;
 behold, my servants shall rejoice,
 but you shall be put to shame;

- 14 behold, my servants shall sing for gladness of heart,
 but you shall cry out for pain of heart
 and shall wail for breaking of spirit.
- 15 You shall leave your name to my chosen for a curse,
 and the LORD GOD will put you to death,
 but his servants he will call by another name.
- 16 So that he who blesses himself in the land
 shall bless himself by the God of truth,
 and he who takes an oath in the land
 shall swear by the God of truth;
 because the former troubles are forgotten
 and are hidden from my eyes.

New Heavens and a New Earth

- 17 "For behold, I create new heavens
 and a new earth,
 and the former things shall not be remembered
 or come into mind.
- 18 But be glad and rejoice forever
 in that which I create;
 for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy,
 and her people to be a gladness.
- 19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem
 and be glad in my people;
 no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping
 and the cry of distress.
- 20 No more shall there be in it
 an infant who lives but a few days,
 or an old man who does not fill out his days,
 for the young man shall die a hundred years old,
 and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.
- 21 They shall build houses and inhabit them;
 they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
- 22 They shall not build and another inhabit;
 they shall not plant and another eat;
 for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
 and my chosen shall long enjoy¹ the work
 of their hands.
- 23 They shall not labor in vain
 or bear children for calamity;²
 for they shall be the offspring of the blessed
 of the LORD,
 and their descendants with them.
- 24 Before they call I will answer;
 while they are yet speaking I will hear.
- 25 The wolf and the lamb shall graze together;
 the lion shall eat straw like the ox,
 and dust shall be the serpent's food.

They shall not hurt or destroy
 in all my holy mountain,"

says the LORD.

The Humble and Contrite in Spirit

- 66 Thus says the LORD:
 "Heaven is my throne,
 and the earth is my footstool;
 what is the house that you would build for me,
 and what is the place of my rest?"
- 2 All these things my hand has made,
 and so all these things came to be,
 declares the LORD.
- But this is the one to whom I will look:
 he who is humble and contrite in spirit
 and trembles at my word.
- 3 "He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man;
 he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck;
 he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood;
 he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol.
- These have chosen their own ways,
 and their soul delights in their abominations;
- 4 I also will choose harsh treatment for them
 and bring their fears upon them,
 because when I called, no one answered,
 when I spoke, they did not listen;
 but they did what was evil in my eyes
 and chose that in which I did not delight."

- 5 Hear the word of the LORD,
 you who tremble at his word:
 "Your brothers who hate you
 and cast you out for my name's sake
 have said, 'Let the LORD be glorified,
 that we may see your joy';
 but it is they who shall be put to shame.
- 6 "The sound of an uproar from the city!
 A sound from the temple!
 The sound of the LORD,
 rendering recompense to his enemies!

Rejoice with Jerusalem

- 7 "Because she was in labor
 she gave birth;
 before her pain came upon her
 she delivered a son.
- 8 Who has heard such a thing?
 Who has seen such things?
 Shall a land be born in one day?
 Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment?
 For as soon as Zion was in labor
 she brought forth her children.

¹Hebrew shall wear out ²Or for sudden terror

- 9 Shall I bring to the point of birth and not cause to bring forth?
says the LORD:
"shall I, who cause to bring forth, shut the womb?"
says your God.
- 10 "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her;
- 11 that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious abundance."⁷
- 12 For thus says the LORD:
"Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees.
- 13 As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.
- 14 You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bones shall flourish like the grass; and the hand of the LORD shall be known to his servants, and he shall show his indignation against his enemies.

Final Judgment and Glory of the Lord

- 15 "For behold, the LORD will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire.
- 16 For by fire will the LORD enter into judgment, and by his sword, with all flesh; and those slain by the LORD shall be many.

¹⁷"Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following one in the midst, eating pig's flesh and the abomination and mice, shall come to an end together, declares the LORD.

¹⁸"For I know² their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming³ to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory, ¹⁹and I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands far away, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the nations. ²⁰And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. ²¹And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD.

- 22 "For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain.
- 23 From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD.

²⁴"And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."

¹Or breast ²Septuagint, Syriac; Hebrew lacks know ³Hebrew and it is coming

A woman with long dark hair is shown from the chest up, looking down at an open book she is holding. She is wearing a brown top. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage and a brick wall. The image is overlaid with decorative black flourishes at the bottom and a vertical gold bar on the right side. The word 'MIND' is written vertically in large, gold, serif capital letters along the right edge.

MIND

What was I thinking? It's a question we sometimes ask in regret. As we walk in wisdom, we can learn to ask the question in present tense: *What am I thinking?* Scripture asks us to focus our minds on the **good purposes of God**, the truths we find in his Word, the light he shines on our path.

Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan.

These are the generations of Jacob.

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

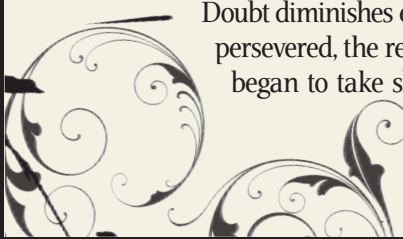
Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.


DON'T LOSE YOUR VISION

As a teen, Joseph, son of Jacob, had a vision of prominence and power. His brothers rejected Joseph's vision and turned on him (see Gen. 37:1–22). We can see that "vision" and fulfillment of the vision never occur simultaneously. In the "between" time, struggle, suffering, and doubt may occur.

Can you imagine the emotional trauma of being sold by your brothers and dragged away to a foreign country? Later Joseph was falsely accused of sexual assault. He was unjustly imprisoned and forgotten by friends who had promised to help him. Yet more than once Genesis says that the Lord was with Joseph. His experiences reveal the reality that God's presence in our lives does not exempt us from struggles or suffering.

Joseph never used the drama in his life as an excuse to give up or to doubt God and the vision he had implanted in Joseph's heart. Doubt diminishes enthusiasm and destroys hope. But as Joseph persevered, the reality of his vision of prominence and power began to take shape. One day Joseph was called in by the pharaoh or king, who ultimately said, "You shall be over my house, and all





my people shall order themselves as you command” (Gen. 41:40).

Delay is not denial. Adversity is not a death sentence. God’s plan for you will be accomplished. Trust him through the process—to fulfillment. If the vision is of God, don’t give up hope! The Bible says, “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him”

“God’s plan for you will be accomplished”

(1 John 5:14–15). In spite of the misdeeds of Joseph’s brothers and the miscarriages of justice in Egypt, the hand of God was upon Joseph and God’s plan for Joseph became a reality.

Don’t lose your vision! The obstacles along the way are intended by God to develop perseverance, character, and hope. In the time between conception and birth of the vision, give yourself over to the molding hand of God to prepare you to move from visionary to possessor of the vision.

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- Waiting can be extremely trying, but it is a time that can form us into the people God wants us to be. Abraham waited 100 years to become a father. Moses waited 40 years to become a leader, and David waited for years to become king of Israel. Why might God want us to wait?
- “Delay is not denial.” What does this mean for you in the context of the life-dreams God has planted in your heart?
- Think about the times when you’ve had to wait for an answer to prayer. Try to name positive benefits (character traits) that you received or lessons that you learned because of the difficult waiting period (See Heb. 12:3–11).

- as' a son of man does with his neighbor.
 22 For when a few years have come
 I shall go the way from which I shall not
 return.

Job Continues: Where Then Is My Hope?

- 17 "My spirit is broken; my days are extinct;
 the graveyard is ready for me.
 2 Surely there are mockers about me,
 and my eye dwells on their provocation.
 3 "Lay down a pledge for me with yourself;
 who is there who will put up security for
 me?
 4 Since you have closed their hearts to under-
 standing,
 therefore you will not let them triumph.
 5 He who informs against his friends to get a
 share of their property—
 the eyes of his children will fail.
 6 "He has made me a byword of the peoples,
 and I am one before whom men spit.
 7 My eye has grown dim from vexation,
 and all my members are like a shadow.
 8 The upright are appalled at this,
 and the innocent stirs himself up against
 the godless.
 9 Yet the righteous holds to his way,
 and he who has clean hands grows stron-
 ger and stronger.
 10 But you, come on again, all of you,
 and I shall not find a wise man among you.
 11 My days are past; my plans are broken off,
 the desires of my heart.
 12 They make night into day:
 'The light,' they say, 'is near to the darkness.'²
 13 If I hope for Sheol as my house,
 if I make my bed in darkness,
 14 if I say to the pit, 'You are my father,'
 and to the worm, 'My mother,' or 'My sister,'
 15 where then is my hope?
 Who will see my hope?
 16 Will it go down to the bars of Sheol?
 Shall we descend together into the dust?"

Bildad Speaks: God Punishes the Wicked

- 18 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and
 said:
 2 "How long will you hunt for words?
 Consider, and then we will speak.
 3 Why are we counted as cattle?
 Why are we stupid in your sight?
 4 You who tear yourself in your anger,
 shall the earth be forsaken for you,
 or the rock be removed out of its place?
 5 "Indeed, the light of the wicked is put out,
 and the flame of his fire does not shine.
 6 The light is dark in his tent,
 and his lamp above him is put out.

- 7 His strong steps are shortened,
 and his own schemes throw him down.
 8 For he is cast into a net by his own feet,
 and he walks on its mesh.
 9 A trap seizes him by the heel;
 a snare lays hold of him.
 10 A rope is hidden for him in the ground,
 a trap for him in the path.
 11 Terrors frighten him on every side,
 and chase him at his heels.
 12 His strength is famished,
 and calamity is ready for his stumbling.
 13 It consumes the parts of his skin;
 the firstborn of death consumes his limbs.
 14 He is torn from the tent in which he trusted
 and is brought to the king of terrors.
 15 In his tent dwells that which is none of his;
 sulfur is scattered over his habitation.
 16 His roots dry up beneath,
 and his branches wither above.
 17 His memory perishes from the earth,
 and he has no name in the street.
 18 He is thrust from light into darkness,
 and driven out of the world.
 19 He has no posterity or progeny among his
 people,
 and no survivor where he used to live.
 20 They of the west are appalled at his day,
 and horror seizes them of the east.
 21 Surely such are the dwellings of the unright-
 eous,
 such is the place of him who knows not
 God."

Job Replies: My Redeemer Lives

- 19 Then Job answered and said:
 2 "How long will you torment me
 and break me in pieces with words?
 3 These ten times you have cast reproach upon
 me;
 are you not ashamed to wrong me?
 4 And even if it be true that I have erred,
 my error remains with myself.
 5 If indeed you magnify yourselves against me
 and make my disgrace an argument against
 me,
 6 know then that God has put me in the wrong
 and closed his net about me.
 7 Behold, I cry out, 'Violence!' but I am not
 answered;
 I call for help, but there is no justice.
 8 He has walled up my way, so that I cannot
 pass,
 and he has set darkness upon my paths.
 9 He has stripped from me my glory
 and taken the crown from my head.
 10 He breaks me down on every side, and I am
 gone,
 and my hope has he pulled up like a tree.
 11 He has kindled his wrath against me

¹Hebrew and ²The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain

- and counts me as his adversary.
 12 His troops come on together;
 they have cast up their siege ramp¹
 against me
 and encamp around my tent.
- 13 "He has put my brothers far from me,
 and those who knew me are wholly
 estranged from me.
 14 My relatives have failed me,
 my close friends have forgotten me.
 15 The guests in my house and my maidservants
 count me as a stranger;
 I have become a foreigner in their eyes.
 16 I call to my servant, but he gives me no
 answer;
 I must plead with him with my mouth for
 mercy.
 17 My breath is strange to my wife,
 and I am a stench to the children of my
 own mother.
 18 Even young children despise me;
 when I rise they talk against me.
 19 All my intimate friends abhor me,
 and those whom I loved have turned
 against me.
 20 My bones stick to my skin and to my flesh,
 and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth.
 21 Have mercy on me, have mercy on me, O you
 my friends,
 for the hand of God has touched me!
 22 Why do you, like God, pursue me?
 Why are you not satisfied with my flesh?"
- 23 "Oh that my words were written!
 Oh that they were inscribed in a book!
 24 Oh that with an iron pen and lead
 they were engraved in the rock forever!
 25 For I know that my Redeemer lives,
 and at the last he will stand upon the
 earth.²
 26 And after my skin has been thus destroyed,
 yet in³ my flesh I shall see God,
 27 whom I shall see for myself,
 and my eyes shall behold, and not another.
 My heart faints within me!
 28 If you say, 'How we will pursue him!'
 and, 'The root of the matter is found in him,'
 29 be afraid of the sword,
 for wrath brings the punishment of the
 sword,
 that you may know there is a judgment."
- Zophar Speaks: The Wicked Will Suffer**
 20 Then Zophar the Naamathite answered
 and said:
 2 "Therefore my thoughts answer me,
 because of my haste within me.
 3 I hear censure that insults me,
 and out of my understanding a spirit
 answers me.
- 4 Do you not know this from of old,
 since man was placed on earth,
 5 that the exulting of the wicked is short,
 and the joy of the godless but for a
 moment?
 6 Though his height mount up to the heavens,
 and his head reach to the clouds,
 7 he will perish forever like his own dung;
 those who have seen him will say, 'Where is
 he?'
 8 He will fly away like a dream and not be
 found;
 he will be chased away like a vision of the
 night.
 9 The eye that saw him will see him no more,
 nor will his place any more behold him.
 10 His children will seek the favor of the poor,
 and his hands will give back his wealth.
 11 His bones are full of his youthful vigor,
 but it will lie down with him in the dust.
- 12 "Though evil is sweet in his mouth,
 though he hides it under his tongue,
 13 though he is loath to let it go
 and holds it in his mouth,
 14 yet his food is turned in his stomach;
 it is the venom of cobras within him.
 15 He swallows down riches and vomits them
 up again;
 God casts them out of his belly.
 16 He will suck the poison of cobras;
 the tongue of a viper will kill him.
 17 He will not look upon the rivers,
 the streams flowing with honey and curds.
 18 He will give back the fruit of his toil
 and will not swallow it down;
 from the profit of his trading
 he will get no enjoyment.
 19 For he has crushed and abandoned the poor;
 he has seized a house that he did not build.
- 20 "Because he knew no contentment in his belly,
 he will not let anything in which he delights
 escape him.
 21 There was nothing left after he had eaten;
 therefore his prosperity will not endure.
 22 In the fullness of his sufficiency he will be in
 distress;
 the hand of everyone in misery will come
 against him.
 23 To fill his belly to the full,
 God⁴ will send his burning anger against
 him
 and rain it upon him into his body.
 24 He will flee from an iron weapon;
 a bronze arrow will strike him through.
 25 It is drawn forth and comes out of his body;
 the glittering point comes out of his gall-
 bladder;
 terrors come upon him.
 26 Utter darkness is laid up for his treasures;
 a fire not fanned will devour him;

¹Hebrew their way ²Hebrew dust ³Or without ⁴Hebrew he

what is left in his tent will be consumed.
 27 The heavens will reveal his iniquity,
 and the earth will rise up against him.
 28 The possessions of his house will be carried
 away,
 dragged off in the day of God's¹ wrath.
 29 This is the wicked man's portion from God,
 the heritage decreed for him by God."

Job Replies: The Wicked Do Prosper

21 Then Job answered and said:
 2 "Keep listening to my words,
 and let this be your comfort.
 3 Bear with me, and I will speak,
 and after I have spoken, mock on.
 4 As for me, is my complaint against man?
 Why should I not be impatient?
 5 Look at me and be appalled,
 and lay your hand over your mouth.
 6 When I remember, I am dismayed,
 and shuddering seizes my flesh.
 7 Why do the wicked live,
 reach old age, and grow mighty in power?
 8 Their offspring are established in their presence,
 and their descendants before their eyes.
 9 Their houses are safe from fear,
 and no rod of God is upon them.
 10 Their bull breeds without fail;
 their cow calves and does not miscarry.
 11 They send out their little boys like a flock,
 and their children dance.
 12 They sing to the tambourine and the lyre
 and rejoice to the sound of the pipe.
 13 They spend their days in prosperity,
 and in peace they go down to Sheol.
 14 They say to God, 'Depart from us!
 We do not desire the knowledge of your
 ways.
 15 What is the Almighty, that we should serve
 him?
 And what profit do we get if we pray to
 him?'
 16 Behold, is not their prosperity in their hand?
 The counsel of the wicked is far from me.
 17 "How often is it that the lamp of the wicked is
 put out?
 That their calamity comes upon them?
 That God² distributes pains in his anger?
 18 That they are like straw before the wind,
 and like chaff that the storm carries away?
 19 You say, 'God stores up their iniquity for their
 children.'
 Let him pay it out to them, that they may
 know it.
 20 Let their own eyes see their destruction,
 and let them drink of the wrath of the
 Almighty.

21 For what do they care for their houses after
 them,
 when the number of their months is cut
 off?
 22 Will any teach God knowledge,
 seeing that he judges those who are on
 high?
 23 One dies in his full vigor,
 being wholly at ease and secure,
 24 his pails³ full of milk
 and the marrow of his bones moist.
 25 Another dies in bitterness of soul,
 never having tasted of prosperity.
 26 They lie down alike in the dust,
 and the worms cover them.
 27 "Behold, I know your thoughts
 and your schemes to wrong me.
 28 For you say, 'Where is the house of the
 prince?
 Where is the tent in which the wicked
 lived?'
 29 Have you not asked those who travel the
 roads,
 and do you not accept their testimony
 that the evil man is spared in the day of
 calamity,
 that he is rescued in the day of wrath?
 31 Who declares his way to his face,
 and who repays him for what he has done?
 32 When he is carried to the grave,
 watch is kept over his tomb.
 33 The clods of the valley are sweet to him;
 all mankind follows after him,
 and those who go before him are innumera-
 ble.
 34 How then will you comfort me with empty
 nothings?
 There is nothing left of your answers but
 falsehood."

Eliphaz Speaks: Job's Wickedness Is Great

22 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and
 said:
 2 "Can a man be profitable to God?
 Surely he who is wise is profitable to him-
 self.
 3 Is it any pleasure to the Almighty if you are in
 the right,
 or is it gain to him if you make your ways
 blameless?
 4 Is it for your fear of him that he reproves you
 and enters into judgment with you?
 5 Is not your evil abundant?
 There is no end to your iniquities.
 6 For you have exacted pledges of your brothers
 for nothing
 and stripped the naked of their clothing,
 7 You have given no water to the weary to
 drink,

¹Hebrew *his* ²Hebrew *he* ³The meaning of the Hebrew word is uncertain



What does it mean to love God “with all your heart”? It’s an emotional attachment and commitment—but so much more. It draws us to obedience, to repentance, to prayer, to contentment, and to celebration in God’s presence. As we discover God’s love for us, we learn what it means to love him—heart to heart.

Genesis 4:8–9

Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?”

Leviticus 19:16–18

You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD. You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?

People still ask the ancient question: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” God is looking for sons and daughters who will step up and say, “Yes, I am.”

As a theme of the entire New Testament, “love” should be the basis of all of our actions. A Christian without love is unreasonable. Consider 1 Thessalonians 4:9: “Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to

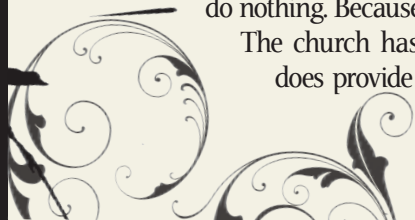
“A Christian without love is unreasonable”


write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another.” Those of us who are Christians should well understand

that love identifies us as Christ’s followers. We are to show his love to others. If we belong to Jesus, love should be evident in the way we live.

Leviticus 19:18 clearly tells us to love our neighbor (people) as we love ourselves. Leviticus 19 also tells us not to oppress or rob our neighbor; not to judge our neighbor; not to hate our neighbor. The Lord God himself gave us these commands. Do we live them out? As a church we need to be more concerned about our brothers and sisters. We are guilty concerning our brothers and sisters, in that we see the anguish of their souls and do nothing. Because we do nothing, distress surrounds us.

The church has never been perfect, but the book of Acts does provide a good model of a caring community that gets involved in meeting needs: “And all





who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:44–45). Just imagine what our communities could look like if our churches looked like that!

When we have a relationship with Christ and recognize that it is not about us, but all about Christ and his will for our lives, then we are pleasing God. The responsibility is ours to be concerned about the spiritual condition of those living in our city. Jesus gave Christians the Great Commission, to go into the entire world, to instruct by precept, example, or experience, all things that he had commanded (Matt. 28:19–20). Are we carrying through on his command? If so, when someone asks, “Are you your brother’s keeper?” I trust that your answer is a resounding, “Yes, I am.”

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- What does it mean for you to “love your neighbor as yourself”?
- In a sentence, summarize how the Spirit, through this devotional, calls you to respond to someone in your neighborhood or faith community.
- The entire book of 1 John centers on love for others. John makes it very clear that if we don’t love others, we cannot really love God. What does your love for others reflect about your relationship with God?

would not allow Israel to pass through his territory. He gathered all his people together and went out against Israel to the wilderness and came to Jahaz and fought against Israel. ²⁴And Israel defeated him with the edge of the sword and took possession of his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, as far as to the Ammonites, for the border of the Ammonites was strong. ²⁵And Israel took all these cities, and Israel settled in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon, and in all its villages. ²⁶For Heshbon was the city of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab and taken all his land out of his hand, as far as the Arnon. ²⁷Therefore the ballad singers say,

- “Come to Heshbon, let it be built;
let the city of Sihon be established.
²⁸ For fire came out from Heshbon,
flame from the city of Sihon.
It devoured Ar of Moab,
and swallowed¹ the heights of the Arnon.
²⁹ Woe to you, O Moab!
You are undone, O people of Chemosh!
He has made his sons fugitives,
and his daughters captives,
to an Amorite king, Sihon.
³⁰ So we overthrew them;
Heshbon, as far as Dibon, perished;
and we laid waste as far as Nophah;
fire spread as far as Medeba.”²

King Og Defeated

³¹Thus Israel lived in the land of the Amorites. ³²And Moses sent to spy out Jazer, and they captured its villages and dispossessed the Amorites who were there. ³³Then they turned and went up by the way to Bashan. And Og the king of Bashan came out against them, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei. ³⁴But the LORD said to Moses, “Do not fear him, for I have given him into your hand, and all his people, and his land. And you shall do to him as you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who lived at Heshbon.” ³⁵So they defeated him and his sons and all his people, until he had no survivor left. And they possessed his land.

Balak Summons Balaam

22 Then the people of Israel set out and camped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan at Jericho. ²And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. ³And Moab was in great dread of the people, because they were many. Moab was overcome with fear of the people of Israel. ⁴And Moab said to the elders of Midian, “This horde will now lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field.” So Balak the son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, ⁵sent mes-

sengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River in the land of the people of Amaw,³ to call him, saying, “Behold, a people has come out of Egypt. They cover the face of the earth, and they are dwelling opposite me. ⁶Come now, curse this people for me, since they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.”

⁷So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the fees for divination in their hand. And they came to Balaam and gave him Balak’s message. ⁸And he said to them, “Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you, as the LORD speaks to me.” So the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam. ⁹And God came to Balaam and said, “Who are these men with you?” ¹⁰And Balaam said to God, “Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me, saying, ¹¹‘Behold, a people has come out of Egypt, and it covers the face of the earth. Now come, curse them for me. Perhaps I shall be able to fight against them and drive them out.’” ¹²God said to Balaam, “You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed.” ¹³So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, “Go to your own land, for the LORD has refused to let me go with you.” ¹⁴So the princes of Moab rose and went to Balak and said, “Balaam refuses to come with us.”

¹⁵Once again Balak sent princes, more in number and more honorable than these. ¹⁶And they came to Balaam and said to him, “Thus says Balak the son of Zippor: ‘Let nothing hinder you from coming to me, ¹⁷for I will surely do you great honor, and whatever you say to me I will do. Come, curse this people for me.’” ¹⁸But Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, “Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the command of the LORD my God to do less or more. ¹⁹So you, too, please stay here tonight, that I may know what more the LORD will say to me.” ²⁰And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, “If the men have come to call you, rise, go with them; but only do what I tell you.” ²¹So Balaam rose in the morning and saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab.

Balaam’s Donkey and the Angel

²²But God’s anger was kindled because he went, and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the way as his adversary. Now he was riding on the donkey, and his two servants were with him. ²³And the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road, with a drawn sword in his hand. And the donkey turned aside out of the road and went into the field. And Balaam struck the donkey, to turn her into the road. ²⁴Then the

¹Septuagint; Hebrew the lords of ²Compare Samaritan and Septuagint; Hebrew and we laid waste as far as Nophah, which is as far as Medeba ³Or his kindred

angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on either side.²⁵ And when the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she pushed against the wall and pressed Balaam's foot against the wall. So he struck her again.²⁶ Then the angel of the LORD went ahead and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right or to the left.²⁷ When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam. And Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the donkey with his staff.²⁸ Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"²⁹ And Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a fool of me. I wish I had a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you."³⁰ And the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Is it my habit to treat you this way?" And he said, "No."

³¹ Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand. And he bowed down and fell on his face.³² And the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to oppose you because your way is perverse¹ before me.³³ The donkey saw me and turned aside before me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, surely just now I would have killed you and let her live."³⁴ Then Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, "I have sinned, for I did not know that you stood in the road against me. Now therefore, if it is evil in your sight, I will turn back."³⁵ And the angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but speak only the word that I tell you." So Balaam went on with the princes of Balak.

³⁶ When Balak heard that Balaam had come, he went out to meet him at the city of Moab, on the border formed by the Arnon, at the extremity of the border.³⁷ And Balak said to Balaam, "Did I not send to you to call you? Why did you not come to me? Am I not able to honor you?"³⁸ Balaam said to Balak, "Behold, I have come to you! Have I now any power of my own to speak anything? The word that God puts in my mouth, that must I speak."³⁹ Then Balaam went with Balak, and they came to Kiriath-huzoth.⁴⁰ And Balak sacrificed oxen and sheep, and sent for Balaam and for the princes who were with him.

⁴¹ And in the morning Balak took Balaam and brought him up to Bamoth-baal, and from there he saw a fraction of the people.

Balaam's First Oracle

23 And Balaam said to Balak, "Build for me here seven altars, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams."² Balak did as

Balaam had said. And Balak and Balaam offered on each altar a bull and a ram.³ And Balaam said to Balak, "Stand beside your burnt offering, and I will go. Perhaps the LORD will come to meet me, and whatever he shows me I will tell you." And he went to a bare height,⁴ and God met Balaam. And Balaam said to him, "I have arranged the seven altars and I have offered on each altar a bull and a ram."⁵ And the LORD put a word in Balaam's mouth and said, "Return to Balak, and thus you shall speak."⁶ And he returned to him, and behold, he and all the princes of Moab were standing beside his burnt offering.⁷ And Balaam took up his discourse and said,

"From Aram Balak has brought me,
the king of Moab from the eastern mountains:

'Come, curse Jacob for me,
and come, denounce Israel!'

⁸ How can I curse whom God has not cursed?
How can I denounce whom the LORD has not denounced?

⁹ For from the top of the crags I see him,
from the hills I behold him;
behold, a people dwelling alone,
and not counting itself among the nations!

¹⁰ Who can count the dust of Jacob
or number the fourth part² of Israel?
Let me die the death of the upright,
and let my end be like his!

¹¹ And Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, and behold, you have done nothing but bless them."¹² And he answered and said, "Must I not take care to speak what the LORD puts in my mouth?"

Balaam's Second Oracle

¹³ And Balak said to him, "Please come with me to another place, from which you may see them. You shall see only a fraction of them and shall not see them all. Then curse them for me from there."¹⁴ And he took him to the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.¹⁵ Balaam said to Balak, "Stand here beside your burnt offering, while I meet the LORD over there."¹⁶ And the LORD met Balaam and put a word in his mouth and said, "Return to Balak, and thus shall you speak."¹⁷ And he came to him, and behold, he was standing beside his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab with him. And Balak said to him, "What has the LORD spoken?"¹⁸ And Balaam took up his discourse and said,

"Rise, Balak, and hear;
give ear to me, O son of Zippor:

¹⁹ God is not man, that he should lie,

¹Or reckless ²Or dust clouds

or a son of man, that he should change his mind.

Has he said, and will he not do it?

Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

²⁰ Behold, I received a command to bless: he has blessed, and I cannot revoke it.

²¹ He has not beheld misfortune in Jacob, nor has he seen trouble in Israel.

The LORD their God is with them, and the shout of a king is among them.

²² God brings them out of Egypt and is for them like the horns of the wild ox.

²³ For there is no enchantment against Jacob, no divination against Israel; now it shall be said of Jacob and Israel, 'What has God wrought!'

²⁴ Behold, a people! As a lioness it rises up and as a lion it lifts itself; it does not lie down until it has devoured the prey and drunk the blood of the slain."

²⁵And Balak said to Balaam, "Do not curse them at all, and do not bless them at all." ²⁶But Balaam answered Balak, "Did I not tell you, 'All that the LORD says, that I must do?'" ²⁷And Balak said to Balaam, "Come now, I will take you to another place. Perhaps it will please God that you may curse them for me from there." ²⁸So Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor, which overlooks the desert.¹ ²⁹And Balaam said to Balak, "Build for me here seven altars and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams." ³⁰And Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

Balaam's Third Oracle

24 When Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not go, as at other times, to look for omens, but set his face toward the wilderness. ²And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. And the Spirit of God came upon him, ³and he took up his discourse and said,

"The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor,
the oracle of the man whose eye is
opened,²

⁴ the oracle of him who hears the words of
God,

who sees the vision of the Almighty,
falling down with his eyes uncovered:

⁵ How lovely are your tents, O Jacob,
your encampments, O Israel!

⁶ Like palm groves³ that stretch afar,
like gardens beside a river,
like aloes that the LORD has planted,
like cedar trees beside the waters.

⁷ Water shall flow from his buckets,
and his seed shall be in many waters;

his king shall be higher than Agag,
and his kingdom shall be exalted.

⁸ God brings him out of Egypt
and is for him like the horns of the wild ox;
he shall eat up the nations, his adversaries,
and shall break their bones in pieces
and pierce them through with his arrows.
⁹ He crouched, he lay down like a lion
and like a lioness; who will rouse him up?
Blessed are those who bless you,
and cursed are those who curse you."

¹⁰And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he struck his hands together. And Balak said to Balaam, "I called you to curse my enemies, and behold, you have blessed them these three times. ¹¹Therefore now flee to your own place. I said, 'I will certainly honor you,' but the LORD has held you back from honor." ¹²And Balaam said to Balak, "Did I not tell your messengers whom you sent to me, ¹³If Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, I would not be able to go beyond the word of the LORD, to do either good or bad of my own will. What the LORD speaks, that will I speak?" ¹⁴And now, behold, I am going to my people. Come, I will let you know what this people will do to your people in the latter days."

Balaam's Final Oracle

¹⁵And he took up his discourse and said,

"The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor,
the oracle of the man whose eye is opened,
¹⁶ the oracle of him who hears the words of
God,
and knows the knowledge of the Most
High,

who sees the vision of the Almighty,
falling down with his eyes uncovered:

¹⁷ I see him, but not now;

I behold him, but not near:

a star shall come out of Jacob,

and a scepter shall rise out of Israel;

it shall crush the forehead⁴ of Moab
and break down all the sons of Sheth.

¹⁸ Edom shall be dispossessed;

Seir also, his enemies, shall be dispossessed.
Israel is doing valiantly.

¹⁹ And one from Jacob shall exercise dominion
and destroy the survivors of cities!"

²⁰Then he looked on Amalek and took up his
discourse and said,

"Amalek was the first among the nations,
but its end is utter destruction."

²¹And he looked on the Kenite, and took up his
discourse and said,

"Enduring is your dwelling place,
and your nest is set in the rock.

¹Or *Jeshimon* ²Or *closed, or perfect; also verse 15* ³Or *valleys* ⁴Hebrew *corners* [of the head]



BODY

“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your . . . strength” (Mark 12:30). Here we glimpse the importance of our honoring God through our physical actions. How do we treat our bodies? How do we control ourselves? How do we show respect to peers? How do we spend our time? With whom do we dine? In its stories and in its commands, the Word of God has a great deal to say about the flesh-and-blood aspects of life.

And as for your birth, on the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you, but you were cast out on the open field, for you were abhorred, on the day that you were born.

And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, "Live!" I said to you in your blood, "Live!" I made you flourish like a plant of the field. And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full adornment. Your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare.

ORPHAN TO QUEEN

Have you ever wondered why young girls love to watch Cinderella? There is something deep within our hearts that longs for a man to pursue us. We hope someone will look at us and call us "beautiful." We desire for a man to say, "I'm here forever; I can give you whatever you need." What is it about some dude seeing us in our "needy" state and rescuing us from our mess and taking us to a better place? Why is that so attractive?

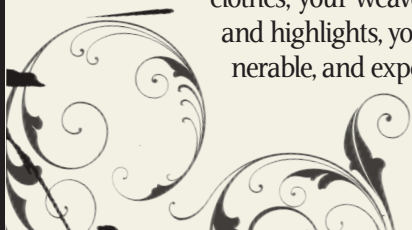
The Bible includes an analogy written about the nation of Israel in relation to God. Although it's a description of Israel, we can learn a lot from this story, which begins with a baby girl being thrown into an open field to die. Through Ezekiel God says that nothing was done to show her any care. She was going to die unless someone saved her. She was fresh out of the womb, struggling in her blood. She was found dirty, naked, and exposed.

Ladies, do you ever feel like that—like you're alone, bleeding inside? Behind your smile, your makeup, your sexy clothes, your weave

and highlights, your education, your job—are you fragile, vulnerable, and exposed? Are you personally hoping that someone will pass by and notice you?

Well, this girl described by Ezekiel is

"Are you personally hoping that someone will pass by and notice you?"



indeed noticed by someone. Let's see what happens after this Man notices her. This abandoned girl is noticed and rescued! She becomes a queen! Her rescuer doesn't just see her in her dying state and leave her there. Nor does he use her and leave her. He becomes her hero by giving her life. He is so powerful that his very words bring her to life! He cleanses her, clothes her with the finest and the best. He feeds her and gives her purpose. When she comes of age, he marries her, commits himself to her, and gives his word that he will never be unfaithful to her. He turns that poor, bloody, dying orphan, so fragile and unwanted, into a loved, accepted, stunning queen.



Somewhere deep in our hearts, don't we all long to be rescued? God gave us that desire, and there is a rescuer who has come for you. His name is Jesus! First off, the Lord has noticed you. Second, his Word and promises are true. God sent his Son to die for you, and in power he arose from the grave, resurrected. When you place your complete faith and trust in him, you go from death to life. His love will cleanse you. His Word will clothe you. He will provide for you. He longs to be one with you. He wants to call you "mine." Will you let him rescue you?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- What was your first emotional reaction when reading the Scripture passage? Have you ever felt similarly unwanted, ignored, discounted, abused, or hopeless? What does this passage say to you about hopeless situations?
- When we feel a need to be loved, we can try and fill it with all sorts of things. What (or who) have you used to try to fill your heart and make you feel worthwhile?
- No matter how broken you feel, God is powerful to rescue you and make you beautiful. What do you know about God that can begin to restore joy to your heart?