

# DEEPER

MONTHLY BIBLE READING

 **THE LINK**  
CHURCH















# DAY 184

Hosea 2-5 • Hebrews 2

## Scripture Reading

“I Will Betroth You to Me Forever”

**Hosea 2:13-20**

### TODAY’S FOCUS

I will betroth you to me forever... in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord. Hosea 2:19-20

Marriage ceremonies used to contain the vow “I pledge you my troth.” The words would be considered quaint today, but it was a way of making a solemn pledge of unflinching love and loyalty. In more modern English we would say, “I will be true to you.”

The Bible often describes God’s relationship with believers in terms of the loving relationship of marriage. In the Ten Commandments he says, “I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God” (Exodus 20:5). That may sound strange, because often people think of jealousy as bad. But jealousy is not the same as envy. Envy doesn’t like it when other people have good things, and jealousy is about protecting things that belong to you. Jealousy can sometimes be distorted, but basically it is a sign of a burning love that rejects betrayal. In marriage, the bridal couple promise “to forsake all others” and be true to each other.

This God we worship loves us so much that he was willing to give his life for us. His love is forever. It is not here today and gone tomorrow. In return, we must love God with our whole heart and soul and mind (see Matthew 22:37). It must be a total commitment. How could we run after other gods and leave the God who loves us so much?

## Prayer

*Lord, you sought us with the deepest love when we did not care for you! When you speak tenderly to us, it softens our hearts, that we may love you in return.*

*In Jesus’ name,*

*Amen.*

### NOTES

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# DAY 188

Micah 1-4 • Hebrews 6

## Scripture Reading

The Future of God's People

**Micah 4:1-5**

### TODAY'S FOCUS

We will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever. Micah 4:5

Micah describes the coming kingdom of God as a time of peace and blessing. In one sense, God's kingdom is already here, but in another sense, the full glory of the kingdom still needs to be revealed. We don't know when that will be; only the Father knows (Mark 13:32). In the meantime, people of all nations will flock to the Lord to learn His ways, so that they too can walk in his paths.

God will eventually judge all the nations and settle every dispute. And people who were at war "will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks." God's people will be able to enjoy the pleasant shade of their vines and fruit trees.

What a wonderful future! I am looking forward to that day, as I'm sure you are too.

Already today we can begin to enjoy this divine kingdom of shalom (peace and flourishing for all). Already we can experience fellowship with the King and all who are fellow citizens of his kingdom (Ephesians 2:19). Already today God invites us to change our behavior so that we can better experience his peace and reconciliation.

Our thoughts and actions are to be shaped by God's coming kingdom! Walking with God, we can begin to enjoy the future today.

## Prayer

*Lord, we pray that your kingdom will come soon, so that all your people may enjoy full life in your presence. But help us now to walk faithfully with you and give us a further glimpse of that day.*

*In Jesus' name,*

*Amen.*

**NOTES**











# DAY 192

Isaiah 15-18 • Hebrews 10

## Scripture Reading

Judgment Against Moab and Damascus

**Isaiah 16:6-17:7**

### TODAY'S FOCUS

In that day men will look to their Maker and turn their eyes to the Holy One of Israel. Isaiah 17:7

Why is there such a litany of judgment in the book of Isaiah? Does God find delight in punishing nations that get out of line? In this passage, two additional nations are called up for divine judgment. The Moabites were descendants of Moab, the son born to Lot's oldest daughter as a result of incest with her father (Genesis 19:36-37). Moab's descendants had a long history as enemies of God and his people. They often succeeded in luring Israel into their idol worship and immorality.

Damascus, the capital of Syria (Aram), was a divisive force in the ancient world, known for its ruthlessness and treachery. In Isaiah's time it was one of the most fortified and proud cities of the world. Many Israelites quickly adopted the gods of Damascus.

Both Moab and Damascus would receive their punishment; and with what result? "In that day," writes Isaiah, people "will look to their Maker and turn their eyes to the Holy One of Israel."

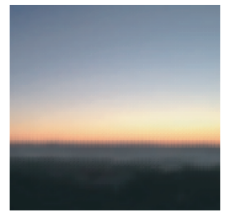
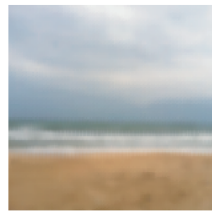
When life goes smoothly, people often forget God and begin to think they don't need him. But in times of crisis, we receive a wakeup call. We look up and turn our eyes to the Holy One of Israel.

Our world continues to know war and rumors of war. Pray that millions will not get caught in the despair of a life without God, but will look up to Christ, the Savior.

## Prayer

***Father, when we look around us, we see unbelief and immorality, and we can easily become lost and afraid. Help us to look to you, the true God, in whose name we pray.***

***Amen.***



### NOTES

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# DAY 194

Isaiah 22-24 • Hebrews 12

## Scripture Reading

Run!

**Hebrews 12:1-3**

### TODAY'S FOCUS

Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us ... run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Hebrews 12:1

Our physical bodies need daily exercise and activity. If we rarely stretch, exercise, do physical work, or play sports, our bodies will grow inflexible and heavy. In the long run, we will risk all sorts of health problems, and by midlife, we will feel the aches and pains of old age prematurely.

Though we don't often think of our spiritual life in the same way, we need to work at being spiritually fit as well. We need to exercise our souls and do faith-building exercises.

These are not exercises we do by our own strength, however. Through Jesus Christ, God has given us a "new nature" that needs to grow up and become strong. The apostle Paul explains that Christians together are like a body that needs to be attached to Christ as their Head, and "the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow" (Colossians 2:19).

As we grow in Christ, we need to exercise all the muscles of our faith. As our text tells us, we must "run with perseverance the race marked out for us." We are called not to shuffle or trudge along in our spiritual life, but to press on, with exertion, for God's glory.

## Prayer

*Creator God, thank you that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Help us not only to be physically fit but also to be active in your kingdom work so that we may bring you glory and honor.*

*In Jesus' name,*

*Amen.*

### NOTES



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# Scripture Reading

Our Will or God's?

**James 4:13-16**

## TODAY'S FOCUS

You ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." James 4:15

Sooner or later we are all faced with life situations that go beyond our control. Whether it is a sickness, tension in a relationship or at work, loss of a job, or advancing age, we come to realize that we have no ability to control the outcome. We must simply be patient and, as is often said, "live one day at a time." Though we usually learn this lesson later in life, it might be helpful to learn it far earlier.

Learning that we have no control over our lives, however, may not necessarily help us. It could simply lead us to despair that nothing will ever turn out. "What's the use of even trying?" we might ask.

But James gives Christian pilgrims the way to move forward with assurance: praying that God's will be done.

Jesus taught his disciples this important principle in the Lord's Prayer, highlighting that his followers can ask that God's will be done "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). Jesus also prayed that God's will would be done through his own death for our sake. In paying for our sin, Jesus marked a path for us, through death to eternal life, so that we can walk with the assurance of God's presence and guidance.....now and always.

Are you seeking God's kingdom and walking in his will, even when you cannot control your circumstances?

# Prayer

*All-powerful God, if my plans for this day are not in line with your will, please correct my path by your Word and Spirit. May I give glory to you today and every day.*

*Amen.*

## NOTES

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# DAY 201

Isaiah 36-37 • Psalms 76 • 1 Peter 1

## Scripture Reading

Faith Stronger Than Gold

**1 Peter 1:1-25**

### TODAY'S FOCUS

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 1 Peter 1:6-7

Have you ever wanted to give up? Sometimes the difficulties we face in our lives can feel overwhelming. At times we want to surrender to the difficulties in our lives. We may feel tempted to take matters into our own hands or return evil for evil to those who are hurting us.

In 1 Peter 1 the Apostle Peter encouraged believers to trust God when we are tired and want to give into difficult situations. As we reflect on Peter's life as recorded in the gospels, Peter knows what it is like to give up and stop trusting God. Peter would have never believed that he could go through a trial that would cause him to stop trusting in God. However, when Jesus was arrested and taken to the Sanhedrin, Peter denied knowing the Lord three times. Even though the Lord warned him that he would abandon him, Peter thought he had more faith and hope in God than he really did. (Mark 14:27-31, 66-72)

Like Peter, our faith will be tested. We may be able to handle smaller tests, but all tests are not lightweight or easy. In our reading today, Peter compared our faith to gold. The value of gold is tied to its boiling point.

When gold is under high heat, it is refined of its impurities. Gold, however, does have a boiling point (1,064 degrees Celsius or 1,948 degrees Fahrenheit) at which time it will perish, but our faith is more precious than gold and is eternal. This means that our faith can withstand the enormous weight of trials if we trust in God and apply God's truth to them.

Are you in the midst of an intense trial? Do you feel tempted to give in and sin against God? Remember, with the power of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, activating God's word, there is no trial or difficulty that can overtake you if you trust God.

## Prayer

***Father, when we are tested by intense situations and tempted to disobey You by doing things our own way, help us to believe and apply Your Word to our situation. Help us to walk through it by faith in You and obedience to You.***

***In Jesus' name,***

***Amen.***

### NOTES

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# DAY 202

2 Kings 20 • Isaiah 38, 39  
Psalms 75 • 1 Peter 2

## Scripture Reading

Prayer Makes the Difference

**2 Kings 20:1-11**

### TODAY'S FOCUS

“Go back and tell Hezekiah, the ruler of my people, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the temple of the LORD. 2 Kings 20:5

Have you ever been in a difficult situation and did not know what to do?

King Hezekiah was one of the few godly kings in the southern kingdom of Judah. He devoted his life to doing what was right. Unlike Ahaz, his father, the king before him, he trusted in God. He demonstrated his trust in God by destroying all the places of idol worship. He even crushed the bronze snake that Moses had made because the Israelites were using it for worship (Number 21:4-8). No other king trusted God like Hezekiah did.

When King Hezekiah became terminally ill, the prophet Isaiah came to him and told him to prepare for death. He was young, only 39 years old. At this point, he had been serving the Lord as king for 14 years and he believed he had a right to ask God for healing. King Hezekiah believed in the power of God and knew God was his only hope; he had seen God deliver him from the King of Assyria. So he cried out to God for help. God heard Hezekiah and gave him 15 more years of life.

God uses our faith and prayers to do many things in our lives. Our prayers in faith are significant to God. King Hezekiah could have

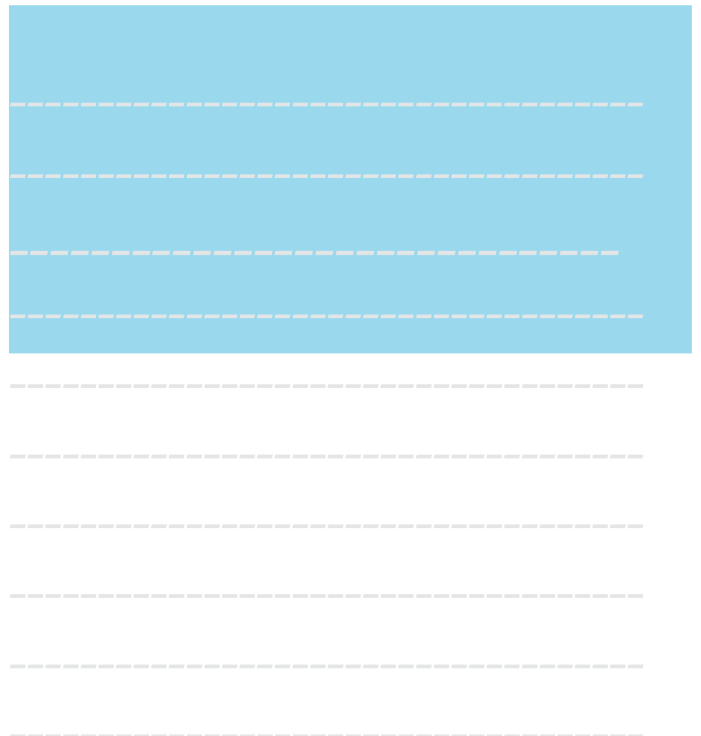
accepted the pronouncement of death by the prophet Isaiah, but he chose to pray instead. He had lived his life by faith in God and knew that it was only by faith and prayers to God that his situation could be turned around. Because King Hezekiah prayed, he received an extension of life.

1 Peter 5:7 instructs us to cast all our cares on God because He cares for us. How many times have we not turned to God in prayer and missed a blessing?

## Prayer

***Father, help us to live our lives for Your glory, trusting You to do exceedingly and abundantly more than we could ask or think. In Jesus' name, Amen.***

### NOTES





# DAY 203

Isaiah 40-42 • 1 Peter 3

## Scripture Reading

Being Like-Minded Believers

**1 Peter 3:1-12**

### TODAY'S FOCUS

Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. 1 Peter 3:8

In 1 Peter 3, the apostle Peter encourages believers how to think and behave toward others. He calls us to “be like-minded” and “love one another,” calling for sympathy, compassion, and humility. This means responding in such a way that malicious accusers will be ashamed. It means letting our actions speak louder than our words. Nothing new, right?

How is it possible for married couples to be sympathetic and compassionate while living with the sharp edges of another's flaws? How is it possible for children to submit to self-righteous parents who do not admit their mistakes? Or how can we be humble when we know that our supervisor is using us for their advancement? The words “truth”, “test”, and “trust” may help.

The “truth”; is that we are to love as Christ has loved, extending to others the very grace we receive from him. The “test”; is whether our actions are Christlike. Even an appeal to pure motives is not an excuse to “repay evil with evil or insult with insult.” Finally, we are to “trust”; the ways of Christ. Peter asks, “Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?” Even if some do us harm, at least we have been faithful to the proven ways of God.

The apostle Peter challenged all believers to live by the higher standard of love, which requires us to love people regardless of how we are treated. We can only do this if we have the compassion and humility of Christ. (Philippians 2:1-8)

## Prayer

***Father, help us to have a spirit of humility that is fueled by being like-minded in Christ with other believers, according to Your Word, so that we treat others with love regardless of how they treat us.***

***In Jesus' name,***

***Amen***

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# DAY 204

Isaiah 43-45 • 1 Peter 4

## Scripture Reading

Distributors of God’s Grace

**1 Peter 4:8-16**

### TODAY’S FOCUS

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4:10

At any given time, 10% to 19% of gift card balances remain unredeemed — and around 6% of gift cards are never even used. That amounts to billions of dollars in gift cards every year that go unused. When we give someone a gift card and they do not use it, they miss the joy that we intended them to experience. They waste the gift. Likewise, God has given us spiritual gifts that he intends for us to use. The spiritual gifts he gives us are to be used to bless others.

Each of us has talents and abilities we can use to bring glory and honor to God. In addition, we have spiritual gifts “for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7). As we find in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, 1 Peter 4, and other passages, there are many gifts of the Spirit: prophecy, faith, giving, encouragement, wisdom, hospitality, and more. Each of us has at least one gift, and with it, we can serve others and testify to God’s grace.

Whatever gifts we have need to be used. That begins by recognizing and acknowledging what gifts we have. We need to discover our giftedness so that we can use it to express love. If we are reluctant or prefer to be modest in acknowledging our giftedness, let’s remember that we will be held accountable for how we used the gifts God gave us (Matthew 25:15-30).

Whatever gifts we are given are to be used for the sake of others. Our communities and our families need us to use our gifts. The effectiveness of the body of Christ is diminished when even one person decides to “sit on the gift” entrusted to them.

Are people around us enjoying God’s love because you are using your gift?

## Prayer

***Father, help us to use the spiritual gift(s) that You have given us to display Your love to the people around us and the people around the world.***

***In Jesus’ name,***

***Amen***

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# DAY 206

Isaiah 50-52 • 2 Peter 1

## Scripture Reading

The Supplement of Self-control

**2 Peter 1:5-11**

### TODAY'S FOCUS

Make every effort to add to your faith ... self-control ... 2 Peter 1:5-6

Today's Scripture reading lists a number of things that we are told to add to our faith. In a way, like vitamins for our health, these virtues help give us a stronger, more well-rounded faith.

One of the virtues Peter identifies is self-control. When we see how Peter behaved in the time of Jesus' teaching ministry (in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), we might think he should not be someone to preach about self-control. Sometimes Peter was hotheaded and impulsive!

For example, when Peter was with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, a little more self-control on Peter's part would have gone a long way to prevent Malchus, the high priest's servant, from losing one of his ears (John 18:10).

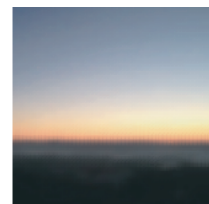
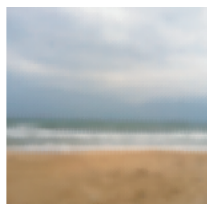
Peter, however, became a follower of Jesus whose faith matured over time. Even more important, he was someone the Lord used to write His Word, so the instructions in 2 Peter are not so much Peter's as God's. God gets his message about self-control across through the example of someone who sorely needed it, and who was finally blessed to have it. (See Acts 10-12.)

Spiritual growth is a lifelong journey. Peter may have learned the value of self-control the hard way, but he did learn. Have you?

## Prayer

*Help us, Lord, to work hard at making sure our faith is strong and vibrant. Thank you for giving us opportunities to see our spiritual progress over time.*

**Amen.**



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# DAY 208

Isaiah 57-59 • 2 Peter 3

## Scripture Reading

Soon and Very Soon?

**2 Peter 3:1-9**

### TODAY'S FOCUS

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise ... Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9

“Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King.” Perhaps you have sung this song at a worship service. The way some people sing it leaves no doubt that they really believe it.

But how soon? Nearly two thousand years have passed since Jesus told his disciples that he was going to come back. For two thousand years God's people have been asking, “Lord, when will you return?” But he has not returned.

Already in the first century some believers doubted Jesus' return. They had believed the promise of his coming, but times were hard, and persecution was severe. Scoffers were asking, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised?” They had no answer.

Sometimes we might wonder too. We hear about persecution and ask, “Why doesn't Jesus come to end it?” We read about poverty and hunger and deprivation, and we think, “When will it end?” We hear about natural disasters and tragedies, and we wonder why Jesus does not end it all by coming back.

The answer Peter gives is that Jesus has not forgotten about his promise to return. He is “not slow in keeping his promise.” Instead, he is patient! And today God wants his church to call people back to him.

## Prayer

*Lord, help us to keep on praying for your return, and while we wait, please use us to call people to repentance.*

*For your name's sake,*

*Amen.*

N O T E S



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# DAY 209

Isaiah 63-64 • Psalms 107 • John 2

## Scripture Reading

The Cross Predicted

**John 2:13-25**

### TODAY’S FOCUS

“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” John 2:19

A very common belief today is that if you live a good life, God will welcome you into heaven. Along with that, many people think of Jesus as little more than a meek, mild, caring, good teacher. While Jesus was and is all of those things, he is much more. In fact, because he is God, there is much more to him than we can imagine. (See Ephesians 3:20.)

In our reading for today we see a side of Jesus that many of us might find surprising. He violently attacks what is going on in the temple. He enters the heart of worship and cleans house. The Jewish leaders ask, “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?” Jesus draws their attention to the cross when he answers, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” The Jews think he is crazy: “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” John adds, “But the temple he had spoken of was his body.”

John includes this statement to point out that this is about Jesus’ death and resurrection. For God and humans to connect, a cleansing must happen. Jesus models that in the temple in Jerusalem, and this is a graphic picture of what the Spirit of God does to us as Jesus comes to live in the temple of our lives—body and soul. Are you prepared to be cleaned out?

## Prayer

*Lord Jesus, come in and cleanse the temple of my life. My good life is not enough to make me right with God, but yours is. Only by your shed blood can I be made clean and whole.*

**Amen.**

### NOTES

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# DAY 210

Is. 65-66 • Ps. 62 • John 3

## Scripture Reading

### Seeking Jesus

John 3:1-21

#### TODAY'S FOCUS

**He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." - John 3:2**

How did you come to know Jesus? Many of us first learned about Jesus in a large crowd at church or a large evangelistic event. Later, in a smaller group such as a Life group, Sunday school class, or through discipleship we learned more about Christ by asking questions and exploring biblical concepts. In John 3:1-21 we read about Nicodemus' personal encounter with Jesus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee who came to know Jesus by following "the buzz" generated by the large crowds of people.

However, Nicodemus realized that if he was going to truly understand Jesus and His teaching, he needed to meet with Jesus personally. Because of the crowds and his fellow Pharisees' unbelief, he decided to meet with Jesus secretly. Nicodemus, convinced by the miracles Jesus performed, began the conversation with a statement acknowledging his belief in Christ. Jesus then began to tell Nicodemus how he could inherit eternal life and Christ's purpose in the world as one sent by God to express God's love. Nicodemus' journey of faith did not happen all at once. He heard about Jesus, believed Jesus came from God, and then met with Jesus for clarity. According to John 7:50 and John 19:39, his faith and belief in Jesus grew to the extent that he "went public" with his faith by participating in the burial of Jesus.

Many times, it takes seeing a miracle as well as studying the teachings of Christ before someone can put their faith in Him. Is there a "Nicodemus" watching your life? Can they see miracles happening in and through you? Some of the miraculous signs that we can perform through the power of God are; loving hateful people, caring for and giving to those who are outcasts in our society, and forgiving those who have treated us wrongfully. This may open the door for you to introduce them to Christ.

## Prayer

***Father, help us to be Christ-like in our character and actions so that people seek Jesus as a result of the miracles that You perform in and through our lives. In Jesus' name,***

***Amen.***

## NOTES

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