

2 Kings 21 • 2 Chronicles 33 • John 4

Scripture Reading

Prioritizing God's Will John 4:1-34

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work." John 4:34

Have you ever asked God for something, but He gave you something else? In John 4, Jesus encounters a woman at a well. Because John 4:4 tells us that Jesus "had to go through Samaria," we know His encounter with the woman was intentional. When He began His conversation with her, she was on a mission to get water. She focused on her physical needs throughout most of her conversation with Jesus. When she believed Jesus had the ability to give her everlasting water, she was eager to receive it. However, after her conversation with Jesus, she left her water jar by the well. Her mission had changed from satisfying her physical needs to telling people about Jesus.

Jesus went through Samaria consumed with fulfilling God's plan, not His physical needs. Surely, His feet were tired from walking and the hot desert sun made Him thirsty for water, hungry, and tired. However, His thirst and hunger for the will of God outweighed His physical needs. How often do we engage in a conversation with God (prayer) completely consumed by our needs? Do we stop praying for ourselves long enough for God to mention anything about meeting the needs of others? Maybe we should consider that God wants to talk to us about His need for us to help others find hope and joy in Him.

Prayer

Father, help us as we converse with you in prayer to hear your heart for those around us who need your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

2 Kings 22 • 2 Chronicles 34 • John 5

Scripture Reading

Beautiful Feet, Beautiful Message

Nahum 1:7-15

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Behold ... the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace!" Nahum 1:15

Remember Nineveh? Remember Jonah? In the Bible book that bears his name, God rebukes Jonah for not wanting to share God's mercy with Nineveh. Even though Jonah was a reluctant missionary, the whole city of Nineveh repented! But Nineveh fell back into its sinful ways. Again, they became an oppressive, evil nation, and by the time of Nahum, they had made life miserable for God's people. But Nahum had a message of good news for Judah; God had seen His people suffer at the hand of Nineveh, and now he would set them free. Nineveh would be destroyed. Their idols would be torn down, their city walls reduced to rubble, and their temples burned to ashes. And God's people would be restored.

God tells His people, "Celebrate your festivals ... and fulfill your vows." Religious and family life for Judah would resume because God would defeat their enemies. That truly was good news! That good news is a reminder for us too. God has defeated the kingdom of Satan and has released this world from sin's grip. As hearts submit to Jesus, racism, hatred, greed, and all other evils lose their power. When addiction, temptation, or sin seem overpowering, rejoice and be strong! The Prince of Peace releases us from the grip of Satan's kingdom.

Prayer

King of peace, sin disrupts so much of this world. But you bring renewal and restoration! Help us to seek your peace wherever we see brokenness.

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Isaiah 65-66 • Psalm 62 • John 6

Scripture Reading

The Lord Hears Our Pleas 2 Chronicles 33:12-13

TODAY'S FOCUS

"When he was in distress, he appeased the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers." 2 Chronicles 33:12

We find in this passage of scripture that the nation of Israel committed many detestable acts in the sight of the Lord. God's anger was aroused against Manasseh, king of Jerusalem, and all his people. God's request was simple, "build Me altars in the temple so that My Name will remain in Jerusalem forever." Instead, God's people built altars to foreign gods and worshiped them.

The word "name" in Greek is onoma. It is defined as, "one's make, reputation, fame or simply one's character." God has always sought for His name or character to be represented well throughout the generations. When God's character is put on display, men on earth can begin to experience His countless qualities. He desires this to remain forever.

In His anger, God allowed Israel's enemies to overtake them due to their sins. Manasseh was left with no choice but to repent and seek the Lord's favor for an answer. The Lord was moved by this entreaty and heard their plea. We often find ourselves in the same position of not exemplifying God's character. When we find ourselves in such a place, God has shown us that we should repent and plead to Him. His gracious mercies endure forever and He is able to restore us when we do.

Prayer

Gracious Father, thank you for your Good reputation! We ask you to help us release the character of our flesh and ourselves and put on the Character of Your Spirit! Amen.

2 Kings 23 • 2 Chronicles 35 • John 7

Scripture Reading

The Blessings of the Holy Spirit

John 7:37-39

TODAY'S FOCUS

"The one who believes in Me... will have rivers of living water... He said in reference to the Spirit.
John 7:38-39

The Holy Spirit has taken on various forms that symbolize important blessings we receive when He lives within us. The Spirit comes as a dove and fills us with peace and holy contentment. We hear the voice of the Father, as when the dove came upon Jesus at his baptism, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22).

On Pentecost, the Spirit descended with tongues of fire (Acts 2:3), and the fire of the Spirit purifies us by burning away our selfish habits, our coarse language, our stubborn ingratitude, and our lack of grace in relationships. As the disciples of Jesus spoke in many languages on Pentecost, some of the onlookers thought they were drunk (Acts 2:13). Why? Because the other languages sounded like babbling to thembut not to the people who understood those languages! And people who are filled with the Spirit overflow with joy and cannot stop talking about Jesus, the greatest treasure in the world. We experience the Spirit also as a comforter who comes to our aid and as a lawyer who defends us in situations of distress (John 14:15-27; 15:26).

The Spirit is also described as a river of living water. Like a spring bubbling up within us, the living water of the Spirit ensures that we will never be thirsty again (John 4:13-14). Life in the Spirit is truly an abundant existence. And this is normal in the Christian life.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, be our dove of peace, our baptism of fire, our translator and joy giver, our comforter and defending lawyer, and our water of life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Habakkuk 1-3 • John 8

Scripture Reading

Walking in the Light John 8:12-30

TODAY'S FOCUS

"I am the Light of the world; the one who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." John 8:12

By boldly declaring, "I am the light of the world," Jesus establishes without question that He is the very presence of God with us. He is the light of the world, for He and He alone knows the Father. The Pharisees immediately objected to Jesus' selfassessment and mounted a campaign to try to ruin His reputation. First, they challenged His lineage. Then they twisted His words to suggest He was suicidal. But if He could not be trusted, why would they react so strongly to what He said? The saying is true, "Darkness does not like to be reminded by the light." Because Jesus knew their hearts were darkened by sin, He replied, "Who follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the Light of life." It all comes back to the call to follow Jesus, the true light giver. Our lives are often muddled by the fear of being known or exposed, so we stay hidden in the darkness. Jesus resists such cover-ups. He floods our lives with the spotlight of His Word and challenges us today to forfeit our own plans for His. The psalmist says it well: "In your light, we see light" (Psalm 36:9). The secret of being guided by Jesus is to commit ourselves to His life-giving Word. Trust Him and let His Word speak to you today.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for the privilege many of us have today to gather and hear your Word. We pray especially for all who are persecuted for following you. Flood them with your light and love. *Amen.*

Zephaniah 1-3 • John 9

Scripture Reading

Any Day Now!

Zephaniah 1:14-18

TODAY'S FOCUS

"The great day of the Lord is near, Near and coming very quickly." Zephaniah 1:14

It was the long-awaited moment when everything would be put right in the world. On "the day of the Lord," God would finally destroy Israel's enemies. At last, justice would come. After years of oppression, Israel would watch their enemies melt before God's anger. Zephaniah now proclaimed that the day of the Lord was "near and coming quickly." The prophet piled up pictures of distress and trouble to illustrate the terror of this day.

When God released His anger, darkness, and chaos would overtake the created world. But Judah would also hear God's verdict on their sin. Judah believed they were immune to judgment, but the Lord said they too deserved to be punished. The Bible tells us that another day of the Lord is yet to come. Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. That includes you and me. On that day, our silver or gold will be unable to save us. All of our accomplishments and wealth will count for nothing. But the gospel assures us that Jesus has taken God's judgment for our sin upon himself. If we believe in Him, the day of the Lord will be a day to share in God's victory over sin and darkness. Are you ready?



Lord, help us to be ready for your return. Test our hearts, and reveal to us if we are placing our hope in things that will not last. May your return be a day of victory for us! *Amen*.

Jeremiah 1-2 • John 10

Scripture Reading

God Has a Purpose for Your Life Jeremiah 1

TODAY'S FOCUS

"The word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.' They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD." Jeremiah 1:4- 5,19

Have you sat and wondered, why was I born? What is it that God wants me to do? What is my purpose?

People all around the world have asked these questions. One way we know this is that *The Purpose Driven Life* is the best-selling hardback in U.S. history with more than 30 million copies sold. It has been translated into over 50 languages according to its publisher, Zondervan.

In Jeremiah 1, we are introduced to the prophet Jeremiah. God came to Jeremiah with a plan made before Jeremiah was conceived. Son of the priest Hilkiah, who found the Book of the Law in the temple during the reign of King Josiah of Judah, Jeremiah was to be a prophet to the nations. Jeremiah was young when he heard God's call upon his life. However, he did not believe he could fulfill it. He had good reasons to be concerned because he was appointed to not just speak to a few people in an obscure place, he was going to be a prophet (God's mouthpiece) to speak to nations.

It can be very intimidating, terrifying, and dangerous to speak judgment to people in power. Amid Jeremiah's concerns, God reassured him that along with the call on his life, He would give Jeremiah everything he needed to be successful. Then God gave him the words he was to speak. Has God reached out to you and called you to a task or mission? Are you backing out of it or moving towards it? Are you listening to God for further instructions as you move in obedience or are you making excuses and refusing to obey? Jeremiah's assignment was extremely difficult, but God promised to be with him. Likewise, God is and will be with us in our assignments.

Prayer

Father, thank You for giving me purpose. Please help me to listen and obey your call upon my life. Help me to surrender my anxiety, frustration, fear, gifts, skills, and talents to you so that I will accomplish your purpose for my life. Help me enjoy your abundant love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Jeremiah 3-4 • John 11

Scripture Reading

Too Late? John 11:17-26



Jesus, forgive me for placing too much emphasis on time and much less time on building my faith and trust in you. Amen.

TODAY'S FOCUS

" 'Everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.' Do you believe this?" John 11:26

We value time! We say things like "Time is money" and "The early bird catches the worm." We believe everything is urgent. In our verses for today, Jesus visits Martha and Mary, whose brother Lazarus has died. They had sent word when Lazarus was sick, but Jesus didn't come right away (John 11:1-7). Didn't he care that His friend was dying? Yes, but he also knew God had other plans for Lazarus (see John 11:11-15, 38-44). Still, we can sympathize with Martha. She had placed her full trust in Jesus to cure her brother. How many times had she looked out and stared down the road for a glimpse of Him?

When Jesus finally did arrive, she met Him with tears and perhaps a bit of scolding, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." But then she said, "I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." We have all felt frustrated when Jesus shows up later than we have wanted. Our dreams are dashed, and our confidence in Him withers, but Jesus knows how we feel, and He often uses time differently than we do. Though we may not understand, He also knows what's most important. Maybe He held Martha by the shoulders and looked her in the eyes as He said, "Who lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" Jesus came to infuse our faltering faith with amazement and wonder. Do you believe this?

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Jeremiah 5-6 • John 12

Scripture Reading

"Come out, come out, wherever you are!"

Prayer

God, it is a blessing that you know us! Each one of us individually, personally, and most of all intimately! Thank You for your son who has delivered us! Amen.

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Roam about through the streets of Jerusalem, and look and take notice. And seek in her public squares, if you can find a person, if there is one who does justice, who seeks honesty, then I will forgive her." Jeremiah 5:1

"Come out, come out, wherever you are!" A number of us remember these words from the game Hide and Seek. In this text, Yaweh is not "it" but He is declaring through the prophet Jeremiah, judgment unto the nation of Judah. Judah had hidden behind idolatry and spiritual adultery and they were not following God. They thought mingling with foreign gods and nations would not incur a price (Jeremiah 1:10). Jeremiah prophesied judgment upon the nation of Judah for her repeated covenant disobedience against God; however, judgment is not forever since God will also provide a future deliverance for His people and judge the nations for their evil. There was good news here. For each outpouring of wrath on men, a remnant is rescued. Anyone who knew the Lord and Jeremiah to be His spokesperson had options that led to safety during those trying times (Jeremiah 28:1-10). In some versions of the game Hide and Seek, the seeker calls out a previously agreed phrase like," Olly, Olly, oxen free!" to signal the hiders to return to base. Nobody is hidden from God. He knows who the righteous are. "Come out, Come out, wherever you are!"

DAY 220 Jeremiah 7-9 • John 13

Scripture Reading

God's Love and Holiness Jeremiah 9:7-25

TODAY'S FOCUS

"This is what the Lord says: 'Let no wise man boast of his wisdom, nor let the mighty man boast of his might, nor a rich man boast of his riches; but let the one who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises mercy, justice, and righteousness on the earth; for I delight in these things,' declares the Lord." Jeremiah 9:23-24

Some people believe God is always angry and full of wrath. They believe He is ready to pour down judgment all the time. The truth is, God is very loving, compassionate, slow to anger, and full of mercy (Psalm 145:8-9). As we look throughout the Bible, we see a God who blesses and cares for everyone (Matthew 5:45). He has made a plan to redeem us from sin so that we can live eternally with Him (John 3:16).

Others believe people are basically good. Therefore, everyone should go to heaven (live eternally in the presence of God). They believe that there is no need for justice and righteousness. However, the Bible teaches that all people are sinners in need of a Savior (Romans 3:10, 21-23).

In chapters 7-9 in the book of Jeremiah, we see how the kingdom of Judah walked away from the Lord and worshiped idols. For hundreds of years, God waited patiently for them to repent. He sent prophets and judges to call them to repentance. Now judgment would have to be executed. To be true to His nature He had to remove the kingdom of Judah from the Promised Land, a symbol of His presence.

God is love. He demonstrates His loving-kindness in His patience and compassion towards those who do not deserve it. He is also holy. Justice and righteousness are expressions of His love and His holiness. This is the reason God demands that we practice both love and holiness in our society.

Prayer

Father, help us to understand and know you in deeper ways so that we will excessively declare your character to those around us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Jeremiah 10-12 • John 14

Scripture Reading

No Longer Orphans John 14:15-21



Lord thank you for making us your children once again. Amen.

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TODAY'S FOCUS

"I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you." John 14:18

All of us inherited an orphan spirit from Adam and Eve, who lost their home and inheritance when they sinned against God and had to leave Eden (Genesis 3). They damaged their relationship with God, with each other, and with God's creation. However, God has worked steadily to restore that relationship ever since.

There are times when each of us can detect the orphan spirit within. It happens when we feel as if we do not belong, or when we feel we cannot relax and be ourselves. We believe we have to work to receive all that will come our way. We work as if our inheritance depends on it. We invest heavily in our appearance and other physical things because our identity is not secure. God the Father has made reconciliation possible through Jesus, His Son.

Jesus willingly came from heaven to earth, emptied Himself to become a human servant, lived among us, and suffered for our sake to pay the price for our sin. Jesus now lives in union and fellowship with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He is secure and at home with His Father. Because of Him, we can "become children of God" (John 1:13). The cross remains the greatest symbol in history because it reminds us that God wants His children back. God does not want to leave us as orphans but calls us back to Him. Our orphan heart can be replaced with a son's or daughter's heart. Has your heart been replaced?

Jeremiah 13-15 • John 15

Scripture Reading

Bearing Fruit John 15:1-8

TODAY'S FOCUS

"The one who remains in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing." John 15:5

Our "doing" for Jesus has to flow out of our "being" with Jesus. Jesus said it this way, "I am the vine, you are the branches; the one who remains in Me, and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."

A branch, apart from the vine from which it draws life and nourishment, is unable to bear fruit. In fact, a branch that is disconnected from the vine is really no more than kindling for a fire. Imagine if all your busyness, in the end, amounted to nothing. Imagine if the activities and work you're involved in failed to add up to any lasting value. Basically, Jesus said, "Unless you're living in me, and I am living in you, all your running and chasing and striving will amount to nothing. Only what flows out of a dynamic, living relationship with me will bear fruit that lasts."

Our own strength is not enough. We need to draw our strength from the vine if we want our lives to bear fruit for God's kingdom. The most important part of the Christian life is the part that only God sees. We find God's deepest blessing when we spend time at the feet of the One who knows and loves us best.

Prayer

O God, forgive us for the times we try to live out of our own strength. We need to be deeply connected to you so that your life can flow through us to others!

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Jeremiah 16-17 • Psalm 96 • John 16

Scripture Reading

Supernatural Peace
John 14:23-27

TODAY'S FOCUS

"In Me, you may have peace. In the world, you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." John 16:33

Jesus' disciples were shocked and confused. He had just said He would be leaving them. After three years of daily, intense mentoring under His leadership and teaching, He was going away, and it was not clear to them where He was going. This caused conflict in their hearts. On top of that, He explained that trouble was coming their way—from people who would hate them and persecute them and kill some of them (see Luke 21:12- 19). No wonder they responded in fear and anxiety!

But Jesus assured them that He would not leave them alone in all this trouble. He would send another teacher, helper, and counselor. The Holy Spirit of God would come to live in their hearts! He would produce in them a beautiful array of spiritual fruit, including a highly prized and needed peace (Galatians 5:22-23). They would become blessed as peacemakers, just as Jesus had taught them earlier (Matthew 5:9). Do you have the Lord's peace in your heart? Are you confident that his comforting care is with you in any conflict? Do you know that in His strength you can be victorious in every struggle and trial? The Bible shows that Jesus' followers did so when the Spirit was poured out on them (Acts 2-28). You can too!

Prayer

Holy Spirit, I want to be a peacemaker. Calm my fears, end my anger, answer my doubts, and clear up my confusion. In your strength, I will work and wait for the glorious peace of heaven to come! Amen.

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Jeremiah 18-20 • Psalm 93 • John 17

Scripture Reading

The Lord Reigns!
Psalms 93:1

TODAY'S FOCUS

Long ago, a little girl asked her father, "How can you tell who the king is?" Her father answered, "You can tell by the way he is dressed and the way he carries himself." He paused for a second and continued by saying, "A king is dressed in majesty because he reigns!"

In Psalm 93, the psalmist wants us to see the God who reigns over everything. He wants us to shift our attention from our fears and frustrations to Him. God does not just reign in some situations; He reigns in all situations of our lives. Our God reigns during economic depression or abundance. He reigns in health and sickness. We are not victims of circumstances, but the children of the King who reigns! The writer of the psalms also points out that God is robed (dressed) in majesty and strength. The word majesty carries with it the idea of dignity, the authority of sovereign power, stateliness, and grandeur. God's creative majesty is on display in the beauty of the seas, the wonders of the mountains, and the colors of the flowers. We also see God's redemptive majesty fully demonstrated by the love Christ Jesus has for us. Today and every day, please remember, just as the psalmist said in this verse, "the world is established: it shall never be moved." You will not be moved by the challenges of life as long as you remember, "the Lord Reigns!"

Prayer

Dear God, I am so grateful you reign! You reign in the world. You reign in my church. God, you reign in my home and on my job. I am thankful you reign in my heart and the hearts of my loved ones. Lord, you REIGN!

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2 Kings 24 • Jeremiah 22 • Psalm 122 • John 18

Scripture Reading

Transformation-formation
Jeremiah 18:1-6

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, house of Israel." Jeremiah 18:6

God is like a potter, and we are like clay. In His work of spiritual formation, God constantly molds and shapes us. This can be a slow process of gradual growth. Or, at times, an encounter with the living Christ through His Word will infuse us with the grace that moves us quickly to a new level of devotion and commitment. At other times, the potter must break the pot and start over again because the clay has become hard and dried up.

Each of these types of spiritual formation shows a different way God deals with us. If I can no longer be molded, I need to repent and experience the shattering grace of God's love. If I've reached a spiritual plateau, I need to discover by God's Spirit undeveloped areas of my personality or giftedness that need His powerful touch, and if I'm gradually growing, I need simply to rejoice and increase my thanksgiving. What concrete ways do we see the Potter at work in our lives?

A new biblical perspective might have to be developed, new directions set, moral values instilled, old habits broken, positive attitudes fostered, deeper commitments chosen and cherished, a family reunited, emotional hurts healed, a serious crisis resolved, spiritual gifts utilized, and new ministries started. As God shapes you and me, the whole world around us is transformed.

Prayer

Creator and molder of the world, we are like clay in your hands. Refashion each one of us into your likeness until we are vessels that are useful to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Jeremiah 23,25 • John 19

Scripture Reading

Name Brand IS different!

TODAY'S FOCUS

"In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will live securely. And this is His name by which He will be called, 'The Lord Our Righteousness." Jeremiah 23:6

When it comes to having a right standing with God, the first place I check is my personal ledger. If my report happens to be good, I gain a higher sense of confidence in God. If I've messed up, I can't help but feel distance or a lack of assurance. I feel off. It's kind of ironic, primarily because the exact opposite is true; at the time when I've messed up the biggest, God's grace is most available (Romans 5:20 "Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more!). Conversely, when I'm "nailing it", chances are I'm depending on my own righteousness. This is (pause for effect) exhausting.

When I was a kid, my parents were experts at shopping for generic store brand Cheerios, shoes, etc. My dad's favorite statement was, "It's all the same. It's made in the same factory!" The truth is, we just could not afford the name brands. A mile up the road, I had a buddy, Bayle. He lived in the "rich" area of town (the name of the area was Ridgecrest, we of course called it RICHcrest). He had ALL the name brands....everything! I can tell you I went back and forth between the two houses as if I had two families, one generic and the other name brand...they were NOT the same! There was something different, something special about the name brand. Sure the packaging was different, but also, the taste...it was just...right.

When the Bible says Jesus righteousness, it is saying there is a divine 'brand' of righteousness. It comes from Christ. It is perfect. It is incorruptible. It was purchased and is offered free of charge by the only one who could pay the high price (and a dear price it was!). You cannot afford to buy it, trust me. The scripture also refers to our own, off-brand righteousness....the generic. It is NOT the same, it's just not right. Today, receive the free gift of the real, true righteousness and let go of trying to pay for your own off-brand. Even if you are successful, it is not the same. To add to the irony, it will cost you so much more. When the Lord Jesus is your righteousness, whether it is a good day or bad, your Heavenly Father accepts you because of His perfect Son. Even when you feel all wrong, you are still...right.



Righteous Jesus, I receive your free gift today. Thank You for forgiveness and grace. Amen.

Jeremiah 26, 35, 36 • John 20

Scripture Reading

Name Recognition
John 20:11-18

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, 'Rabboni!' (which means "Teacher")." John 20:16

Mary was participating in one of the oldest dramas in the world. She stood at the grave of a loved one and wept. Many of us have been there too. And perhaps, like Mary, as grief swelled, it was hard to see Jesus in the midst of it. In her deep sorrow, Mary didn't recognize that it was Jesus who stood near her.

In fact, she mistook Him for the gardener. Ironically, Mary was wrong at one level, but right at another. For Jesus, through His life, death, and resurrection, had come to bring order to the chaos that had invaded God's world. Jesus came to plant seeds of new creation, to uproot the thorns and thistles, the sin and pain and decay of this world, and to replace them with the blossoms of forgiveness, grace, and everlasting life.

What is most striking about this scene is that it wasn't fanfare, lightning bolts, or the blasting of trumpets that helped Mary see Her Lord. She recognized Jesus when He called her name, "Mary." Jesus calls your name too. In the midst of your grief, Jesus is near. He cares about your loss and pain. He lived, died, and rose again so that you might have hope and comfort, even in the depth of your sorrows. Jesus knows your name and speaks it in love. Take time today to listen and answer.

Prayer

God of grace, thank you that in Jesus we see how much you love us. Enable me to hear Him speaking my name. Help me enter into the comfort of His risen presence. In His name, Amen.

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Jeremiah 45-47 • Psalm 105 • John 21

Scripture Reading

What is Your Fallback? John 21: 1 –6

TODAY'S FOCUS

"So Jesus said to them, 'Children, you do not have any fish to eat, do you?' They answered Him, 'No.'" John 21:5

Have you ever tried something new and were excited about it? You told all of your friends and posted daily about a new routine or life change you were about to make. You had the "before and after pictures" on your bathroom mirror or your screensaver. You even wrote your daily confession to help support this change. Then the unthinkable happens, you do not reach your goal. After three years of sacrifice, hard work, and belief, you find out everything you had hoped for and dreamed of never materialized. That goal, that better day, never happened. You are discouraged, disappointed, and disheartened.

This is how the disciples felt after the crucifixion of Jesus. For three years, He had led them, fed them, taught them, and loved them, and now what? What do you do now that your dreams and hopes for a better day have died? Peter decided to go back to what he did before, which was fishing. What do you go back to when it seems like God is not answering your prayers?

What is your fallback position when life does not make sense? For some of us, it is a big bowl of ice cream. Perhaps you go back to manipulating or nagging. You may go back to sinful pleasures or pretend that everything is ok, even if your heart is broken.

Or Peter, going back to fishing did not work guess that what we "go back to" does not work or satisfy us either. It keeps us busy, but it does not fulfill us or capture our hearts. When there is a God-sized hole in our hearts, only God can fill it.

So instead of moving away from Jesus, sit still and allow Jesus to move toward you as He does in this text. Jesus reaches out to us no matter where we are. He gives us direction and welcomes us to the shore with loving arms. When our substitutes and fallback plans fall empty and hollow, sit still, and listen for Jesus. He will instruct you where to place your net for a meaningful and full life.

Prayer

Jesus, I am so grateful there is no need for a "Plan B" when I follow you. Even when it seems like things are not working out, I know you are working them out. Therefore, I will sit, listen, and follow your wonderful and loving plan for my life.

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Jeremiah 48-49 • 1 John 1

Scripture Reading

Jesus, the Righteous Advocate 1 John 1:1-2:3

TODAY'S FOCUS

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, so that He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9

The apostle John says, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One." Jesus Christ is the advocate of lost causes, and there are three reasons for this. The first reason is that He is just. Because of His character, sin was never a part of His nature, and no malice ever came from His lips.

The second reason is in the methods He uses. As your advocate, Jesus not only comes to be by your side but also to serve in your place, to be your replacement. Jesus did not come to plead His innocence but to take on your guilt. Jesus did not come, like a human lawyer would, to charge legal fees for taking on your case. He came to pay the price for your redemption, and He paid with His perfect life.

Jesus Christ, as your advocate, can save you completely because after He died for you, He rose from the dead and is now ruling at God's right hand, where He intercedes for you. There is also a third reason: Jesus is the advocate of lost causes because His work is effective. He has never lost a case, and He never will.

Prayer

Lord God, holy and righteous are your ways! I thank you because, through Jesus, I have forgiveness for everything that separates me from you. So I confess my sin, in his name.

NOTES

Jeremiah 21, 24, 27 • 1 John 2

Scripture Reading

Kingdom Investments

1 John 2:15-17

TODAY'S FOCUS

"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away and also it's lusts; but the one who does the will of God continues to live forever." 1 John 2:16-17

In 1 John 2, we are warned and reminded that worldly things are not of God, and they will pass away. In Matthew 6, we can read a message preached by Jesus, the greatest pastor to ever walk the earth! In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus preached that we should not "store up for ourselves treasures on earth —where moths and rust destroy, and robbers break in and steal—but to store up our treasures in heaven." Worldly ambition is not a worthwhile investment of our time, talents. and treasures. Our treasures are not just financial wealth. They are the things we value most and put first. In the Amplified Bible, Matt 6:21 reads, "for where your treasure is, there your heart [your wishes, your desires; that on which your life centers] will be also." If you honestly look at your life, you will know if God's will is what you treasure. We cannot serve two kingdoms. The world prioritizes prideful self-promotion and status, while Jesus tells us to humbly serve and put others above ourselves. The world is never satisfied and always tells us to get as much as we can, while Jesus tells us to give to others sacrificially. Which kingdom do you serve and put first? Is Jesus your life's center?

We are always looking for a sure thing, something to invest in that will not lose its value. It is easy to be caught up in the way the world tries to create security. Jesus preached that if we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, all these things would be given to us as well. This is a promise from Jesus. There is not a more secure investment than that!

Prayer

Father God, we need to make you the center of our lives and invest our time, talents, and treasures to serve your Kingdom first. Help us to do your will above all things.

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Jeremiah 28-30 • 1 John 3

Amen.

Scripture Reading

Actions Speak Louder Than Words 1 John 3: 16-17

TODAY'S FOCUS

"We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers and sisters. But whoever has worldly goods and sees his brother or sister in need, and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God remain in him? Little children, let's not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. 1 John 3:16-18

When I read 1 John 3:16, I'm reminded of John 3:16 in the Gospel of John, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." This was God's love in action! In today's verses from I John 3, we are called to lay down our lives, to sacrifice material things in our lives to a brother or sister who does not have enough. In Acts 4 we read that "God's grace was so powerfully at work in them" that there were no needy persons in the church.

People sold their land and homes and laid the money from the sales at the apostles' feet to distribute to anyone in need. Scripture tells us that Christ was moved with compassion when He saw others in need (Matthew 9:36). Following the lead of our loving Savior, we should have compassion that moves us to do something, beyond words. If the love of God is in us, we should act on it and act like it! Are you laying down things in your life for your brothers and sisters in need?

Prayer

God, as we remember that you are a Father who tells us to take care of our brothers and sisters, help us to follow your example, and demonstrate your love with actions.

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Jeremiah 31-32 • 1 John 4

Scripture Reading

God Is Love 1 John 4:7-21

TODAY'S FOCUS

"The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love." 1 John 4:8

You can't take the love out of God and still have God. Love is God's nature; it defines God's core. If God had DNA, each of his genes would be encoded with love. We tend to place limits on our love, but God's love is unconditional.

King David was an adulterer, the apostle Paul was a murderer, and one of Jesus' disciples, Peter, was a betrayer. But none of them ever reached the end of God's love. Each was used mightily in God's kingdom. You and I will never reach the end of that love either (see Romans 8:38-39). As we look to Jesus and the cross, we will discover God's love for us again and again. That's the love we're free to share as people who practice Sabbath keeping. It's not a love we somehow muster up from within ourselves; it's God's love that we're called to share!

God's love gives, shows mercy, heals, and forgives. We're free to share the love of God every day. Sabbath is about a lifestyle that we engage in every day. As we grow in our willingness and ability to share God's love with others, we soon discover new depths of God's mercy toward us, and new ways of sharing that mercy with others each day of our lives.

Prayer

We stand amazed, O God, at how deep and full your love is! Thank you that in Jesus you never stop loving us. May we learn to more fully share that love with others. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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Jeremiah 33-34 • Psalm 74 • 1 John 5

Scripture Reading

Great Promises in a Hard Place Jeremiah 33: 1 – 16

TODAY'S FOCUS

In this passage of scripture, the prophet Jeremiah is imprisoned. His imprisonment is not because he has broken any laws. He is imprisoned because he kept his commitment to telling the truth exactly as God gave it to him.

While in prison, Jeremiah gets a fresh and powerful promise from God. In verse 3, God tells Jeremiah, and us, "to call unto me." This is a reference to prayer. We can call on God even in the prison of disappointment, the prison of financial loss, and the prison of shame and regret. God is reminding us that a prison is just a place and not our position. Whether we are in a prison or the promised land, we are to call on God. Our wonderful God reminds us, "He will answer us." This is where believers are sometimes tripped up in their faith walk. We believe God should answer us when we want Him to and the way we expect Him to. Yet the Word of God is very clear, God's timing is different from ours, but it is always the right time. Included in the promise God gives Jeremiah, is this powerful statement "I will tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know."

In the context of this passage, the great and wonderful things are the plans God has for the nation of Israel. He promises to take them from captivity to freedom. In verses 15 and 16, God speaks about Jesus coming as Savior and returning as the Lord of Righteousness. This is a powerful reminder to us. God is limitless in the ways He can answer prayer and most importantly, His timing is perfect. Do not allow the "when" and "how" God will answer your prayer to keep you from praying to God.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your great and precious promises. You are faithful and loving. Your promises are for me. They will never fail or falter. I will use the faith you have given me to believe and receive your promises at the time you have them for me.

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Jeremiah 37-39 • Psalm 79 • 2 John

Scripture Reading

God's Grace...Our Disgrace
Psalms 79:4

TODAY'S FOCUS

"We have become a disgrace before our neighbors, an object of derision and ridicule to those around us." Psalm 79:4

Have you ever done something that you regretted not just because it was wrong, but because it disgraced your family, your team, your organization, your community, or your people? Have you ever done something that brought shame upon God's name and ruined your testimony? Most of us have. This was the case for Israel in Psalm 79. Not only was God repulsed by Israel's sinfulness, even their ungodly neighbors recognized their moral depravity. The Chosen People had completely lost their testimony and were now damaging the name of YHWH, God. "We have become a disgrace before our neighbors, an object of derision and ridicule to those around us" Psalm 79:4.

Things are really bad when non-Christians must rebuke Christians and the Christian Church. We can be sure that the wrath of God is sure to follow because God is zealous for His name. There is more at stake than the disobedience of His children. When those who proclaim to be followers of Christ use position, power, or status to take advantage of others, they invalidate the truth of the Gospel. This stirs God's anger and provokes a severe response. What do you do when you have not only irrevocably tarnished your character but your actions have impugned the name of God as well? Like the people of Israel, you cry out for mercy! Not because you deserve it, but for the sake of God's glory. Israel recognized that God's discipline was a manifestation of His grace. God's love for them would not permit them to continue in their sin. His grace was His discipline. The only thing that would stay the fullness of God's wrath was an appeal to the glory of His name.

If Israel was utterly forsaken as their sins deserved, God's promise to redeem the world through the seed of Abraham would be broken and God would be made to be a liar. Thus, Israel appealed to God on behalf of His name's sake. "Help us, God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name; and save us and forgive our sins for the sake of Your name" Psalm 79:9. If you are suffering from the effects of your own sin, there is still hope! We can appeal to God's undeserved mercy because we are still His children, His namesake. He can still use us for His glory, if we repent.

Prayer

God, we know we do not deserve a second, third, or forty-ninth chance, but today we plead for your loving-kindness and mercy to fall upon us. Will you restore us once again so that your name will be glorified and your grace be known to the ungodly?

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Jeremiah 50-51 • 3 John

Scripture Reading

Proud Papa 3 John 1:4

TODAY'S FOCUS

"I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth." 3 John 1:4

Every parent loves to see their children succeed. It gives them great joy when their children receive a good report card, their coach tells them that their child is gifted, or the band teacher recognizes them for their musical ability. How much more should we take joy in the spiritual growth and development of those we are discipling?

Many of us know the "helicopter parents" who do everything for their children. They live vicariously through their children, receiving their children's success as if it were their own. Certainly, we are not to act that way with our children, nor are we to act that way with our spiritual children. However, there should be a sense of joy when we see those whom we have nurtured in the faith take possession of their faith and begin to do great things for Christ. This was the case in 3 John. John, the Evangelist (the writer of the Gospel of John), was writing to encourage his protégé, Gaius. He wanted Gaius to know that he noticed his growth in the Lord and John commended him for it. Not only did John notice Gaius' development, but it delighted him greatly. He was a proud Papa!

As Christians, it is difficult to notice our own spiritual progress. Like a child who is growing an imperceptible amount daily, unless others recognize our growth and point out how we are changing into the image of Christ, we can be convinced that we are not growing and become discouraged. We need "Johns" in our lives who are like giddy parents delighting in every new step that we take.

Prayer

God, we praise you for the gift of discipleship. You have entrusted us with the care and spiritual development of those younger in the faith. May we shepherd and guide them by your strength and power so that they may mature and become even greater witnesses for your kingdom than we are. Amen.

Jeremiah 52 • Psalm 143-144 • Revelation 1

Scripture Reading

Cristo Viene ya! Christ is coming! Revelation 1:7

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen." Revelation 1:7

Walking the dusty streets of the Dominican Republic, I would often see the phrase "Cristo Viene Ya!" prominently painted on the front door of many houses. Although the humble structures were a mixture of cinder block, irregular sticks, and corrugated sheet metal cobbled together to keep most of the sun and rain out, the solid wooden doors proudly proclaimed what the families who dwelled inside firmly believed: Christ is coming again! I felt convicted the first time my interpreter explained what the phrase meant. How different my life would be if I were reminded every time I entered my house that Christ is coming! I wondered what effect it had on the lives of these people who lived in great poverty. Did it provide hope to endure their daily suffering?

Or did it eventually lose its impact like the encouraging statements I often write in marker on my bathroom mirror? Knowing that Christ will return does not mean that we should sell everything, find a cave, and count down the days. On the other hand, we should not live a life of complacency, ignoring the urgency of the times we are living in. In fact, in 2 Peter 3:11, Peter admonishes the Saints to keep praying for each other, loving each other, fellowshipping with each other, and serving each other even as the day of Christ approaches. There is no need to panic. Neither should we become disinterested. self-focused consumers. We must live between the two extremes.

Prayer

Father, keep us from complacency and hysteria. Ready us to proclaim salvation to all those who will listen until the day we die or You return. Maranatha!

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Ezekiel 1-3 • Revelation 2

Scripture Reading

How Does That Happen?

Revelation 2:1-7

TODAY'S FOCUS

"But I have this against you, that you have left your first love." Revelation 2:4

It appears that the apostle Paul spent more time with the church in Ephesus than with any other (see Acts 19:8-10). He wrote the believers there a wonderful letter in which he prayed that they might "grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge" (Ephesians 3:18-19).

Later Jesus said about that same church: "I know your deeds, your hard work, and your perseverance. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name. Yet, I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first."

Did Jesus mean that members of that church no longer loved each other or that they no longer loved Him—or both? Did they love someone or something new? Jesus did not say that His love had abandoned them; that will never happen. But He said that this church set aside or discarded, their love.

How does it happen that an individual or a church stops loving the Savior who loves them so much? How long does it take?

Paul urges us to "put on love" every hour, every day, continually (see Colossians 3:14). And the love he has in mind is not our love but God's love, Jesus' love. Put His love on; live in and out of God's love. Doing that, we won't hear Jesus say to us what He sadly had to say to the church in Ephesus.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, alert us if we begin to show signs of forsaking our love for you. May we make and keep your love central in our lives.

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Ezekiel 4-7 • Revelation 3

Scripture Reading

The Deceitfulness of Success Revelation 3:14-19

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent." Revelation 3:19

Jesus' letter to his church in Laodicea is stirring and gripping in its imagery. This church community is identified as being like lukewarm water, not fit for drinking. The plot thickens when Jesus says, "I am about to spit you out of my mouth." What created this culture of being neither cold nor hot? There was a smug sense of selfsecurity based on accumulated wealth and possessions. This church had become rich in material goods. Prosperity and convinced the Laodicean success Christians that they had everything they needed.

In this letter, Jesus gives smug self-security a bone-chilling reality check. He says, "But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked." I wonder which hurt more: being told that they did not know the truth of their own condition or the string of negative descriptions that we read here. These are painful words for a church to hear. But at the same time, these words reveal the degree to which Jesus loves even a lukewarm community of believers. Today let us listen to Jesus' reality check for what it is, a love letter calling for repentance and change.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your great and precious promises. You are faithful and loving. Your promises are for me. They will never fail or falter. I will use the faith you have given me to believe and receive your promises, at the time you have them for me.

Amen.	
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Ezekiel 8-11 • Revelation 4

Scripture Reading

Worship the Lord Revelation 4:1-8

Prayer

You are holy, Lord God Almighty. We bow before you, the one who was and is and is to come. We thank you that our times are in your hands. In Jesus' name, *Amen*.

TODAY'S FOCUS

"...day and night they do not cease to say, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come." Revelation 4:8

The apostle John wrote this letter to the churches in Asia Minor in a time of great crisis. Persecution had greatly increased among first-century Christians. John was banished to the island of Patmos for refusing to worship the Roman emperor as Lord. From there, he sent this letter describing a vision from God. He challenged his readers to see that what they were experiencing was a prelude to the joyful celebration that would take place when the Lord returns. By faith, we too must see what is going on in the world. By faith, we must see that the kingdom of God has come because Jesus has come.

By faith, we can serve him with joy every day. John invites us to worship God in song, joining with the four living creatures near the throne, saying, "'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,' who was, and is, and who is to come." Whenever we worship God, we are invited to sing with these creatures that our God is eternal and absolutely pure. No matter what season of life we are in, or what our circumstances may be, and no matter who the shakers and movers in our world appear to be, we too can sing, "Our God reigns! He is in control!" Because of Jesus we may joyfully approach his throne and worship him today.

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Ezekiel 12-14 • Revelation 5

Scripture Reading

Blood Relatives Revelation 5:9

TODAY'S FOCUS

"And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are You to take the scroll and to break its seals; for You were slaughtered, and You purchased people for God with Your blood from every tribe, language, people, and nation." Revelation 5:9

Under the vast horizontal sky, a mission team and over 15 tribes and 6 denominations gathered together in Kenya for a marriage conference. The men assembled in a barn-type structure reminiscent of a stable that you would erect for a Christmas manger scene.

There was even hay on the ground. The husbands were charged with the task of preparing the meat for our fellowship meal and the women prepared the vegetables. I had never seen a sheep slaughtered before. As the husbands led the large furry animal through the throng of men I could not help but feel a range of emotions; sorrow for the sheep mixed with trepidation and slight queasiness.

Moreover, I could not help but become overwhelmed by the evocative symbolism of this moment so often used to illustrate Christ's sacrifice for my sin. True to form, the sheep was slaughtered without uttering a sound. Although the men held its feet, it offered very little resistance. Unless you have experienced an animal giving up its life so that you may live, it is hard for these verses to command the power that they had for both New Testament and Old Testament readers.

The men reverenced the moment and respected the sheep by utilizing every part of it, nothing was wasted. Finally, we broke bread together, in the sanctuary of the rustic church. We ate, we danced, and we sang glorious songs unto the Lord. It was beautiful to see God's people celebrating together at this marriage feast. We were of different colors, different nations, and different tongues. It was the most vivid foreshadowing of what the Apostle John promised in Revelation 5:9-11 awaits those who believe!

Prayer

Lord, we thank you for your sacrifice that will one day allow all nations, tribes, and peoples to celebrate together in your presence. Only through your blood can we be made one. We long for that day!

Amen.



Scripture Reading

May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you.

TODAY'S FOCUS

"May all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; and may those who love Your salvation say continually, 'May God be exalted!" Psalm 70:4

Incentives: Survival

What do you do when you are the object of relentless attack? What do you do when there is a powerful campaign by enemies who want to ruin you and bring you harm? They are pursuing you, and they will not be satisfied until they see you eliminated. On more than one occasion, David was the target of a search-and-destroy mission. One time, his enemies even posted a watch on his house, planning to kill him when he came out in the morning. If his wife, Michal, had not warned him and smuggled him out of the house at night through a window, he would have been a dead man (see 1 Samuel 19:1-17).

So again, David recognized that God had rescued him from certain danger through the help of others. These enemies had come to kill him, but his wife had helped him to escape. So David rightly gave God the credit for watching over him and saving him. When there are people in our lives who are not wishing us well but who instead are out to get us and won't be happy until we are out of the picture and gone, what can we do? David's psalm tells us that he sought help from the Lord. While his enemies were seeking to squeeze the life out of him, David sought God to pour life into him. Sometimes we seek God just to survive!

Prayer

Father in heaven, help me to seek you, especially when enemies are breathing down my neck. May I find joy in you, even in dangerous and fearful times. For Jesus's sake, Amen.

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