



KINGDOM PREACHERS

Forty Daily Devotionals
from James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John, and Jude
(Based on the NKJV)

Introduction

The letters from which we will be reading over these next forty days make up the largest part of what is often referred to as the “General Epistles” section of the New Testament. Hebrews will be the only one of those eight letters that we will not be reading from in this devotional guide. The term “general” is applied to these letters because they are not addressed to any one specific church or person. They are written for the instruction and inspiration of all churches and Christians. This does not make these writings any less personal in their appeal or any less powerful in their application. We will be reading the writings of four different men. Two of them (Peter and John) were part of The Twelve who walked with Jesus for the full three years of His earthly ministry. The other two (James and Jude) knew Him even longer than that! These two men were half-brothers that were born to Joseph and Mary after the miraculous birth of Jesus Christ. I know that you will be blessed with the great spiritual truths that we will receive from these faithful Kingdom Preachers.

Daily Reading Schedule

Day	Scripture Reading	Date
1	James 1:1-8	8/6/22
2	James 1:9-18	8/7/22
3	James 1:19-26	8/8/22
4	James 2:1-9	8/9/22
5	James 2:10-17	8/10/22
6	James 2:18-26	8/11/22
7	James 3:1-8	8/12/22
8	James 3:9-18	8/13/22
9	James 4:1-17	8/14/22
10	James 5:1-11	8/15/22
11	James 5:12-20	8/16/22
12	I Peter 1:1-12	8/17/22
13	1 Peter 1:13-25	8/18/22
14	1 Peter 2:1-8	8/19/22
15	1 Peter 2:9-17	8/20/22
16	1 Peter 2:18-25	8/21/22
17	1 Peter 3:1-12	8/22/22
18	1 Peter 3:13-22	8/23/22
19	1 Peter 4:1-11	8/24/22
20	1 Peter 4:12-19	8/25/22

Day	Scripture Reading	Date
21	1 Peter 5:1-14	8/26/22
22	2 Peter 1:1-11	8/27/22
23	2 Peter 1:12-21	8/28/22
24	2 Peter 2:1-11	8/29/22
25	2 Peter 2:12-22	8/30/22
26	2 Peter 3:1-9	8/31/22
27	2 Peter 3:10-18	9/1/22
28	1 John 1	9/2/22
29	1 John 2:1-17	9/3/22
30	1 John 2:18-29	9/4/22
31	1 John 3:1-10	9/5/22
32	1 John 3:11-24	9/6/22
33	1 John 4:1-12	9/7/22
34	1 John 4:13-21	9/8/22
35	1 John 5:1-12	9/9/22
36	1 John 5:13-21	9/10/22
37	2 John 1-13	9/11/22
38	3 John 1-14	9/12/22
39	Jude 1-13	9/13/22
40	Jude 14-25	9/14/22

Day 1: James 1:1-8

“James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.” (James 1:1)

A Servant of God

There are at least three men named James mentioned in the New Testament. Only two of those men could possibly be considered as the author of this important letter. Since the elder apostle named James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John, had already died a martyr’s death by the time this letter was written, we can safely conclude that he was not the writer of this epistle. Scholars agree that the James who wrote this epistle was the oldest of the half-brothers of Jesus. We believe that he was the oldest of the other sons of Mary and Joseph because he was listed first in Matthew 13:55. We know that he was not always a believer in Jesus as the Messiah (John 7:5). Isn’t it amazing that this man who had once rejected Jesus as the One who was sent from the Father later became one of the earliest leaders in the church? This man, who had once rejected the deity of Christ, now believed in Him and referred to himself as “a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” He was one of the individuals to whom Christ personally appeared after the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7) and Paul once referred to him as one of the “pillars” of the church (Galatians 2:9). Our verses end today with James commenting on the “double-minded” man (v. 8). He died for his faith about 12 years after he wrote this book of the Bible. It seems that he had found the kind of faith that put all of his doubts about Jesus behind him.

Prayer Emphasis: **Never** give up on people! **Believe** that God can do a mighty work in the lives of your unbelieving friends and family members. **Pray** for the salvation of someone you know today and **ask** God to give you opportunities to share your faith with them.

Day 2: James 1:9-18

“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” (James 1:12)

The Test

In our focus verse, James speaks of those who have “been approved.” Some translations use the words “tried” or “stood the test” here. There are two primary views about this testing that James mentioned here. Some believe that this is speaking about the time that a believer’s work will be tried, or tested, by the Lord (1 Cor. 3:13) and that the “crown” that James mentions here represents the rewards of those who faithfully served God even in the face of persecution. Others believe that the “crown” that James had in mind here was about the blessings that God would pour out upon His faithful in this lifetime. I do not find it difficult to believe that the Holy Spirit had some of both in mind when He inspired James to write these wonderful words! There is a great blessedness that accompanies those who serve the Lord faithfully in this life and the promise of an even greater blessedness that will follow in eternity. The key thing to remember is that this promise of rewards – whether in the here or the hereafter – is made to those who “endures” (NKJV) or “perseveres” (NIV) through the many temptations that are faced in life.

Prayer Emphasis: **Refuse** to allow trials and temptations to stop you! **Seek** God’s strength to see you through the tough times! **Enjoy** the blessedness that accompanies those who serve God on a “Whatever You Want” basis! **Pray** for and **encourage** someone who is experiencing trials today.

Day 3: James 1:19-26

“If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” (James 1:26-27)

Is Our Religion Real?

James spoke of a person who “thinks he is” (NKJV) or “considers himself” (NIV) “religious.” The word “religious” there refers to good things like giving, praying, church attendance, and other things that we have learned to anticipate seeing in the lives of those who are followers of Christ. The word “thinks” (“seem” in some translations) indicates that there may be those who do things that a Christian should do and yet not really be what a Christian should be. James offers a three-fold test to apply to our “religion” so that we can be sure that it is the real thing. The first test of true religion is *a controlled tongue* (v. 26). Every believer is responsible to “bridle” (NKJV) or to “keep a tight rein” (NIV) on his tongue. The second test is *a compassionate heart* (v. 27). Genuine Christians are marked by a genuine concern for people in need, such as the fatherless and widows, especially when these folks are in “trouble” (NKJV) or “distress” (NIV). The third test is *a consecrated life* (v. 27). A sincere follower of Christ truly desires to keep himself “unspotted” (NKJV) or from “being polluted” (NIV) by “the world.”

Prayer Emphasis: Ask the tough questions! Do your *words* and your *works* provide sufficient evidence to indicate to others that you are a genuine Christian? Is your religion real? Ask yourself, “Do others see me as a person who has *a controlled tongue, a compassionate heart, and a consecrated life?*”

Day 4: James 2:1-9

“If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.” (James 2:8-9)

The Royal Law

James 1:1 identified the target audience of this letter to be the “twelve tribes,” or the ancestors of Jacob’s sons. As such, these Jewish readers would have no problem understanding what James was referring to when he mentioned, “the royal law.” This law was clearly identified in Leviticus 19:18: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” In Matthew 22:39, Jesus clearly stated that this “royal law” was the second highest priority for all mankind. The Jews understood that the first four commandments (Exodus 20) had to do with a right relationship with God. When they were in a right relationship with God, they would be able to fulfill what they considered to be “the royal law,” that being, to love their fellow man and to exhibit that love by treating their fellow man in the ways that were commanded in the final six commandments. Paul admonished us to owe no man any debt but love. He reminded us that we have fulfilled the law when we love our fellow man (Romans 13:8). Take a few moments and review Romans 13:9-10 and note the commandments that are referenced there. Clearly, the “royal law” is based upon our loving others with a royal love.

Prayer Emphasis: Practice the Golden Rule in all your relationships. Realize that much can be discovered about the way that we love God by observing the way that we treat others. Always remember to **think** and **pray** before you **speak** and **act** and there will be a greater probability that people will see “the royal law” lived out in your life.

Day 5: James 2:10-17

“For He who said, ‘Do not commit adultery’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.” (James 2:11-12)

The Royal Treatment

Since believers are encouraged to employ the royal law in their lives, an outgrowth of such will be that those we encounter, and to whom we minister, will enjoy the royal treatment. If we are to succeed in living out the royal law, then we will have to remember to watch how we “speak” and “do” (NKJV) or how we “speak and act” (NIV). If we are to avoid the “partiality” (NKJV) or “favoritism” (NIV) that is mentioned in James 2:1, then we must pay careful attention to what is said in James 2:12! We must learn to judge others as we would desire that God judge us, that being “by the law of liberty” (NKJV) or “the law that gives freedom” (NIV). This judgment is not about the determination of our eternal destiny, but about the rewards that will be assigned to us in heaven. This verse encourages us to treat others with the same kind of grace and mercy that we ourselves have been treated by God. When we do this, we will treat all people with courtesy, compassion, and consistency. Every person who comes to God’s house should be treated as we would want them to treat us.

Prayer Emphasis: **Welcome** people into our fellowship and services. **Greet** a new person every time you see them and let them know how happy you are that they are in the services or a part of our church body. **Treat** every person the way that you would want a church to treat you. **Invite** someone who is obviously alone to sit with you and your family.

Day 6: James 2:18-26

“But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” (James 2:18)

Faith You Can “See”

There is a great difference in the person who makes a profession of having faith and the person who has the possession of faith (see James 2:14). The difference is found in the fact that the one person has a lot to *say* about their faith and another has a lot to *show* because of their faith. James clearly says that we can “show” our faith to others through the “works” (KJV) or “deeds” (NIV) that should be an outgrowth of Christ living in us and our living out our new life in Him. The Greek word that is translated “show” in our focus verse is a word that means “to expose to the eyes” or “to give evidence or proof of something.” James challenged his readers to try showing their faith without works. That was something that they could not achieve, and we cannot do it today, either. But James goes on to say that there is a way for us to make our faith visible to those around us. He says that we can exhibit our faith to others by exercising the spiritual gifts which Christ has so graciously bestowed upon us and doing the spiritual works that Christ has called us to do. Every day should be “show and tell” day for the believer!

Prayer Emphasis: **Seek** out ways and opportunities to make the love of Christ visible to others through kind words or deeds. **Review** James 1:12 and remember to “speak and act” (NIV). When it comes to sharing spiritual truth, we must constantly remind ourselves that we live in a world of visual learners! **Do** something kind for someone today and **give** Christ all the credit!

Day 7: James 3:1-8

“And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature, and is set on fire by hell...But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” (James 3:6 & 8)

“No Man” = “No Exceptions”

There are some “no man” statements that are made in the Bible to which there are no exceptions. For instance, in some translations, like the KJV, Matthew 6:24 quotes Jesus as saying that, “No man can serve two masters.” The NKJV, and others, use the words “no one” in that same verse. In that verse, the Lord was speaking to those who thought it possible to serve God and money. He clearly stated that it was impossible to do both. People have been forever trying to prove themselves to be the exception to that rule but with no success. The same is true about the tongue. The Holy Spirit clearly declares that “no man” or “no one” can tame the tongue because it is “evil” and full of “deadly poison.” If we choose to live in a state of denial about this inherent weakness, then we will have to live in constant denial about what we have said or, at least, what we meant by it. Sometimes we are all guilty of saying too much – or speaking too soon – about a matter. None of us can afford to trust our tongues to always speak in words or tones that best exhibit the Christ that lives in us. Earlier, in James 1:19, we were reminded to be “slow to speak,” and that by doing so, we would also be “slow to wrath” (NKJV) or “slow to become angry” (NIV).

Prayer Emphasis: Learn to **excuse yourself** from certain conversations and you will be less likely to have to make excuses for the things that you say. **Confess** to God when you sin against Him and others by allowing your tongue to escape its bridle. **Make amends** when you can and determine to **exercise** Christian caution before speaking.

Day 8: James 3:9-18

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.” (James 3:17)

Some “Speech” Therapy

There is an important lesson in today’s verses that may make more difference in the effectiveness of our ministries than any other one thing mentioned in the Bible. This important lesson reminds us that, since the tongue cannot be *controlled*, then it most definitely needs to be *cleansed*! Our focus verse provides some important information about the kind of wise speaking that can be a blessing to everyone we encounter. First, we are to consider *the source of wise speaking*. It is to be “from above” (NKJV) or “from heaven” (NIV). Then we are to consider *the sincerity of wise speaking*. It is to be “first pure; then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and *without hypocrisy*.” We will not receive this kind of speech therapy from anywhere but heaven! We cannot fill our minds with what we see on network television or hear on secular radio stations and expect to speak the way that God desires us to speak or the way that the world needs us to speak! When our hearts and minds are filled with God’s Word, then our conversations will be found to be a blessing to others.

Prayer Emphasis: **Refuse** to repeat anything before you carefully consider the source! Before speaking, **ask** yourself, “Who am I quoting here?” “What kind of person speaks this way?” When we speak the language of heaven, we are speaking a language of love that everyone can clearly understand.

Day 9: James 4:1-17

“But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” (James 4:6-8)

Submit vs. Resist

In all the months that I have been prayerfully selecting a focus verse from our daily devotional readings, today’s verses represented what might have been the greatest challenge thus far. This is a powerful chapter in the New Testament, and it is filled with great truths that can equip any believer to walk more fully for Christ. The word translated “submit” in our focus verses means “to place oneself under the authority or administration of another.” It came from a military term that described the arranging of troops under a supreme commander. The word translated “resist” is the same word that is translated “withstand” (NKJV) or “to stand your ground” (NIV) in Ephesians 6:13. In that verse, we are told to put on the “whole armor of God” so that we might be able to “withstand” or “resist” the evil one. It is important to note the order in which James uses these two important commands. We are first to “submit to God.” Then we are to “resist the devil.” There is no way to live victoriously for Christ without first surrendering our lives to Christ. If we submit to Him, He will equip us to resist the devil and face our foe without giving ground.

Prayer Emphasis: **Refuse** to lose the battle simply because you offered no resistance. Do not allow the devil to win by default! **Commit** to daily Bible reading and prayer and **ask** God to equip you to stand your ground against Satan and his devilish tricks.

Day 10: James 5:1-11

“Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!” (James 5:9)

Here Comes the Judge!

James closes his powerful letter with some strong admonitions about how the second coming of Christ should affect the way that believers live and think. When he tells his readers that “the Judge is standing at the door” he is reminding them of the fact that Jesus could return at any moment and that every believer will soon be standing before Him. Because of that, James urged his readers to do several things. First, in verses 1-6, he urged them to prioritize their values. Christians should not place high values on perishable things like fine clothes, jewelry, and worldly possessions. All these things will someday corrode and rot away. Next, in verses 7-11, he urged them to be patient in times of trial and affliction. It may surprise you to learn that this is the only place in the New Testament where Job is mentioned. The soon coming of our Lord should remind all of us to take our eyes off the things of this world and to put our eyes on Jesus Christ. By doing so, we will be able to see our way through even the most difficult situations. The word translated “perseverance” in verse 11 comes from two Greek words that mean “long” and “tempered.” This word is often translated “patience” in other translations of the New Testament. This term was sometimes translated “long fused” in other Greek documents.

Prayer Emphasis: **Decide** to be a “long fused” Christian. **Refuse** to be short-tempered and impatient with others. **Look** to Christ as your example and **ask** Him to teach you how to be more like Him when it comes to relationships and dealings with others.

Day 11: James 5:12-20

“But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No,’ lest you fall into judgment.” (James 5:12)

Here Comes the Judge (Part Two)

Today’s verses continue James’ closing remarks on how the soon coming of Christ should affect the way Christians live and interact with others. As he continues to stress these important points, James mentions that believers should be pure in their speaking (v. 12). James states that those who tell the truth do not have to support their words by swearing “by heaven or by earth,” or “with any other oath.” In verses 13-18 James continues to sum up his thoughts and instructions by stating that believers who live considering the soon coming of Christ will be prayerful in their trials. Verse 13 clearly reveals that James believed that Christians would see times when they were “suffering” (NKJV) or “in trouble” (NIV). Verse 14 clearly reveals that there are times when believers, even the best of believers, are “sick.” The Bible clearly indicates that Christians will sometimes encounter sickness and disease. James then, in verses 19-20, closes his letter by encouraging all believers to be consistent and persistent in their witnessing to others, whether they are lost or straying believers.

Prayer Emphasis: **Thank** God for the commitment of the New Testament writers like James. **Pray** for someone who is experiencing sickness or trials right now and **let them know** that you are praying for them. **Encourage** and **strengthen** a fellow believer today.

Day 12: 1 Peter 1:1-12

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” (1 Peter 1:3)

Hope

In verse 1, Peter addressed his letter to “the pilgrims” (NKJV) or “strangers in the world” (NIV). These people were strangers politically because they had no homeland of their own, and they were living under the rule of other governments. They were strangers spiritually because they were now citizens of Heaven who no longer fit into this world and its system. He also referred to his readers as being “of the Dispersion” (NKJV) or “scattered” (NIV). The word translated “scattered” in Peter’s opening remarks is a word that refers to the way that a farmer might sometimes scatter his seed by tossing it into a strong wind and letting that wind carry it out across his fields. Sadly, this is how many of the scattered Jewish believers felt. Despite this, Peter begins his letter to these people by talking about “a living hope”! The believer’s hope is “*a living hope*” because it is placed in a living Savior! In verses 4-5, Peter also states that the believer’s hope is *a lasting hope*. Our inheritance is not of this world and, therefore, will never become corrupted or fade away. He closes with a reminder that the believer’s hope is *a loving hope* (v. 8). Many of the new Christians to whom Peter was writing had never seen Jesus personally. Yet, because of their love for Him, they persevered through the many trials and afflictions that they faced.

Prayer Emphasis: **Be** a hopeful person and **practice** sharing your hope with others. **Speak** to someone about Christ today and let him or her know how much joy Jesus brings to your life. **Refuse** to become discouraged when your life seems to be “scattered” and things do not go as you might desire. **Trust** God to be at work in your life and that He will bring about that which is best for you and your family.

Day 13: 1 Peter 1:13-25

“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’” (1 Peter 1:13-16)

Holiness

The hope that lives in the believer’s heart should be their greatest motivation to holiness. Since we know that God would not command us to be something that it would be impossible for us to be, we must understand that the word “holy” does not mean to be sinless and morally perfect. In the New Testament, this word is used to describe those who have separated themselves, in full devotion, to the Lord. Verse 14 helps us to understand holiness when it tells us that we are to be “as obedient children.” Since we are God’s children, we should bear some characteristics that resemble our Father! Verse 17 reminds us that our “work” will one day be judged by God. This fact alone should be enough to motivate us to live lives that are dedicated to God and His will. However, the fact that we have been redeemed by “the precious blood of Christ” should be the greatest motivation to live holy lives and to follow Christ completely (v. 19).

Prayer Emphasis: **Accept** God’s challenge to holiness. **Strive** to make your best effort a fair representation of our Heavenly Father. **Acknowledge** that we are far from perfect, but do not allow that acknowledgment to stop us from desiring to succeed in our every spiritual endeavor.

Day 14: 1 Peter 2:1-8

“Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking,” (1 Peter 2:1)

Harmony

Three of the first topics that Peter addressed to his readers were hope, holiness, and harmony. You can see that the Holy Spirit is leading Peter to lay a solid foundation for successful Christian living early in this letter. Hope leads to holiness and holiness leads to harmony. The first word of our focus verse, “therefore,” definitely connects what Peter is about to say now to what he has been saying in the first chapter. Because we are God’s hope-filled, holy children, we are instructed to be “laying aside” (NKJV) or to “rid ourselves” (NIV) of “all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking.” When believers are living in hope and pursuing holiness, they will feel disconnected with those who are angry and speaking evil, slanderous things about others. You must believe that these were not easy words for Peter to pen. He, more than anyone else, knew that he had failed Christ during His last days and that his speech had certainly not been what one would have expected. He had boasted of great faithfulness only to become a great failure. However, our preaching cannot be based on our lives, but on the life that Christ lived before us. That life was not a life of deceit, and there was not one ounce of hypocrisy in the One who died for us. When Jesus becomes our model, we will begin to succeed spiritually. It is only when we stop looking at others and look to Christ that we will have true harmony in our churches.

Prayer Emphasis: **Ask** God to forgive you for hurtful speaking and divisive words. **Seek** forgiveness from others, if necessary, and be willing to **forgive** those who have hurt you – even without an apology. Politely **separate** yourself from conversations and Christians who are destructive and divisive. **Refuse** to repeat gossip and slander.

Day 15: 1 Peter 2:9-17

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;” (1 Peter 2:9)

A Royal Priesthood

Earlier in this devotional guide we read where James spoke of the royal law that required that we give others what we referred to as the royal treatment. Now we have Peter describing those who are followers of Christ as “a royal priesthood.” Earlier, in 2:5, he referred to believers as “a holy priesthood.” Peter is closing the opening remarks of his letter with some simple reminders of who we are. No believer should ever lose sight of the fact that we (Jewish and Gentile believers together) are a chosen people – just as assuredly as Israel was God’s elect and chosen people in the Old Testament message. We have been chosen to be “a holy nation,” meaning, that we, as believers, have been set apart for this royal service to our Lord. At Sinai, God told Moses to tell the people, “And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). The church now has the privilege of being “God’s people” who have been authorized to “proclaim” (NKJV) or “declare” (NIV) God’s praises.

Prayer Emphasis: Remember who you are! **Refuse** to forget the price that God paid to be able to declare you to be His chosen child. **Live** for eternal purposes and **share** some praise with someone that you meet today. **Strive** to be the “special” person that God has called you to be and “proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” It can be done!

Day 16: 1 Peter 2:18-25

“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:” (1 Peter 2:21)

In His Steps

When I was a very young Christian, my pastor gave me a book written by Charles Sheldon entitled “In His Steps.” Our wise pastor had everyone in our little youth group reading this book and it had a powerful impact on our lives. Although Sheldon was not the first to use the phrase, “What would Jesus do?” he added it as a subtitle to his book and the phrase became what it is today. Unfortunately, his publisher failed to register the copyright in the proper form, and Sheldon soon saw his book, and this coined phrase, become public domain. As a result of that mistake, the author received very few royalties on a book that has now sold over thirty million copies. However, that might seem like meager fair to the eternal reward that continuously flows to him in heaven every time someone reads his book and decides to walk in the steps of the Savior. Too many people pluck this verse out of its context and preach beautiful messages about following Christ. However, if you read this verse in context, you will soon see that the call to follow the example of Christ – to “follow His steps” – is a calling associated with suffering and great sacrifice. The “example” that Christ left us was one of a suffering servant who freely gave His life for the good of others. Look again at verse 23 and note the words, “He was reviled” and “He suffered.”

Prayer Emphasis: Read the Bible and **learn** how you can truly follow in the very footsteps of Jesus. **Seek** to serve others with an appropriate heart attitude. **Be kind** in your relationships. **Accept** whatever path God sets forth for you and walk it with faith and endurance. At life’s end, you will never regret one moment that you spent serving Jesus!

Day 17: 1 Peter 3:1-12

“Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.” (1 Peter 3:1-2)

“Without A Word”

Peter was the only apostle who the Bible ever mentions being married, and, as far as we know, he was the only one of the original twelve who was. It does not take a long look at this man’s life to know that he was not perfect. Therefore, he is not speaking here as the perfect husband, demanding submission from his own wife and all women to their husbands. He is using the voluntary submission of a wife to her husband to help his readers understand how we, as believers, should live in submission to Christ and those to whom He has called us to serve. The phrase, “likewise” (NKJV) or “In the same way” (NIV) refers to the kind of submission that Peter said believers should have to governmental authorities (2:13-17) and that slaves should have to their masters (2:18-25). When a Christian woman lives her life as God commands, God uses that woman to preach a message “without a word” that could lead to the salvation of her husband and others. All of us have been called to preach this kind of sermon. We are preaching to others every day as we live out our lives and follow the example of Christ.

Prayer Emphasis: Ask yourself, “If my life were a book, what title would others give it?” **Refuse** to underestimate the impact that your life has on others. **Be** intentional in your walk and **see** every situation as a ministry opportunity. A life that convinces others that Christ is real will always be a “best seller!”

Day 18: 1 Peter 3:13-22

“And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed. ‘And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.’” (1 Peter 3:13-14)

Happy

I cannot count the times that a counseling session has included the comment, “I just want to be happy!” Our English word “happy” comes from a word that means to have “good luck or favorable circumstances.” As such, when many people say that they want to be happy, they are saying that they want to live among their own designed, desired circumstances. Peter, and those who heard him speak, knew that the word meant something different. In its original form, the word that is translated “happy” (KJV) or “blessed” (NKJV and NIV) in our focus verse is a word that means “to be fully satisfied.” According to Matthew 5:3-11, the kind of blessedness or “happy” that Jesus preached meant to be “fully satisfied” even when we are “poor in spirit,” or when we “mourn.” It means to be content even when we are forced to walk in meekness and when we suffer persecution. The happiness of which Jesus preached was not associated with getting what we want but in our giving what He has called us to give to the world around us. It is the kind of happiness that comes on an “even if” basis!

Prayer Emphasis: Review James 1:12 and 25 and **look** for the word “blessed.” That is the same word that we have discussed today. In that case, the word is used to describe the person who consistently serves Christ on an “in spite of” and not a “because of” basis. **Make** every effort to be that kind of Christian. **Live** to give and not just to get!

Day 19: 1 Peter 4:1-11

“And above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins.’ Be hospitable to one another, without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” (1 Peter 4:8-10)

Above All

The Greek word that is translated “above” in verse 8 is translated “before” in every place that it is found in the New Testament – except for here and in James 5:12! If you were keeping score, the “Befores” would outpace the “Aboves” 44 – 2! The word comes from the little Greek word “pro” which simply means “before.” James told us that, “Above all,” we, as Christians, should speak truthfully at all times and without sensing the need to support what we say by swearing or making an oath. Peter now tells us that, “Above all,” we should “have fervent love” (NKJV) or to “love each other deeply” (NIV). James reminded us that, “Above all,” or “before anything else,” we should be careful to *talk* like a Christian should *talk* (James 5:12). Peter now writes and reminds us that, “Above all, or “before anything else,” we should be careful to *walk* like a Christian should *walk*! Notice that verse 10 clearly states that “each one has received a gift.” No believer is without a spiritual gift! And every believer is responsible to “minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”

Prayer Emphasis: Review James 5:20 and you will see that the same word that is translated “cover” there is the same word that is used to describe what love can do when it is considered “before” or “above all” in 1 Peter 4:8. **Exercise** Christian love by not disclosing the faults and imperfections of others. **Dispose of** such things as gossip and slander like yesterday’s garbage.

Day 20: 1 Peter 4:12-19

“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;” (1 Peter 4:12)

Trials

Peter says some powerful things about trials in these verses. Even though I have selected verse 12 as our focus verse, I am going to comment on several of our verses today by providing you with a simple outline of this passage that God gave to me many years ago. I have preached these verses many times and, in many places, since I was a very young man. First, God tells us that trials are *planned* (v. 12). It is not a “strange” or uncommon thing for believers to experience trials. It never has been, and it never shall be, an easy walk when we choose to follow Christ. Second, God tells us that trials are *purposeful* (v. 14). If we are called to walk the path of persecution, then God will use that path to bring blessing into our lives and to display His glory to others. Third, God tells us that trials are *precious* (v. 16) because they afford us an opportunity to “glorify” (NKJV) or to “praise” (NIV) God as we suffer unashamedly on His behalf. Because of these things, God tells us, then, that trials can be *pleasant* (v. 13). In that verse, we are told to “rejoice” in our trials. And why should this be? We can choose to rejoice in difficult times because God tells us that facing trials is a way of participating in the ministry of Christ (v. 13).

Prayer Emphasis: Recall some of your past experiences and **see** the good that God brought into your life during some time of trial. **Thank** God for such experiences and **praise** Him through every tough situation. **Seek** out an opportunity to testify to someone about the goodness of God today.

Day 21: 1 Peter 5:1-14

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.” (1 Peter 5:8-9)

Our Adversary

Peter closes this first letter with three important exhortations to his readers. First, *he exhorts them to be faithful* (vs. 1-4). These first verses are addressed primarily to the pastors, but he extends the same exhortation to the people, as well. Notice that Peter emphasizes the fact that people should serve the Lord “not by compulsion” (NKJV) but “because (they) are willing” (NIV). Christians should be faithful to the Lord because they desire to be and not because they must be. Then, *Peter exhorts them to be humble* (vs. 5-7). He tells his readers to “be clothed with humility.” Most believe that this is a direct reference to the way that the Lord clothed Himself as a servant and washed the feet of the disciples. I am sure that Peter, or any of the other apostles, was ever able to forget that evening of the Lord’s humble service to them. Last, *Peter exhorted them to be watchful* (vs. 8-11). He warns them that Satan is their “adversary” (NKJV) or “enemy” (NIV). This word was used to describe the prosecutors who attempted to accuse and convict someone in a court of law. In Genesis, Satan appeared as a *serpent to deceive*, and in 1 Peter, Satan appears as a *lion that devours*. Believers in our day are to resist him by being “steadfast in the faith” (v. 9).

Prayer Emphasis: Resist Satan in the faith! **Use** God’s Word as a shield of faith to deflect his deadly blows. **Refuse** to underestimate the devil or overestimate yourself. **Avoid** Satan’s traps by staying in the Word and on your knees!

Day 22: 2 Peter 1:1-11

“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue,” (2 Peter 1:2-3)

Everything We Need

Knowledge is a prominent theme in Peter’s second letter to believers. Verse 2 speaks of the “knowledge of God.” We will then read the word “knowledge” again in verses 3, 5, 6, and 8. This term does not refer to what God knows but to what we know about God. Peter states that God has given us “all things” (NKJV) or “everything we need” (NIV) to live godly lives through what He has taught us through His Son. Later in this letter, Peter will warn of false teachers who will rise from “among the people” (2:1). These words of wisdom would serve to prepare the people to avoid becoming involved with any teacher whose teachings did not follow the teachings of Christ. There is no new wisdom or new thought that can improve upon that which the Holy Spirit has already provided us. Let the Bible be your devotional guide and be a prolific reader of God’s Word. You may not understand everything that you read, but everything that you read will be preparing you to face the trials of the day so that you can live victoriously over the enemy.

Prayer Emphasis: Read God’s Word every day and **pray** for knowledge and understanding. As the old preachers used to say, “If there is dust on your Bible there is probably dirt in your life!” As you read God’s Word, **ask** Him to show you things that will feed your spiritual needs. **Remember**, “What you do with the Bible determines what God can do with you!”

Day 23: 2 Peter 1:12-21

“for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” 2 Peter 1:21)

The Origin of the Bible

Our focus verse contains an important statement about the Bible. Peter tells us that the Bible “never came” (NKJV) or “never had its origin” (NIV) in the will of man. The Bible came to us through men that God “moved” (NKJV) or “carried along” (NIV) by the Holy Spirit. By this, Peter is saying that he believed that the Bible was dutifully written by the hands of men but divinely inspired by the heart of God. This statement follows the important teaching of verse 20, where we are told that “no prophecy of Scripture is of” (NKJV) or “came about” (NIV) by the prophet’s own interpretation. In other words, Peter is saying that the Bible is not about what men think but, rather, it is about what God says! This echoes Paul’s statement in 2 Timothy 3:16 where he said that the Bible was “given by inspiration of God” (NKJV) or “God breathed” (NIV). Every Christian must come to a place of certainty about what the Bible *is* before they can ever come to any certainly about what the Bible *says*.

Prayer Emphasis: **Believe** that the Bible is God’s divine Word to man and treat it like a personal letter from God. **Organize** and **prioritize** your life and schedule so that there can be adequate time given to the reading of God’s Word every day.

Day 24: 2 Peter 2:1-11

“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.” (2 Peter 2:1)

False Teachers

Peter warned his readers that there would be false teachers “among the people” just like there were false prophets among the people of God in Old Testament times. However, he helps us to understand that there is a difference between false teaching and false teachers. A false teacher is not someone who misinterprets a Scripture or is in error in his personal understanding of the Word. In Acts 18:24-28, we read about Apollos teaching a false (incorrect) doctrine (the baptism of John), but he was not referred to as a false teacher. False teachers act intentionally and not out of ignorance. False teachers know the truth but turn and twist it to their own advantage, and, more often than not, for their own personal gain. They may be motivated by personal greed, personal glory, or both (v. 3)! Peter warns that they will bring in “destructive heresies” – even to the extent that they will deny the Lord for Who He is and Who He should be in our lives. Back in 1:16, Peter mentioned the cunningly devised fables” (NKJV) or the “cleverly invented stories” (NIV) that he had refused to follow and promote. There is one story to tell and that is the story of Jesus! Any teacher who desires his own glory over the glory of Christ will soon find himself in a very bad place.

Prayer Emphasis: **Serve** the Lord and **seek** only His glory. **Use** God’s Word to lift Christ up before men and **watch** Him keep His promise to draw all men to Himself. **Remember** that we have nothing to offer anyone but Jesus – but that Jesus is everything that they need!

Day 25: 2 Peter 2:12-22

“These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.” (2 Peter 2:17)

Wells without Water

In our focus verse, Peter declares false teachers to be like “wells” (NKJV) or “springs” (NIV) “without water.” You can imagine how devastating it would be to come to what appeared to be a well filled with refreshing water only to find that it was merely a dry hole! Such would be the case for those who followed these false teachers, Peter said. These false teachers would make many glittering promises but would not be able to produce one drop of spiritual water for their hearers. They would be like “clouds” (NKJV) or “mists” (NIV) that promised rain but never provided it. Their teachings may have appeared to be truthful and helpful, but they were given more for the benefit of the teacher than the pupil. In verse 18, Peter goes on to say that they speak with “swelling” (NKJV) or “boastful” (NIV) words of vanity that appeal more to the desires of the flesh than the spirit. Peter goes on to say that such false teachers “promise...liberty” while they themselves are “slaves of corruption” (v. 19).

Prayer Emphasis: Be cautious about the kind of teaching and preaching that you listen to. Even more importantly, **exercise** caution in the kind of teaching that *you* provide for others. **Remove** yourself from the equation at every opportunity and try to speak in ways that glorify only the Lord and edify the spiritual lives of your family and friends.

Day 26: 2 Peter 3:1-9

“Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior,” (2 Peter 3:1-2)

Some More “Be’s”

If you recall, 1 Peter 5 opened with three “Be” exhortations. Now we find Peter provided some more important “Be” exhortations to his readers. Two of these commands are found in the first nine verses of the chapter and two more are found in the last nine. First, Peter exhorts the people to “be mindful of” (NKJV) or “recall” (NIV) the things that they had been taught from the Old Testament preachers, as well as the Lord and the preachers that followed Him. This exhortation is closely connected to Peter’s earlier warnings against false teachers who teach things purely for their own gain and benefit (v. 3). The only way that these young Christians could avoid the pitfalls of false teaching was to have “pure minds” (KJV) or “wholesome thinking” (NIV). To do that they would have to “not forget” that the Lord’s Day would soon be upon them and that they should focus on what they have learned from their true, God-sent teachers (v. 8). Every believer should live every day as if it were the day that the Lord will return and our lives and ministries on this earth will be ended. At that time, there will be no one to scoff at what we believe or to mock us as we seek to live for the honor and glory of Christ. However, there will be no more opportunity for us to share the gospel of Christ with our unsaved friends and loved ones.

Prayer Emphasis: **Speak** of Christ to someone today. **Mention** Him and all that He has done for you in conversation. If you have an opportunity, **share** with someone about the peace and comfort that your faith in Christ provides you as you live through these last days.

Day 27: 2 Peter 3:10-18

“Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless;” (2 Peter 3:14)

The “Be’s” (Continued)

Peter now exhorts his readers to “be diligent” (NKJV) or “to make every effort” (NIV) to be ready for the day of the Lord’s return. The imminent return of Christ is a great incentive for godly living. It was for the earliest Christians and it should remain so for every Christian today. Why should we live for this world, and all that it offers us, when it is all going to perish at the end? We know that the Lord’s promises are true and we, therefore, remain faithful and diligent to His teachings. These true teachings will allow us to live “in peace” (KJV) or “at peace” (NIV) with Christ and “without spot” (NKJV) or “spotless” (NIV) in this world. Finally, Peter gives his last “Be” exhortation to his readers. He closes his letter by commanding us to “beware” (KJV) or to “be on your guard” (NIV) against false teaching and wayward living that would distract us from the task at hand (v. 17). Peter’s final command to us is that, even though we are surrounded by false teaching and wrong living, we are to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (v. 20). Times may “be” tough, but we can still “be” everything that God desires us to “be” if we keep our eyes on Jesus!

Prayer Emphasis: **Commit** your life to diligent, faithful service to Christ. **Read** again the final verse in this powerful lesson and **note** that it takes “grace and knowledge” to accomplish that goal. By grace we are saved and by knowledge we grow.

Day 28: 1 John 1

“If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John 1:6-7)

The First Test of Fellowship

In today’s reading, verse six speaks of those who walk in darkness while verse seven speaks of those who walk in light. Being in fellowship, or in harmony with God, was important to the early believers and it should be important to those of us who serve Christ today. Our second focus verse includes an “if,” which is a clear indication that it is entirely possible for a believer to be disobedient to this command and out of fellowship with God. John begins this important letter by providing a three-fold test for true fellowship. First, he says that *true fellowship is evidenced by walking in light*. We have fellowship with God when we come to Him and allow Him to conform (shape) us to His image. Far too often, people try to make God conform to their little world and their lifestyle when God is not the One who needs to change! Being in fellowship with God does not mean that we are perfect and sinless. Being in fellowship with God means that we are accepted by Him even when not everything we do or say is acceptable to Him.

Prayer Emphasis: **Seek** to walk in the light that God gives you through His Word. **Believe** that God desires to lead you down a pleasant and acceptable path and walk that path in faith and boldness. **Ask** God to mold you to His way of thinking and to show you, clearly, the way that He would have you go. **Mention** the Light of the World to someone that you see today.

Day 29: 1 John 2:1-17

“He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.” (1 John 2:9-10)

The Second “Test” of Fellowship

Yesterday we read where Peter said that *true fellowship is evidenced by walking in light*. Today’s verses reveal a second test of true fellowship when Peter teaches us that *true fellowship is evidenced by walking in love*. Our focus verses clearly indicate that one must first be walking in the light if they are to walk in love. When we are walking in the light, we will find that we are best equipped or enabled to walk in love. True fellowship with God is best evidenced by our being able to fellowship with one another. Notice that verse nine begins with “He who” (NKJV) or “Anyone” (NIV). This is yet another one of God’s rules to which no person is the exception. If we claim to be in the Light but fail to exhibit Christian love to our fellow believers, then we are still in darkness. However, if we love our brother, then we are walking in accordance with God’s light and can walk without stumbling. Satan’s greatest desire is to cause us to fail in our relationships. First, he would have us *fail in our relationship with God*. If we do that, he knows that we will certainly *fail in our relationships with people*. It is not likely that a person who truly loves God will live without loving his fellow believers.

Prayer Emphasis: Express Christian love to someone today. **Practice** kindness – verbally and visibly – to someone today. **Allow** God’s Word (the Light) to teach you how to love others. **Refuse** to be a source of discord in God’s family.

Day 30: 1 John 2:18-29

“And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.” (1 John 2:28)

The Third “Test” of Fellowship

John continues his line of teaching by revealing to us that the third test of *true fellowship is evidenced by walking in the Lord*. In our focus verse, he urges us to “abide” (NKJV) or to “continue” (NIV) in Him. This important Greek verb occurs ten times in the verses found in 1 John 2:6-27 and 23 times total in 1 John. John was committed to teaching his followers to find their being in Christ. Of the 112 times this Greek verb is used in the Scriptures, sixty-six of those times it was John that wrote it! John emphasized that believers must “live/abide/continue” in Him and that they must allow Him to “live/abide/continue” within them. We must never forget Who it is that enables us to walk in the light and empowers us to walk in love. Our ability to have fellowship with God – and our fellow believers – is not something that comes from our own strength or natural abilities. We can only fulfill these supernatural demands through the Supernatural One who lives within us. Our focus verse clearly indicates that a believer might be “ashamed before Him at His coming” (v. 28). This statement is not referring to a believer losing their salvation. It is referring to believers being ashamed of their unwillingness to walk in God’s light and love.

Prayer Emphasis: Keep things right in your relationship with God by reading His Word and walking in the light that it provides you. **Realize** that it is not possible to be right in your relationship with others if you are not right in your relationship with God. **Restore** the joy and fellowship to some human relationship while there is still time to do so.

Day 31: 1 John 3:1-10

“Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest; Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.” (1 John 3:9-10)

The First “Test” of True Sonship

While the first half of this brief, but important, letter dealt with *fellowship*, the second half will deal with *sonship*. John will now discuss some evidence that will mark those who are genuine followers of Christ. The first indicator of genuine faith mentioned is *obedience*. Our focus verse speaks of those who have been “born of God.” God has a dual claim to His ownership of believers. He is our Creator because He originally created us in His image, and He is our Procreator (Father) because He has set forth His plan to have us be born into His family. When John says that those who are born of God do not commit sin, it is not saying that a Christian has lost his desire or ability to sin. What it is saying is that a Christian will not live in habitual sin. The phrase “he cannot sin” (NKJV) is in the Greek present tense which denotes continuous or repeated action. John is not saying that Christians never sin, but that they do not choose to continue or remain involved in sinful activities. Sin may well be *inevitable*, but it does not have to be *habitual*! This phrase is translated “he cannot go on sinning” in the NIV and other translations.

Prayer Emphasis: Be quick to **recognize** and **admit** that you have made a wrong turn or are guilty of wrong actions or attitudes. **Seek** God’s guidance on how to get back on the right track. **Remember**, real men *will* stop and ask God for directions!

Day 32: 1 John 3:11-24

“And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.” (1 John 3:23)

The Second “Test” of True Sonship

The second evidence of true sonship that John discussed is closely connected to the first. The first evidence was *obedience* and the second is *love*. Our focus verse clearly reveals that Christ has commanded us to “love one another.” You will notice that the word “commandment” is found in two forms in the focus verse. First, we are commanded to “believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ” and to “love one another.” These words provide a very strong indication that the kind of love that should be evident among Christians is a love that comes only through a right relationship with Jesus Christ. It is impossible to have the love of Christ in us without first having Christ in us. The twofold use of the word “commandment” is very important. The first usage tells us that we are commanded to love one another while the second usage tells us that we are commanded to love one another “as” He has commanded us to love one another. There is only one way that true Christian love can be exhibited – and that is in the way that Christ modeled it to us! True Christians love unselfishly, completely, totally, sacrificially, and unconditionally. I could have produced more ways to describe how God loves us, and commands us to love others, but you probably have a pretty good idea of what I am saying. I am sure that the Holy Spirit has spoken to all of us about this before!

Prayer Emphasis: **Express** Christian love in word and deed today. **Refuse** to sit back and wait for an opportunity to do so – **look** for an opportunity to be unselfish or create one if necessary! **Read** verse 11 again and **realize** that this was what Christ taught His followers from the very beginning.

Day 33: 1 John 4:1-12

“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:10)

Propitiation

I have urged you to not “shun” the “tion” words more than once in these devotionals. In our focus verse, we are told that God sent His Son to be the “propitiation” (NKJV) or “atoning sacrifice” (NIV) for our sins. The Greek word that is translated “propitiation” (NKJV) is found only in this little letter of 1 John (2:2; 4:10). It is important to understand this word if we are going to understand how God can love us unconditionally and save us by His grace. It is also important for us to understand this word if we are going to love others in the way that Christ has loved us and commanded us to love our fellow Christians. The word propitiation referred to a sacrifice by which God is satisfied or appeased. The only person who could make that sacrifice was the “only begotten” (NKJV) or “one and only” (NIV) Son of God (v. 9). I much prefer the NKJV translation over others in this verse, as well as in other verses where this phrase is found. Only the Priest who was “begotten” of God could make this perfect sacrifice for the sins of man. This sacrifice is perfect because the One who offered it was perfect. Christ came to offer Himself – the Perfect Man making the Perfect Sacrifice – for the sins of the whole world.

Prayer Emphasis: **Realize** that not everyone *will* be saved – but **believe** that everyone *can* be saved. The perfect Priest came to personally make the perfect Sacrifice so that our sins could be “propitiated” or “atoned.” **Decide** to be a witness to everyone for whom Christ made that sacrifice, and you will see opportunities to witness everywhere you go.

Day 34: 1 John 4:13-21

“And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.” (1 John 4:21)

A Letter from Home

The commandment that we have in our focus verse is said to be “from Him” (NKJV) because “He has given us” (NIV) the command to love one another. There are some things that we can learn from our teachers, but this is one of the things that we can only learn from God. Even though this command comes to us through the devoted disciple John, we are to understand that this command comes directly from God. When we read the Bible, we should read it like a letter from home and treat it as a letter written by the hand of God and coming from the heart of God. The NKJV and the NIV insert the word “must” in this verse because this is an imperative command from God Himself. Loving one another is not an option. It is a command. There is no excuse for not obeying this command because no one is excused from obeying it! God’s desire is that we love one another, and He has diligently made it possible for us to be obedient to this divine mandate. We are enabled to show love to one another because we are empowered to love one another through Him. Love is a gift from God that often remains unopened by those to whom it is given. It is important that we allow this gift from God to be active in our lives if we are going to be visible witnesses of His presence in our lives!

Prayer Emphasis: **Allow** God to love someone through you today. **Express** Christian love to someone today by letting them know that you are praying for them and that you are there for them if they ever need a Christian friend.

Day 35: 1 John 5:1-12

“And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” (1 John 5:11-12)

Another “No Exceptions” Truth from God

Verse 11 declares that God has given us “eternal life.” This means that eternal life is a present possession of the believer and not one that will be experienced only after we are in heaven. We are now the children of God – at this present moment and in this present world. Those who have the Son have this eternal life now. Those who do not have the Son do not have eternal life. We must never forget that Jesus is *the* way and not *a* way to God. In John 14:6 Jesus clearly said, “I am *the* way, *the* truth, and *the* life” and that “no one comes to the Father except through Me.” For centuries, well-intentioned people have desperately tried to create exceptions to this rule by placing their hope of salvation in places (church membership) and practices (baptism and good works). However, the Bible clearly declares that salvation is found in a Person and not in places or practices. It is impossible for anyone to be saved by “joining the church” or doing some good work. We are saved because we have become one with Christ and we are now joined to Him.

Prayer Emphasis: Make a personal review of your hope of salvation and **take** an inventory of your life to make sure that you have truly received Christ as your personal Savior. There is no hope of salvation apart from knowing Christ. **Find** a way to include the word “saved” in a conversation with someone today.

Day 36: 1 John 5:13-21

“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.” (1 John 5:14-15)

Confidence!

In the closing verses of 1 John, we find the word that is translated “confidence” a third, and final, time in this letter (see also 2:28; 3:21). In fact, this is the last time that we will see this word in the New Testament. This is the same word that is associated with prayer in Hebrews 4:16 where we are told that we can “come boldly” (NKJV) or “with confidence” (NIV) before God’s “throne of grace.” This word is used, especially in Hebrews and 1 John, to describe the confidence that believers have when they are fulfilling a command of Christ. In this verse, this confidence is associated with the saint who prays “according to His will.” Because of this confidence, a Christian can seek God in prayer with an unwavering, fearless faith that does not hesitate to mention the needs of the hour. However, this kind of confidence is not limited to time spent in prayer. A careful look in the New Testament will reveal that this confidence can be found when any Christian is doing anything in accordance with the will of God. For example, this is the same “boldness” (NKJV) or “courage” (NIV) with which Peter and John preached God’s Word in Acts 4:13, as well as the confidence that Paul displayed in his preaching in Acts 28:31. When we go out into this world, we should go forth as confident witnesses of the glory, power, and provision of God.

Prayer Emphasis: When we know God’s will, we can live and act in confidence. **Minister** wisely by ministering in accordance with God’s will for your life. **Realize** that Christian confidence is strengthened when we are acting in agreement with God and His Word.

Day 37: 2 John 1-13

“This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.” (2 John 6)

Love is a Command

We often hear about the gift of love. However, while it is true that love is a spiritual gift, it is also true that it is a way of life by which all believers are commanded to live. The word that is translated “commandment” (NKJV) or “command” (NIV) in today’s focus verse is the same word that Jesus used to refer to the Old Testament commandments in Matthew 5:19 and 15:3 & 6. We would all do well to learn that love is not an option, but an act of obedience to a command of God the Father and God the Son! Notice how often you see the words “walk” or “walking” in the first six verses in this little letter and see how closely love is associated with the way that we live. Then, look again to see how many times you see the word “truth” in these same verses, and you will clearly see that true love is found in living in obedience to God’s Truth! Read verse three again and see how John makes this association when he says, “Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.” John saw no need to separate truth and love – and neither should we.

Prayer Emphasis: **Believe** that, when we know the truth, we will know how to truly love. **Accept** the responsibility to love as a command from Almighty God and as an act of obedience to His will. **Refuse** to operate outside of the will of God by choosing to express, and enjoy, true Christian love in all your relationships.

Day 38: 3 John 1-14

“The Elder, to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth: Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.” (3 John 1-2)

Gaius vs. Diotrophes

Third John is a personal letter written to a specific Christian that lived during John’s lifetime. This letter, along with Paul’s letter to Philemon, makes up the entire collection of personal letters included in the New Testament. Notice that John refers to this man as “Beloved” (NKJV) or “Dear friend” (NIV) in the second part of his salutation (v. 2) and then uses that same term of endearment again in verses 5 and 11. Our focus verse is a good indicator that John practiced what he preached to others. After preaching the command to love others in his *public* letters to the church, he now practices loving others in his *private* letter to a very dear friend. Verse 2 gives some indication that Gaius was not doing well physically because John was praying that he “be in health.” However, in spite of his physical health, that same verse gives some strong indication that Gaius was prospering and in very good health spiritually and that he was a helper to those who travelled among the churches and preached the Word of God. Compare this man to Diotrophes, who loved to “have the preeminence” (NKJV) or “to be first” (NIV) and who refused to be a helper to men like John and other ministers. Verse 10 clearly indicates that this one man’s selfish attitude soon affected and infected the hearts and minds of others.

Prayer Emphasis: **Determine** to be an encourager, and not a discourager, to those who seek to serve the Lord and His church. **Be** intentional in your love and support of ministers and ministries. **Pray** for someone in one of our church ministries today and let them know that you have done so.

Day 39: Jude 1-13

“Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ:” (Jude 1)

Jude

Although neither James nor Jude refers to themselves as being the half-brother of Jesus, it is commonly accepted that they were two of the brothers mentioned by name in Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 and then referred to again in John 7:3-10. Paul did not hesitate to refer to James as the Lord’s brother in Galatians 1:19. It is obvious that these two half-brothers of Jesus came to faith sometime late in the ministry of Christ or possibly not until after His death and resurrection. When Luke recorded some of the names of those who met with the apostles in prayer just after the ascension and just prior to Pentecost, he noted that the Lord’s brothers were among those who waited and prayed (Acts 1:14). While it is true that there was an apostle that bore this same name, the writer of this letter never lays claim to being an apostle. A careful look at the letters of the other apostles will reveal that this was the customary thing to do. Through faith, this man who was once known as a denier of Christ became an ardent defender of Christ who wrote this letter to urge others to contend for the faith and withstand the false teachings of those who spoke “evil” (NKJV) or “abusively” (NIV) about things that they did not understand (v. 10).

Prayer Emphasis: **Avoid** the sin of speaking presumptuously by refusing to speak on an issue before you have carefully examined it and understand it yourself. **Remember** that God’s Word of faith has been “delivered” (NKJV) or “entrusted” to us (v. 3). Faithfully **declare** and **defend** it at every opportunity.

Day 40: Jude 14-25

“And on some have compassion, making a distinction: but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.” (Jude 22-23)

A Bondservant

Although today’s reading is from the second half of Jude, I want to conclude this devotional by referring to a word found in the first verse of Jude, as well as in the first verse of James where this devotional began. Our first and last preachers about whom we have written were half-brothers of the Lord who chose to refer to themselves as “bondservants.” Although they were half-brothers of Jesus, neither makes any mention of it nor presents any argument or claim to that status. Look at Romans 1:1 and you will see that Paul, without hesitation, immediately laid claim to being a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ. As apostles, Paul, and others, acted under a commission from Christ and in command to His Words. However, as a bondservant, one acted in response to a choice of one’s own free will. Such was the case with James and Jude. These two men became devoted followers of the same Christ that they had once rejected and denied. You have only to read the concluding verses (verses 24-25) to get an idea of what Jude believed about Jesus at the time of this writing!

Prayer Emphasis: I will repeat the challenge that I laid before you in the first prayer emphasis in this devotional guide. “Never give up on people! **Believe** that God can do a mighty work in the lives of your unbelieving friends and family members. **Pray** for the salvation of someone you know today and **ask** God to give you opportunities to share your faith with them.” The next Kingdom Preacher may be among them!