



# ECHOES

Adult Student Book  
Comprehensive Bible Study  
December 2024–February 2025



A King Forever and Ever  
Studies in Ruth, 2 Samuel,  
Psalms, Matthew, Luke

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# ECHOES

## Adult Student Book Comprehensive Bible Study A Bible Study Quarterly for Adults

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# What's Ahead

## Quarterly Preview

The winter quarter, "A King Forever and Ever," explores the biblical teaching about God's reign.

Unit 1 has lessons showing key moments in the history of Jesus' ancestors, how John the Baptist prepared the way for a Savior, how Jesus' birth brings good news to the world, and how the "Son of David" bestows mercy on those in need.

The psalms in Unit 2 extol the reign of God. They show comfort in the assurance of His reign, praise Him as the eternal and all-powerful king, and recount His merciful and powerful acts as ruler of an everlasting kingdom.

Lessons in Unit 3 from Matthew show Jesus explaining the nature and obligations of kingdom life to His disciples—what it means to pray, the resistance to the kingdom in this world, and the reward for those who give up much to follow Him.

In this quarter, here are some biblical principles you will study and apply to the situations in your own life:

- Witness that God brings hope in troubled times.
- Trust God's plan for a forever kingdom.
- Allow God to prepare your heart for the message of Jesus.
- Celebrate the arrival of our Savior!
- Do you believe God's mercy is for you?
- Know that God sees your affliction and cares.
- Praise God as the mighty king and Lord of creation.
- Remember God's faithfulness and all He does for us.
- Tell of your king's glory, protection, and deliverance.
- Pray that God's kingdom would come among us.
- Look to Jesus to find what God desires.
- Find your treasure in heaven, not on earth.
- See and serve "Jesus" in distress.

## Jesus' Ancestry

You have a beautiful family," the woman sitting next to Dorothy said as they sat in the doctor's waiting room. "They're so caring and attentive."

"That's my theater friend, Amber, and her daughter, Shantae," Dorothy said, nodding toward the two women at the counter as they returned the electronic pad they'd used to input Dorothy's information.

Dorothy, an otherwise healthy woman in her eighties, had fainted and fallen a few times, but thank God, had been in the house each time. With no children or siblings, she'd called Amber, who had come to rush her to the hospital. The doctor had said he thought Dorothy needed a pacemaker. She had returned for a follow-up appointment, when she'd receive a temporary heart monitor.

"As we age, life seems to get scarier," the woman said. "I live alone and am growing more concerned about how I will make it on my own."

"Do you know Christ personally, as Lord?" Dorothy asked. Dorothy testified about her Savior and her life, which had been challenging and often lonely, in no way improved by the health issues that plagued her more and more frequently as she aged. But Christ has been there every step of the way.

"I may need to get a pacemaker, and I don't know what tomorrow will bring," Dorothy said. "But I'm not fearful, and I have hope, because I have Christ."

- 1.** *How have you seen God bring hope to a dire situation?*
- 2.** *What does it mean to be a witness?*
- 3.** *How do you keep hope alive when life feels bleak?*

## Boaz Redeems Ruth

*Ruth 4:9–12 KJV*

9 And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi.

10 Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day.

11 And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephrathah, and be famous in Bethlehem:

12 And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman.

*Ruth 4:9–12 NIV*

<sup>9</sup> Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelek, Kilion and Mahlon."<sup>10</sup> I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown. Today you are witnesses!"

<sup>11</sup> Then the elders and all the people at the gate said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem."<sup>12</sup> Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

Boaz declared his intention to become their "guardian-redeemer" who would "ransom" the family property

and name (v. 9). Boaz first checked that a closer relative did not wish to fulfill this role, as would have been his right (Ruth 4:1–8). Boaz publicly declared to the people of Bethlehem that he would redeem Elimelek’s family and raise children. He stood in the city gate to announce “to the elders and all the people” that he was choosing to buy all the property of Elimelek’s widow, Naomi (v. 9).

Boaz also declared he would marry Naomi’s daughter-in-law, Ruth (v. 10). He did this “in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown.” Naomi’s words to Ruth are proven true, for Naomi said, “The man [Boaz] will not rest until the matter is settled today” (Ruth 3:18). Boaz’s actions and declaration of intent confirm Naomi’s hope and confidence in him. Boaz keeps his word to make the family whole once again.

The people at the city gate affirm Boaz’s declaration and add a prophetic blessing. The beginning of the blessing reviews the past: “May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel” (v. 11). Rachel and Leah were Jacob’s two wives who, along with their servants, gave birth to the twelve tribes of Israel. The blessing next acknowledges current circumstances: “May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem” (v. 11). Finally, the blessing looks forward to the future: “Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah” (v. 12). The hopes expressed by this blessing would be fulfilled.

**4.** *What does Boaz announce in verse 9, and who does he address?*

**5.** *What additional responsibilities does Boaz assume, and why are they significant (v. 10)?*

**6.** *How do the elders and the people respond to Boaz’s declaration?*

## Boaz's and Ruth's Descendants

*Ruth 4:13–17;*

*Luke 3:23, 31b–32 KJV*

13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son.

14 And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel.

15 And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.

16 And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.

17 And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

23 And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli,

31 . . . which was the son of David,

32 Which was the son of Jesse, which was the son of Obed,

*Ruth 4:13–17;*

*Luke 3:23, 31b–32 NIV*

<sup>13</sup> So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. <sup>14</sup> The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel!

<sup>15</sup> He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth."

<sup>16</sup> Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. <sup>17</sup> The women living there said, "Naomi has a son!" And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

<sup>23</sup> Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry.

He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli,

<sup>31</sup> . . . the son of David, <sup>32</sup> the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz,



which was the son of Booz, which was the son of Salmon, which was the son of Naasson,

the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon.

God enabled Ruth and Boaz to have a child, and the family would continue. Boaz fulfilled his role as guardian-redeemer. The women of Bethlehem blessed Naomi's grandson (v. 15). In that culture, a child represented security for the future. When Obed grew up, he would work and bring in the family income. Naomi, as a widow with no income of her own, would have to rely on Obed.

The women acknowledge Ruth's loyalty toward Naomi. Even during Naomi's crisis, God was faithful to her. The women call Ruth a "daughter-in-law, who loves [Naomi] and who is better to [her] than seven sons" (Ruth 4:15). When Naomi holds Obed, the women proclaim, "Naomi has a son!" (v. 17). Even though she lost two sons, God used the birth of a grandson to redeem Naomi's family.

This story of redemption continues past Naomi's lifetime. The boy becomes a father to Jesse, who becomes the father of David. Through David's family line, God establishes a line of kings (2 Sam. 7:16). The third chapter of Luke shows that the kingly lineage extends a thousand years after David: "[Jesus] was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph" (Luke 3:23). Joseph was a descendant of David, Jesse, Obed, and Boaz (vv. 31–32). This was also a reason that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the town of His ancestors (Luke 2:1–5). Through Jesus, the kingship of David's family will never pass away. God used unusual and tragic circumstances to accomplish His purposes, not only for Naomi, but for the entire world.

**7.** *How does God prove faithful to Ruth and Boaz?*

**8.** *What does this story's continuation in Luke reveal about Boaz and Ruth's son, Obed? Why is he significant?*

**9.** *How do you see God working in your life, in light of Ruth's story?*

## From Hopeless to Hopeful

When the COVID-19 pandemic first hit the United States, people from all walks of life felt bleak and hopeless. They were all terrified by the unknown and overwhelmed by the statistics of death and illness.

During the period of isolation, many were laid off from their jobs, and I was among them. In 2019, I felt like I had finally landed my dream job. I had spent years looking for opportunities to launch a new career, and I finally found the right job. But by August 2020, that dream was gone. There I was: at home, isolated, and jobless once more. I felt like there was no hope. My world had turned upside down overnight. Everything I had worked for was ripped away from me in an instant.

A little before this, I had started a home bakery business on the side. It wasn't much, a way to make some extra income. I never expected to do more than bake the occasional order of birthday cupcakes for friends and family. But in those initial weeks after my job termination, I was flooded with orders. Some friends ordered out of support, but then total strangers found my website and started submitting orders. Other people were sending job listings to me, along with a word of encouragement.

God used that time to remind me that He provides—and not always in the ways we expect. I had always struggled with the fear that people did not care about me. But then they came around me when I had nothing, and those fears vanished. In the days of feeling like a failure and worrying about money, God provided for me and bolstered my hope. He reminded me that I wasn't alone and that He could take care of my needs.

**10.** *What situation feels hopeless to you right now?*

**11.** *What keeps you from hoping in the Lord?*

**12.** *How can you remind yourself of His light when life feels dark?*

## Seeking Hope, Finding God

When circumstances are challenging, it can be our first instinct to try to fix the situation ourselves. Then when things get worse, we feel helpless and hopeless. Part of this is cultural—American culture is very individualistic and self-reliant. But this isn't how the Bible instructs us to live. Instead of letting God be our last resort, we should turn to Him first—in any situation! He makes impossible situations possible and good situations even better!

► *When was the last time you turned to God for help? Do you go to Him first or only after you try to resolve your problems on your own? Why?*

### KEY VERSE

And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David. —Ruth 4:17 KJV

The women living there said, "Naomi has a son!" And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. —Ruth 4:17 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of November 25 through December 1

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Luke 3:23–38—We Belong to Christ's Family.
- Tue.** Psalm 128—A Household Built by God.
- Wed.** Ruth 1:1–18—Determined Loyalty.
- Thu.** Ruth 2:1–3, 17–23—An Act of Kindness.
- Fri.** Matthew 12:46–50—Bound Together by More than DNA.
- Sat.** Ruth 3:1–13—Daring Faith.
- Sun.** Ruth 4:9–17—God Has Not Abandoned You.

## God's Promise

Malcolm smiled at his campaign manager, his 22-year-old granddaughter, Camille. She had arranged for them to attend a Christmas party at the home of one of the more influential principals in their school district. Camille was counting out the sleek, well-designed trifold brochures that she had created as they drove to the party.

Malcolm was running for a third term on the school board. His opposition was a younger candidate who considered Malcolm's methods outdated and his convictions irrelevant. The candidate supported new policies that, he claimed, mirrored the changing times.

"You've accomplished great things for the school district," Camille had said months before. She'd always been interested in the world of politics. "I'm going to do all I can to help you get re-elected." And she had; she'd been working non-stop for months as they prepared for the upcoming election in April.

Which was, in part, why Malcolm had let her convince him to go this Christmas party. Primarily, he wanted to socialize with the other guests who had historically supported his campaigns.

"I think this party will be good to pick up a few votes," Camille said as the car rolled onto the exit ramp. "Be sure to get a lot of face time with Principal Franklin."

"I've been meaning to tell you," Malcolm said, "that you are a great campaign manager. Thanks for all your hard work. I do hope to win this April, but if I don't, I'm part of a better kingdom, one which never ends. And I can't get voted out of that one."

**1.** *How easily do you trust in God's plan?*

**2.** *Why can it be a struggle to trust God in today's world?*

**3.** *What is a promise that God has kept in your life?*

**LESSON FOCUS:** Trust God's plan for a forever kingdom.

## David Made Great

2 *Samuel* 7:4–9 *KJV*

4 And it came to pass that night, that the word of the LORD came unto Nathan, saying,

5 Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the LORD, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in?

6 Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle.

7 In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar?

8 Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel:

9 And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth.

2 *Samuel* 7:4–9 *NIV*

4 But that night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying:

5 "Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?' 6 I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. 7 Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'

8 "Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. 9 I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth.

A divine message comes to Nathan, to alter David's plan (v. 4). The word is clear: God does not want David to build the temple. Although the temple would be built, David would not be the builder.

God's presence has never been confined to one particular place. Since the Israelites' escape from Egypt, He has not lived in a "house" but has moved "from place to place with a tent as [His] dwelling" (v. 6). He journeyed with Israel through the wilderness. There was never a point from the past to the present when God had requested a house (v. 7). He doesn't need a permanent temple to confirm His greatness, which is displayed by the ways He has been present in David's life: turning a shepherd into a leader, protecting him in battle and when chased by Saul, and making him king over Israel. God will continue to grow David's reputation (his "name"), as an image of His faithfulness (v. 9).

**4.** *What does God ask in verse 5? What does He mean by this?*

**5.** *What reasons does God give Nathan for His decision?*

**6.** *What does God tell Nathan to tell David instead?*

## The Kingship Made Eternal

*2 Samuel 7:10–17 KJV*

10 Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime,

11 And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have

*2 Samuel 7:10–17 NIV*

10 And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning<sup>11</sup> and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also

caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the LORD telleth thee that he will make thee an house.

12 And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom.

13 He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

14 I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men:

15 But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee.

16 And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.

17 According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David.

give you rest from all your enemies.

“The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you:

<sup>12</sup> When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup>

He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup> I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. <sup>15</sup> But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. <sup>16</sup> Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”

<sup>17</sup> Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation.

God says that He will not only make David’s name great, but will make the nation great as well. He would “provide a place for . . . Israel and . . . plant them so that

they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed" (v. 10). The Israelites had spent many years fighting other nations to keep the promised land. Some enemies even conquered and ruled the Israelites for periods of time. Because of that history, God promises, "Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they . . . have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel" (vv. 10–11). In time, Israel will have "rest from all [their] enemies" (v. 11). God's people will be freed from the turmoil, as had been the plan when they were brought back to the land of Abraham.

The passage returns to the greatness of David's house, and that God will "establish" it (v. 11). God will "raise up [David's] offspring to succeed [him]" (v. 12). God will build this descendant's kingdom, continuing the work He started. This son—later to be revealed as Solomon—shall go on to build a house for the Lord. God declares, "He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (v. 13). God promises that He will have a special relationship with David's son (v. 14). God shall discipline him when he does wrong, but He will never stop loving him.

The final words of God's revelation point beyond Solomon and David's house: "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (v. 16). These words point to the ultimate "Son of David," Jesus Christ (Luke 1:31–33; Acts 13:22–23). But even as the promise is given, David is awestruck and full of praise. He trusts in God and gives glory back to Him. David declares, "Do as you promised, so that your name will be great forever" (vv. 25–26). God is deserving of all glory.

**7.** *What promises does God make to David about Israel?*

**8.** *What do God's promises reveal about Him?*

**9.** *Why is God's promise about David's throne important for believers today?*



## Are You Ready for a King?

My children love to play kings and queens. Through their games, I see what they believe about leadership—if you want to call it that. The oldest orders her younger siblings to retrieve snacks, books, and pillows for a throne.

God didn't start by giving Israel a king. The Israelites asked for a king anyway, probably because they wanted to be like the nations around them. What they were actually doing was rejecting God as king (see 1 Sam. 8:1–22).

The problem is that many leaders have nearly the same idea of leadership as my eight-year-old, assuming positions of power are for lording over others. It's shocking to read God's promise that David's family shall rule forever! We find that many of David's descendants were horrible leaders. God would send prophets to say, "Hear this, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right . . ." (Mic. 3:9–12).

God's promise to David looks like a big mistake, unless you understand that God came to earth to show a completely different version of kingship. The Son of David would become a servant, going as far as to die for His friends (Phil. 2:6–8). What looked to others like weakness and foolishness was the unfathomed mercy of God. He reminds His people, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Isa. 55:8). The only way that God could give us a good king was to come to earth in the person of Jesus. It is Jesus who can be exalted and hailed as worthy, the one who turned our version of kingship upside-down.

**10.** *What image comes to mind when you think of a king?*

**11.** *What's a Gospel story that shows God's version of kingship?*

**12.** *What do you imagine will be different when all creation bows to Jesus as king?*

## Falling into Place

When I was sixteen, my father was transferred out of state for his job, and my whole family moved with him. This turned my entire life upside down. Nothing was how I thought it should be. I spent that summer in a lot of rage—anger toward my family and toward God for ripping me away from the only home I'd ever known. But that move sparked a chain of events I couldn't have possibly predicted. I went to a different state college; there, I met the man I would later marry; and I earned a different degree than what I thought I wanted. When I thought my life was falling apart, God was moving the pieces into their proper places.

► *When have you thought your life was falling apart, only to find out later that God was moving all the pieces into place? How have you witnessed His faithfulness in your life?*

### KEY VERSE

And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.

—2 Samuel 7:16 KJV

Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.

—2 Samuel 7:16 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of December 2 through December 8

(See *The Quiet Hour and Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** 1 Samuel 16:1–13—The Lord Looks on the Heart.
- Tue.** 2 Samuel 5:1–10—A Shepherd for God's People.
- Wed.** Luke 1:26–38—Christ's Unending Reign.
- Thu.** Psalm 2—God Defends the Anointed.
- Fri.** Isaiah 9:1–7—Endless Peace for David's Throne.
- Sat.** Romans 1:1–7—The Son of David.
- Sun.** 2 Samuel 7:4–17—An Everlasting Kingdom.

## Zechariah's Prophecy

Jerrica silenced the beeping sound by fastening her seatbelt. Her mind was jam-packed with problems, thoughts, and feelings. Her job. Her finances. Her boyfriend. Her mother. Her sister.

Though Jerrica was exhausted physically and emotionally from the previous weeks, she had pushed herself to get up and go to church this morning. She hadn't been sleeping well the past few days and had awakened this morning at 5 a.m.

Jerrica had a 40-minute commute to church and was running ahead of schedule, so she didn't have to speed. She reached toward the radio button, then hesitated and dropped her hand. Maybe what she needed was silence. Maybe that would quiet her racing thoughts.

As she drove, Jerrica found herself silently talking to God. Mostly, she listened to the Holy Spirit and let the peace of God envelop her. It was nice.

By the time she got to church, she was no longer agitated or tired. She got out of her car with a smile on her face. She was ready for the Word of God.

"Praise the Lord," Sheri said. "You ready for church this morning?"

"Yes, I am," Jerrica said, her smile widening.

**1.** *What is your most memorable Christmas experience, and why?*

**2.** *In what ways does Christmas inspire you to express God's mercy to others?*

**3.** *Why is Jesus' birth meaningful to you?*

## Zechariah's Praise to God

*Luke 1:67–75 KJV*

67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,

68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,

69 And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;

70 As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:

71 That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;

72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;

73 The oath which he sware to our father Abraham,

74 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear,

75 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

*Luke 1:67–75 NIV*

<sup>67</sup>His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

<sup>68</sup>"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

<sup>69</sup>He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David

<sup>70</sup>(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

<sup>71</sup>salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—

<sup>72</sup>to show mercy to our ancestors

and to remember his holy covenant,

<sup>73</sup> the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

<sup>74</sup>to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,

and to enable us to serve him without fear

<sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

Zechariah praises God because He has turned His face toward His people. Zechariah trusts God's redemptive purposes for His people. Gabriel told Zechariah what

John's role would be: he would be filled with the Spirit to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17).

Zechariah thanks God for raising up "a horn of salvation" through David's line (v. 69). First-century Jews knew that the coming king would be a descendant of King David. God would transform the broken world through this Messiah, who would be just and completely different from ruthless tyrants like Herod (compare Matt. 2:16). Zechariah has these promises in mind when he refers to God's "horn of salvation" (v. 69). A "horn" symbolizes the power of a beast of burden, like an ox with strong horns.

Zechariah praises God for keeping a promise made "long ago," sent through "holy prophets" (v. 70). God had promised to provide redemption through the Messiah. Zechariah sees the birth of his son as the beginning of the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies.

Zechariah is glad that God promised "salvation from our enemies" (v. 71). Because the Jews suffered at the hands of foreign rulers—most recently, the Romans—they were anxious to be free. They wanted relief from their oppressors and vindication for the wrong that had been done. Yet, the salvation God promised was not a political deliverance. Through Jesus, God would defeat the powers of Satan, sin, and death. For the time being, living in God's kingdom means anticipating the reign of peace and justice that Christ will bring.

Zechariah is thankful for God's "mercy" and steadfast love (v. 72). People can do nothing of their own power to make themselves worthy of salvation. But God is still faithful to "his holy covenant." Even when people are not faithful to God, He shows faithfulness to them. This is in keeping with the "oath he swore" to Abraham (v. 73; see Gen. 12:1–3; 22:16–18). God would soon fulfill His covenant promise to Abraham, in and through Jesus.

Zechariah is satisfied that God shall "rescue" His people "from the hand of [their] enemies" to serve Him (v. 74). Israel's service before God "without fear" is marked by "holiness and righteousness," which reflects the ministry

of repentance that Zechariah's son will bring (v. 75).

**4.** *How does Zechariah's prophecy reveal God's faithfulness and mercy to His people?*

**5.** *What is the significance of God's covenant with Abraham and its connection to Jesus' coming?*

**6.** *What does Zechariah say will be part of the Messiah's coming kingdom?*

## **Zechariah's Prophecy about John**

*Luke 1:76–80 KJV*

76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;

77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,

78 Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,

79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

80 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.

*Luke 1:76–80 NIV*

<sup>76</sup>And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;

for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

<sup>77</sup>to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,

<sup>78</sup>because of the tender mercy of our God,

by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

<sup>79</sup>to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

<sup>80</sup>And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

Zechariah returns his attention to his son, John, who would be a "prophet" to prepare the way for the Lord

(v. 76). John will tell Israel that a redeemer had arrived: Jesus of Nazareth. Like a servant clearing a path for a king, he would prepare the way for Jesus.

John is like part of the construction crew that builds a straight road for the king, through mountains and valleys (compare Isa. 40:3–4). The people needed “knowledge of salvation,” for they required God’s help to transform their hearts (Luke 1:77; see Jer. 31:34). John would cause people to face their sin and to ask God’s forgiveness.

John’s ministry would also display the “tender mercy of our God” (v. 78). Zechariah’s witnessed this mercy. Even though he experienced doubt that God would give him a son, God did not revoke His plan. God’s design was not thwarted by Zechariah’s unbelief, and God even restored his speech at the perfect moment so that he might prophesy of God’s favor and mercy. God’s steadfast love is like the dawning of a new day, when darkness is forgotten. Like a “rising sun,” the Father’s mercy brings light to people “living in darkness and in the shadow of death” (v. 79).

Zechariah praised God. He knew that God was about to do something special. John’s ministry would help people be ready to follow Jesus. Verse 80 adds a postscript about Zechariah’s son: he “became strong in spirit.” John shared his parents’ faith and hope in God. He lived in seclusion in the barren wilderness of the Jordan Valley, west of the Dead Sea. This isolation may have been part of his preparation for ministry, just as Israel came through the wilderness before arriving in Canaan. While in wilderness, the “word of God” shall come to him and send him to begin to baptize people who repent of their sins (see Luke 3:1–3).

**7.** *How does Zechariah’s prophecy emphasize the importance of John’s ministry?*

**8.** *What is the purpose of John’s role to prepare the way for Jesus?*

**9.** *What impact will John’s ministry have on the people of his day?*

## Waiting for God

I had just boarded a flight when I heard the unwelcome news that the “luggage netting” needed repair before my plane could fly. The pilot promised that a little waiting was not in vain, that a replacement was on the way. Eventually, the crew announced that passengers could walk back into the terminal, and a flood of people left in a hurry. But not half an hour later, the plane was fixed, and it took longer than that to round everyone up, especially those who had given up waiting and left the plane.

It reminds me that people who are asked to wait on God are prone to despair. Believers find it challenging to confront this attitude, especially when so much suffering runs rampant in this world. Nevertheless, there is light. That light comes from God, who fulfilled countless promises by sending Jesus. The Messiah arrived, and He brought us the hope of peace and salvation. Our hope in God’s faithfulness is not futile (like people on my plane feared) but secure in this fact: God is present and active in our lives.

Like Zechariah, we have a message that people need to hear. We glorify God for who He is and what He has done to redeem the lost (us), and we can offer hope to the hopeless and those who might give up waiting. Jesus has come! But we cannot be effective messengers if we have not allowed God to prepare our hearts. Our lives are full of distractions. We must strive to be focused on why we have placed our trust in Jesus. “The LORD’s unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him,” declares the psalmist. “Rejoice in the LORD and be glad!” (Ps. 32:10–11).

**10.** *Why might the world’s representation of Christmas cause people to feel discouraged?*

**11.** *How is the Holy Spirit preparing your heart for Christmas?*

**12.** *How does sharing your faith with others help you to celebrate Christmas?*



## Insights about His Birth

Zechariah was blessed with a son even though his wife, Elizabeth, had been barren. This son had a remarkable calling; John would be the one to prepare the way for the Messiah. God is actively preparing our hearts for the message of Christ.

► *This week, pray for God to prepare your heart to hear the Christmas message in a new way. You may wish to use the space below to write out your prayer for this season.*

### KEY VERSES

And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins. —Luke 1:76–77 KJV

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. —Luke 1:76–77 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of December 9 through December 15

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Psalm 89:1–4, 27–37—God's Covenant of Love.
- Tue.** Luke 1:5–17—God Has Heard Your Prayer.
- Wed.** Luke 1:18–22—A Message of Promise and Grace.
- Thu.** Psalm 84—The Lord God Is a Sun and Shield.
- Fri.** Malachi 4—The Herald of God's Coming.
- Sat.** Luke 1:57–66—A Child of Wonder.
- Sun.** Luke 1:67–80—Praises to the God who Saves.

## Savior's Birth

**M**ommy, is that Jesus' birthday cake in the oven?" Gabrielle's six-year-old daughter, Yasmine, asked. "I want to help decorate it!"

"Of course, you can," said Gabrielle as her daughter turned to leave, probably in search of her twin.

"It sure smells good," said Danica, Gabrielle's friend from work, as she sat comfortably in the kitchen nook. "Smells like lemon."

Gabrielle had invited Danica, who had no family in the area, to celebrate the holidays over coffee and pastries. The two women also wanted to exchange gifts before Christmas.

"You're right," Gabrielle said. "This year, we decided on lemon for Jesus' birthday cake. Corey and I like to stress the celebration of Christ's birth at Christmastime. We have a birthday cake every year and read Luke 2:1–18 over the course of the days leading up to Christmas."

"I love that idea," Danica said. "I must say, I'm guilty of pushing Christ into the background during the holidays. I've been preoccupied with the hustle and bustle of it all and am honestly still upset that I couldn't afford to fly home."

"Well, you're more than welcome to spend Christmas Eve with us," Gabrielle said. "We want the girls to observe what is most important as we celebrate—Christ."

**1.** *Do you think of the birth of Jesus as more of a fulfillment or more of a surprise?*

**2.** *Have you ever struggled to celebrate the birth of Jesus in this season? If so, why?*

**3.** *What is your favorite Christmas tradition?*

## The Birth of the Christ Child

*Luke 2:1–7 KJV*

1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.

2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)

5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

*Luke 2:1–7 NIV*

<sup>1</sup>In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup>(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup>And everyone went to their own town to register.

<sup>4</sup>So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. <sup>5</sup>He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup>and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Luke says this was the first registration when Quirinius was military governor of the Roman province of Syria. Caesar relied upon high-level administrators like Quirinius to ensure that inhabitants throughout the empire journeyed to their hometowns to be registered (v. 3).

At the time, Joseph was living in Nazareth, a town situated in lower Galilee. To comply with the census, Joseph had to travel about ninety miles—at least a three-day journey—from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the town of his ancestors (v. 5).

When Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, Mary entered into labor (v. 6). The town might have been crowded with travelers who had also come to register at their ancestral hometown. Joseph and Mary struggled to find suitable accommodation. The “inn” that had no place for them (v. 7 KJV), could also be the “guest room” (NIV) in a private home of Joseph’s extended family. In those days, animals and feeding troughs could be in the same house with people. One part of the house was for people and the other for the household animals—and that was the only place left for Mary and Joseph.

The newborn son would have been washed in a mixture of water and olive oil, rubbed with salt, and then wrapped in strips of linen. These would be placed around the infant’s arms and legs to protect his limbs. Once Jesus had been swaddled, Mary laid her child in the feeding trough, which would have been about the right size.

**4.** *How did the Roman census disrupt Joseph and Mary’s lives?*

**5.** *What significance do you draw from the humble circumstances of Jesus’ birth?*

## The Announcement of the Messiah’s Birth

*Luke 2:8–16 KJV*

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round

*Luke 2:8–16 NIV*

<sup>8</sup> And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and

about them: and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. <sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

<sup>13</sup> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

<sup>15</sup> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

<sup>16</sup> So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

Outside Bethlehem, shepherds were watching their sheep that same night when an angel of the Lord appeared near the shepherds, and the radiance of God's glory surrounded

them (v. 9). The sight terrified the shepherds, but the angel reassured them with wonderful “news” (v. 10). Israel’s Savior would be born, and these shepherds are the ones who receive the announcement from God. They were not wealthy lords or scholars of Israel’s Scriptures. They were working people with below-average social standing.

The gospel announcement is “good news” (v. 10) that results in tremendous “joy” for everyone who receives it, by faith. Perhaps this is why the angel encouraged the shepherds to find Christ lying in a manger, wrapped snugly in strips of cloth (v. 12). This would be a sign from the Father, validating the birth of His Son.

Then the night sky exploded with sounds of the “heavenly host” (v. 13). This was an enormous group of angels who offered a hymn of praise to God. They glorified Him, proclaiming that peace has come.

The angels’ news was simple. They gave “glory to God” (v. 14) and said His “peace” remained on those who were the objects of His “favor.” Later the apostle Paul would write that the Father’s mercy rests on those who experience peace through faith in the Son (Rom. 5:1).

After the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds were curious about the message (Luke 2:15). The angel had told the shepherds the location and situation of the birth. The shepherds decided to travel to Bethlehem and see for themselves what the angel had declared to them.

The shepherds “hurried off” and found Mary and Joseph. They saw the baby resting peacefully on a bed of hay (v. 16). The shepherds told the couple about the angels and the message they had received.

**6.** *What was the symbolic importance of the angel’s appearance to the shepherds (v. 9)?*

**7.** *Why did the angel encourage the shepherds not to be afraid (v. 10)?*

**8.** *How did the shepherds respond to the angel’s message (vv. 15–16)?*

## Celebration!

During Christmas, the nativity scene appears across North America. We see Jesus presented as a baby in a manger with His earthly parents and others present: shepherds, the wise men from the East, and sometimes even animals. We see such a scene in front yards, on living room tables and shelves, and in store malls. Unlike so many other places that either forbid such sacred demonstration or are indifferent to the Christian faith, God has blessed us with the freedom to express our adoration for the birth of Christ.

Despite the frequent sighting of nativity scenes, however, how often do we take the time to ponder the significance of Jesus' birth? Moreover, how often does the knowledge that Jesus came in human form stir our hearts with joy and gratitude? For most of us, not nearly enough!

The celebration of Jesus' birth should awaken our faith in the Lord and overcome our hearts with rapture and gratitude. "Rejoice," stated Jan Hus, the distinguished Czech theologian of the fourteenth and fifteenth century, "that the immortal God is born, so that mortal men may live in eternity." Yes, let us join together to praise God and celebrate His marvelous gift to us!

For centuries, the people of God fervently prayed for the coming of the Messiah. Even the heavenly host might have wondered how God would redeem humankind. As Christians living in our present age, we are truly blessed to know the whole story. We do not have to await God's fulfillment of His promise; His promise is already fulfilled.

Therefore, let us fall to our knees and raise our hands and celebrate the birth of Jesus, for the Lord is gracious and worthy to be glorified!

**9.** *How is your church or Christian fellowship preparing for the celebration of Jesus' birth?*

**10.** *How do you plan to spend Christmas Day?*

**11.** *How is Jesus integral to Christmas Day for you?*

## A Letter of Praise and Gratitude

When the shepherds first gazed upon the baby Jesus, they must have been struck with awe at being in the presence of this extraordinary sight—a sight greater even than the heavenly host. You may write a prayer letter that expresses your jubilation as you comprehend the humble majesty of Jesus' birth.

► *Acknowledge the advent of the Messiah and His identity as the Son of God, who became human so that you may be redeemed and restored as a child of the heavenly Father. Humbly convey your gratitude for the birth of Christ.*

### KEY VERSE

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. —Luke 2:15 KJV

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

—Luke 2:15 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of December 16 through December 22

(See *The Quiet Hour and Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Isaiah 11:1–9—The Coming King of Peace.
- Tue.** Isaiah 43:14–21—God Is Doing a New Thing.
- Wed.** Isaiah 64—We Are the Clay; God Is the Potter.
- Thu.** Micah 5:1–9—A Great and Peaceful King.
- Fri.** John 1:1–5, 9–14, 16–18—The Word Became Flesh.
- Sat.** Hebrews 1—The Son Is King! Worship Him!
- Sun.** Luke 2:1–20—Christ Is Born! Glorify Him!



## David's Son

Leron, isn't this the fourth time this week you've worked past your shift?" Jerome asked. "You're going to break the store."

"I'm not putting in overtime, Mr. Taylor," Leron responded. "I'm careful with my hours."

Leron, a thirty-something who'd been out of prison for the last two years, had initially struggled to find work. It seemed no one wanted to hire an ex-con. Leron had been stuck doing odd jobs and lawn work.

Then five months ago, Leron had stumbled in the auto parts store searching for spark plugs for his used lawnmower. He met the store's middle-aged manager, Jerome Taylor, a kind man who showed an interest in Leron. Leron told him about his struggles, and how he was trying to turn his life around.

"What you need is for Christ to change your life," Jerome had said, and invited Leron to church. After Leron had attended church for a few weeks, Jerome offered him a job at his auto parts store. Jerome had explained to upper management that Leron was an ex-con, but had advocated for his hiring.

"The store took a risk, hiring me," Leron said as he shelved another filter. "I'm willing to work hard in thanks."

"God made it possible," Jerome replied. "It doesn't matter what you've done; God's mercy is available for you."

**1.** *Is it difficult for you to ask for and receive mercy? If so, why do you think that might be?*

**2.** *In what ways has God expressed His compassion toward you?*

**3.** *How has God's mercy affected your life?*

## A Man Born Blind Shows Persistent Faith

*Luke 18:35–39 KJV*

35 And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging:

36 And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant.

37 And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.

38 And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me.

39 And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy on me.

*Luke 18:35–39 NIV*

<sup>35</sup> As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging.

<sup>36</sup> When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. <sup>37</sup> They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."

<sup>38</sup> He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

<sup>39</sup> Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jericho was located in the Jordan Valley, near the Dead Sea. In the first century, the city's population was predominantly Jewish, with a mix of Roman, Greek, and other cultures as well. Jericho had a diverse population because of its location and historical significance as one of the oldest inhabited cities of the world.

The road from Jericho was mentioned in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). Jesus taught that loving a neighbor means showing mercy. Now several chapters later, Luke tells a story that shows how Jesus practiced what He preached. He is on the road and confronted by someone who requests "mercy," the same word as appeared in the parable in Luke 10:37. Will Jesus be like the religious leaders who pass a person in need?

Instead of someone who had been robbed, like the man in Jesus' parable, Jesus encounters a man born blind—someone just sitting beside the road and begging for alms. Jesus, accompanied by His disciples and a large crowd,

comes near (Luke 18:35). The man asks what is going on, for there was probably a big commotion (v. 36). Some in the crowd told him who was passing by: “Jesus of Nazareth” (v. 37). He begins to implore Jesus, the “Son of David,” to be merciful toward him (v. 38).

His request emphasizes that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah—a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies as the rightful heir to David’s throne. He asks for “mercy” to be shown him, but he doesn’t say what he means. Under typical circumstances, he would be asking for financial help.

Some in the procession object to this man’s cries for help and admonish him to stop (v. 39). The crowd might be imagining that Jesus’ attention should not be wasted on someone who was marginalized, poor, and blind. They expect that Jesus’ mission has to be more important than answering. Does a “king” sound like the kind of person who can be hassled when He is trying to get somewhere? Despite the crowd’s attempts to silence him, the man does not stop. He keeps asking for King David’s descendant to show mercy. No one is going to prevent him from seeking Jesus’ deliverance.

The man’s persistence displays a relentless faith. In contrast to others in the crowd, he recognizes that Jesus was a source of hope and healing. Jesus does meet the outcasts, the lost, and the downcast with a display of God’s mercy.

Precisely because He is the rightful king, Jesus takes the time to show mercy. Hosea 6:6 says, “For I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” Even the sacrifices that God required according to the Law of Moses might be rejected, if they were given hypocritically—meaning, when a person was being unmerciful toward others. God redeemed His people through an act of mercy, and this shows that mercy is never optional. The king had a mission, and His mission was to come near this man.

- 4.** *Whom does Jesus encounter as He approached Jericho?*
- 5.** *What prompts the man to call out to Jesus?*

6. *How does the man respond to the crowd's rebuke?*

## The Savior Heals the Man

*Luke 18:40–43 KJV*

40 And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him,

41 Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight.

42 And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee.

43 And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.

*Luke 18:40–43 NIV*

<sup>40</sup> Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, <sup>41</sup> "What do you want me to do for you?"

"Lord, I want to see," he replied.

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you."

<sup>43</sup> Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.

Despite being surrounded by the large crowd, Jesus hears the man's cries and issues a command for the man to "be brought to him" (v. 40). The nearest person—possibly the same one who had just been telling him to be quiet—now has the job of leading him to Jesus.

In order to appreciate what Jesus is doing, it is helpful to look at the ways Luke has arranged events in chapter 18. Jesus told a parable about a widow who would not stop asking for justice until she received her request (Luke 18:1–8). It's a parable about persistence. Then, Jesus tells about two people who pray to God, one with pride in his heart and the other asking for mercy as a sinner (Luke 18:9–14). It's a parable about humility. Then after, Luke tells about a wealthy ruler who came to Jesus, but the ruler was unwilling to give up everything to enter the kingdom of God (Luke 18:18–30).

Here, Jesus demonstrates that, if it is difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of God (Luke 18:24), maybe it is a little easier for someone who is poor, like the beggar before Him. This man has no authority, no possessions, no social status. His only hope was to cry out so that His king might hear him. Jesus left the wealthy young ruler sad and disappointed; that man was comfortable. But for someone as destitute and desperate as this poor man, Jesus can do something for him (Luke 18:41). His willingness to act is confirmation of His previous words, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven" (Luke 6:20).

The man asks that his sight would be restored. He has faith to ask the rightful king of Israel to heal him. Jesus praises the man's faith (v. 42). He can just say, "Receive your sight," and it is done. He has that kind of authority to restore what was lost.

The man does not stop coming to Jesus, but now he can follow without any help (v. 43). He knows that only God's Son would have been able to heal him. The crowd, after witnessing this event, now joins this man in praise. They too saw the power displayed through Jesus' actions.

The miraculous healing serves at least three purposes. First, the story demonstrates Jesus' care for the marginalized. Second, this incident affirms Jesus' identity as the Messiah. He proves that He has the divine authority and power to restore a person's sight, just as the words of the prophet had said (Isa. 61:1). Third, Jesus' interaction with the man shows the consequence of faith. The man's faith was persistent and unshakable. Jesus not only acknowledges but also honors that faith.

**7.** *How does Jesus respond to the poor man's plea for help?*

**8.** *Why do you think that Jesus left the rich young ruler sad, but Jesus could give this poor man what he most wanted?*

**9.** *How does the man respond to being healed?*

## Awaiting God's Mercy

How do we await God's mercy? With confidence and joy, or with disillusionment and despair? I wish I could say that I am always confident that Jesus will show me mercy. Sometimes, I react with fear.

The evangelist Billy Graham used to say, "The wonderful news is that our Lord is a God of mercy." When we seek God's mercy, we should not focus on our own failures and mistakes. We can place our hope on the compassion of Christ. When people needed forgiveness, Jesus forgave; when people sought healing, Jesus healed; and when people died, Jesus gave life. As Deuteronomy 4:31 reminds us, "The LORD your God is a merciful God." We can anchor our faith in the unchanging character of God.

But receiving mercy is only half of our covenant with God. We also must extend compassion to others. When we show mercy to others, we not only reflect the love of God to the world, we also remind ourselves of the mercy God has shown us. We are recipients of God's boundless grace. That means we are called to "be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36).

You might ask yourself, "Am I like the wealthy ruler, or am I like the man in today's story?" Luke shows us that if we are too comfortable with the way the world is now, it's a lot harder to enter God's kingdom and to accept the lordship of Jesus. God is willing to meet us, wherever we come from, and Jesus does not turn away a humble request for mercy. Praise God for His mercy and for His Son, who truly embodies it!

**10.** *When you pray, do you ask for God's mercy? What do you say?*

**11.** *What is one way that God's mercy inspires you to show compassion toward others?*

**12.** *It what ways are you ready for the kingdom of God and to proclaim Jesus as king?*

## Receive and Share!

When the blind beggar cried out to Jesus, the Lord responded with curative compassion. The man desperately wanted to see, and he believed that Jesus had the power to heal him. Like the blind beggar, we should ask for God's mercy. Moreover, we must extend compassion to others.

► *Make a commitment to place your trust in the hands of a merciful God, recalling His deep love for you and His ever-present compassion. Moreover, commit to sharing God's mercy with others who need to experience His compassion.*

### KEY VERSE

And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy on me. —Luke 18:39 KJV

Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" —Luke 18:39 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

**Week of December 23 through December 29**

**(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)**

- Mon.** Luke 4:14–21—Mercy for Those Who Suffer.
- Tue.** Luke 6:27–36—Show God's Mercy to All.
- Wed.** Micah 7:14–20—God Delights in Compassion.
- Thu.** Psalm 25:1–10—Remember Your Mercy, O Lord.
- Fri.** Psalm 25:11–22—God Relieves a Troubled Heart.
- Sat.** Luke 18:9–14—Mercy for Sinners.
- Sun.** Luke 18:35–43—Lord, Let Me See Again.

## The Lord is King

Zina?" Karen said over the walkie talkie.  
 "Yes?" Zina asked as she pushed her large and cumbersome housekeeping cart down the long hallway.

"210 and 247 will be ready for check-in within an hour. Do those rooms first, and quickly."

Zina sent a quick affirmative and picked up her pace. Zina's job at the hotel was hard work, and didn't pay a lot, but it was all the single mother had been able to find.

The housekeeping staff weren't a friendly bunch; Zina didn't know if it was because of the high turnover rate or the spirit of competition between them. Karen had once been on the housekeeping staff but had been promoted to housekeeping manager a few months back, largely as a result of a couple well-placed lies.

Karen always overloaded Zina with work, probably because she didn't respond in anger like the others. Zina had asked for better, reasonable hours. She had also asked for advancement opportunities. She didn't receive either.

Zina's earbuds played gospel music so she could worship and pray while working. She knew the Lord loved her, saw her, and heard her prayers.

As Zina pushed her cart to 247, she knew had less than twenty-five minutes to finish the room. She prayed for strength to do her job well. In her worship time, Zina felt the Spirit of God comfort and enable her.

- 1.** *What's a situation in your life where you desperately needed God, but felt He was far away?*
- 2.** *What are some small ways you saw God reminding you of His love, even if the problem itself was taking a long time to resolve?*
- 3.** *How would you encourage someone who felt like they didn't need more Bible knowledge, but just needed to feel that they were loved?*



## Destroy the Wicked/Help the Afflicted

*Psalms 10:12–15 KJV*

12 Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up thine hand: forget not the humble.

13 Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? He hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it.

14 Thou hast seen it; for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand: the poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless.

15 Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man: seek out his wickedness till thou find none.

*Psalms 10:12–15 NIV*

<sup>12</sup> Arise, LORD! Lift up your hand, O God.

Do not forget the helpless.

<sup>13</sup> Why does the wicked man revile God?

Why does he say to himself, "He won't call me to account"?

<sup>14</sup> But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted;

you consider their grief and take it in hand.

The victims commit themselves to you;

you are the helper of the fatherless.

<sup>15</sup> Break the arm of the wicked man; call the evildoer to account for his wickedness

that would not otherwise be found out.

In the first half of Psalm 10, the psalmist provides a description of the wicked man's schemes and injustices. The psalmist builds his case for why God must intervene. He boldly addresses God: "Arise, LORD!" This is a way of asking God to act in his present circumstances. Up until this point, God has appeared indifferent to the situation of the afflicted. To the psalmist, it looks like God is not hindering their schemes. It seems like, under God's rule, the wicked are prospering.

The psalmist specifically asks God to "lift up [His] hand" (v. 12). This is a request for God to decisively intervene. God seemed idle, but now His hand is needed to support and uplift the afflicted. The psalmist continues by saying, "Forget not the humble" (v. 12 KJV). Saying

“forget not” is another way of asking God to remember. When God remembers in the Bible, it is never only a cognitive action. Remembering is the basis for action. The psalmist wants God to remember the helpless and to reverse their circumstances.

In verse 13, the psalmist addresses the apparent challenge the wicked man poses to God. It seems like the wicked person is living as if God is powerless, as if there will be no justice and order. There is no immediate answer to this challenge. The wicked continue unpunished and unhindered, even though God’s reputation is at stake.

But God will act on behalf of His afflicted people. Contrary to how it may appear, God does see the plight of the helpless and afflicted. God sees them, and He is aware of their situation. He considers their grief and takes it in hand. God is not apathetic and uninvolved in the pain of His people. He is intimately involved and affected by it. The psalmist describes God as the “helper of the fatherless.” In Scripture and in ancient times, the fatherless are often considered some of the most marginalized people. Without the protection of a father, they were especially at risk of exploitation.

The psalmist asks God to “break the arm of the wicked man” (v. 15). The arm represents his power and schemes. The arm is pivotal in battle, as it holds the spear or sword. When an enemy’s arm is broken, their power is not only fractured, but their ability to cause harm is also reduced. By asking that God would render the wicked man powerless, the psalmist is praying that justice would be served.

**4.** *According to the psalmist, of what attitudes is the wicked man guilty?*

**5.** *How does this psalm describe God’s attitude toward those who are helpless?*

**6.** *In what specific ways does the psalmist want God to act?*

## God Is King

*Psalm 10:16–18 KJV*

16 The LORD is King for ever and ever: the heathen are perished out of his land.

17 LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear:

18 To judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress.

*Psalm 10:16–18 NIV*

<sup>16</sup>The LORD is King for ever and ever;  
the nations will perish from his land.

<sup>17</sup>You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted;  
you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,

<sup>18</sup>defending the fatherless and the oppressed,  
so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror.

As the psalmist nears the end of the psalm, he expresses confidence in God's ability to act. He says, "The LORD is King for ever and ever" (v. 16). There is no end to God's rule, and nothing can limit His power. The wicked think that they are operating outside of God's rule and do not have to give any account, but their time is limited. They will not get away with their actions under a God whose reign lasts for ever and ever.

The result of God's kingship is that "the nations will perish from his land" (v. 16). This is referring to what will happen in the future, a judgment that God shall render on proud kings and rulers who stand against Him. At first, this may seem like a puzzling statement. In the Old Testament, people outside of Israel were sometimes called simply "the nations." They are frequently depicted as those who—unless redirected by God or by His people—do not live in a way that brings honor to the creator. As a result, they have no lasting place in His land. Even though Psalm 10:16 describes a future judgment of the nations, many other Scripture passages also give a glimpse of the blessings that God plans to show to all people (Gen. 12:3; Isa. 61:11; Ps. 72:17). In the end, the psalmist expresses

confidence that God has heard his plea (vv. 17–18).

The psalmist gives no less than four ways that God demonstrates concern for those oppressed by the wicked. First, God hears their “desire” (v. 17). What is this desire? They desire to be seen by God. They don’t want God to forget their plight (compare v. 12). They want God to “break the wicked man’s arm” (v. 15), putting an end to the oppression they are experiencing at his hands. While the wicked man boasts about his evil cravings (v. 3), it is the longings of the afflicted that God actually regards (v. 17).

Second, God encourages them (v. 17). In Hebrew, this phrase can be translated literally as “strengthen their hearts.” God is not simply cheering from the sidelines or giving inspirational speeches. God is active behind the scenes, working to strengthen them internally.

Third, He “[listens] to their cry” (v. 17). This echoes God’s response to the Israelites while they were captive in Egypt. Of their sufferings, God said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers” (Ex. 3:7). When God sees His people’s afflictions, He acts to deliver them.

Fourth, God defends “the fatherless and the oppressed” (v. 18). These are the most vulnerable people. It is consistent with God’s character that He desires to care for them. According to verse 18, He defends them against the “man of the earth” (KJV). This is another way of describing the oppressors and their worldly thoughts. With God on the throne, the evildoers’ time and power are limited.

The psalmist is asking God important “why” questions. Why does God seem far away? Why do the wicked appear to be escaping punishment? The psalmist responds by trusting that God sees and will act to save His people in their time of trouble.

**7.** *What is the basis of the psalmist’s trust in God?*

**8.** *What actions does God take on behalf of the afflicted?*

## An Ocean of Love

A father and his young daughter were on one of those “get away from it all” cruises. The father had thought the trip would be good for the two of them after the sudden loss of his wife. Though both openly expressed their intense sadness, they also tried to spend some time telling stories and reliving all the good memories.

At one point, as they were huddled together on the deck of the ship and trying to cope with the unrelenting grief of their loss, the little girl asked her father, “Daddy, does God love us as much as Mommy did?” At first, the father didn’t know what to say. But he knew he couldn’t side-step his daughter’s question.

Pointing out across the water to the most distant horizon, he said, “Honey, God’s love reaches farther than you can see in that direction.” Turning around, he said, “And God’s love reaches farther than you can see in that direction too.” Then, the father looked up at the sky and said, “And God’s love is way higher than the sky.” Finally, he pointed down at the ocean and said, “And it’s even deeper than the ocean.” After hearing her father’s description, the girl looked up into her father’s eyes and responded, “Oh, just think, Daddy! And we’re right here in the middle of it all!”

In the middle of our helplessness, God is there. In the middle of our trouble and grief, God is there. Even in the midst of our oppression, God is there. For whatever we face, we are right here in the middle of His love.

**9.** *What situations or circumstances in life have helped you grasp how wide, long, high, and deep is the love of Christ (see Eph. 3:18–19)?*

**10.** *Have you ever experienced God’s presence amid overwhelming grief? When?*

**11.** *How might your life be altered if you believed that you are in the middle of the immense ocean of God’s love?*

## Pay It Forward

Has anyone in a store or restaurant ever given you a free drink? In school, did a teacher allow you to turn in your work late without penalty? Did a family member ever patiently listen while you complained about work? Did a police officer let you off from a speeding ticket with a warning? Our lives are full of grace that we take for granted. A test of our understanding of grace is whether we show it to others.

► *Who in your life right now would you say is really struggling with something? Maybe this isn't the person who has the worst problem, in your mind. It could be someone who is suffering in silence over something that others don't consider important. Ask yourself, "How can I build trust so that this person is willing to talk to me about it?" Today's psalm doesn't give you a "right" answer to share, but you can remind your friend that God sees.*

### KEY VERSE

**LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.** —Psalm 10:17 KJV

**You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry.** —Psalm 10:17 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of January 6 through January 12

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

**Mon.** Revelation 19:11–21—Faithful and True.

**Tue.** 1 Chronicles 29:10–20—God Gives Strength and Power.

**Wed.** Isaiah 52:1–12—Our God Reigns.

**Thu.** Psalm 47—Shout Joyfully to God.

**Fri.** Philippians 2:1–13—Exalted through Obedience.

**Sat.** Mark 4:35–41—The Wind and Sea Obey Jesus.

**Sun.** Psalm 93—Robed in Majesty.

## The Lord is Majestic

A robe,” the woman said, holding a small paper plate with fruit and cheese cubes on it. “It’s very striking!”  
Brendon smiled back at the woman. “Thank you so much.”

Brendon’s colored oil painting was among more than 20 works of art displayed at the gallery. His work, along with that of eight other graduate students, had been selected for exhibit. He also had a black and white pencil drawing in the show but was most proud of his oil painting.

An elderly man joined the woman observing Brendon’s piece. The background of clouds, subtle shadowing, and other colorful, dramatic marks both framed and somewhat concealed the back of the regal white, purple, and gold robe. Brendon didn’t want the viewer to focus on the person in the robe, or any physicality of God. He wanted to show the magnificence, splendor, power and might of the Lord through the image of royal clothing.

“This is wonderful young man,” the elderly gentleman said. “How much is it? I’d like to purchase it for my home office.”

Brendon handed the gentleman the brochure of the art pieces and their corresponding prices. The man scanned the pamphlet.

“It’s worth every penny and more,” he said, turning to head toward the sale table.

- 1.** *What aspect of creation stands out most to you?*
- 2.** *Where do you glimpse the creative ingenuity of God?*
- 3.** *In what aspects of creation do you find it most difficult to see God’s glory?*

## Robed in Majesty

*Psalm 93:1–2 KJV*

1 The LORD reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; the LORD is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself: the world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved.

2 Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting.

*Psalm 93:1–2 NIV*

<sup>1</sup> The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty;  
the LORD is robed in majesty and armed with strength; indeed, the world is established, firm and secure.

<sup>2</sup> Your throne was established long ago;  
you are from all eternity.

“The LORD reigns” (Ps. 93:1). This psalm starts out with a confident declaration of the position and power of God. This declaration was a particularly bold one after the fall of the southern kingdom of Judah (586 BC), as God’s people lived under the dominion of foreign powers. The destruction of Solomon’s glorious temple and the loss of national sovereignty made it difficult for some to affirm that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was the ruler of all creation.

Despite the appearances on the ground, the writer of the psalm describes the Lord as “robed in majesty and armed with strength” (Ps. 93:1). This imagery connotes royalty and authority. God is the great king, and majesty and strength characterize Him, so much so that they are like garments on Him. The kingly imagery invites our respect and awe.

After affirming the reality of God’s reign, the writer next describes the world as “established, firm and secure” (Ps. 93:1). The subject change from “the Lord” to “the world” can seem somewhat surprising, but attention to the parallelism of Hebrew poetry can clarify the author’s point. After two lines that similarly emphasize God’s reign by referring to His regal “garments,” the third line expands upon that point with a different image. The



psalmist describes the world's foundation as "secure" because it implies its permanence. This permanence comes from God's rule over it. In other words, the earth is securely "established" because it is the kingdom over which God forever reigns. This line thus reiterates the point of the first two—the cosmic dominion of the God of Israel—in a fresh way.

Verse two addresses God directly: "Your throne *was* established" and "you *are* from all eternity" (emphasis added). The psalmist here shifts attention from the present reality of God's reign to its perpetuity. Using the poetic device of parallelism, the author affirms God's eternal dominion with two different images. In the first line, "your throne" is another way of referring to God's kingship, and the establishment of this "throne" occurred "long ago." The second line is even more specific: the divine king has actually reigned "from all eternity." In these verses, then, the psalmist emphasizes that God's rule has lasted and will last forever.

**4.** *How is the Lord described in these verses?*

**5.** *What do these verses say about the rule of God?*

## Lord Over All Creation

*Psalm 93:3–4 KJV*

3 The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves.

4 The LORD on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea.

*Psalm 93:3–4, NIV*

<sup>3</sup> The seas have lifted up, LORD, the seas have lifted up their voice; the seas have lifted up their pounding waves.

<sup>4</sup> Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea— the LORD on high is mighty.

In these verses, the psalmist compares the powerful

waves of the sea to the power of God. The seas are described as “lifting up” their “voice” and their “pounding waves” (Ps. 93:3). The psalmist is describing the sight and sound of powerful water, a force that invokes both awe and fear. A flooding sea could destroy crops or wash away homes, and storms threatened fishing and impeded navigation. Three times, the psalmist repeats “the seas have lifted up,” and the force of the water seems to build with each repetition (Ps. 93:3).

This imagery carried an additional nuance in the ancient Near Eastern context. The seas were often viewed as symbols of chaos and disorder, a threat to the harmony of the well-ordered cosmos. God’s victory over the seas and their creatures is a common motif in the Old Testament (Isa. 27:1; Job 26:12; Pss. 74:13; 89:9). With the three-fold repetition and expansion of the image, the psalmist here emphasizes the frightening power of the chaotic seas.

Yet as powerful as they are, the forces of chaos pale in comparison to the almighty God. In verse four, the psalmist describes God as “mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea.” God demonstrated His incomparable might by establishing the world (v. 1) and His reign over it (v. 2), thus quelling the chaotic seas. God is the one who created the seas. He rules over them (see Gen. 1:9–10, 20–22; Ps. 89:9). He is more powerful than the sound and the force of the waters.

Verse four ends by declaring that “the LORD on high is mighty.” This description evokes the earlier portrayal of God as reigning king. The repetition of the word “mighty” here reinforces that kingly imagery, as this term is used to describe the majesty of rulers. These verses remind us that God is king over all of creation.

**6.** *What did the seas represent for ancient Near Eastern peoples?*

**7.** *What do these verses say about God’s power and authority?*

## Teachings That Stand Firm

*Psalms 93:5 KJV*

5 Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever.

*Psalms 93:5 NIV*

<sup>5</sup> Your statutes, LORD, stand firm; holiness adorns your house for endless days.

The psalmist concludes this poem by addressing God directly, just like in verse two. Here he offers two further affirmations of God's eternal reign over the world. First, the psalmist describes God's "statutes" or "testimonies" as "firm." The Hebrew word for "statutes" appears throughout the Old Testament in reference to the commands that God had given to His people (see Deut. 4:45; 6:17; 2 Kings 23:3; Ps. 25:10). God's statutes reflect His right to govern the world as the ruler of creation. God gives righteous statutes because all wisdom and understanding come from Him. Just as God has "established the world" and His reign over it as firmly and securely (vv. 1–2), so His royal decrees "stand firm" (v. 3). This assertion could serve as comfort to God's people when other cultures seemed to prevail and other ways of life seemed to prosper.

The writer then declares that "holiness" is what decorates God's "house" (Ps. 93:5). The term "holiness" means sacred or set apart. And God's "house" often refers the temple of the Lord (for instance, 2 Sam. 7:5–6). Here the psalmist may mean the temple in Jerusalem, but he may also refer to a heavenly temple (compare Heb. 9:11, 23–24; Rev. 11:9). Or perhaps he means all creation, which is like a giant temple for the creator. The author describes holiness as a permanent characteristic of God's temple ("for endless days"), thus affirming once again that God has unique and enduring reign over the world He has made.

**8.** *What is described as standing firm in these verses? Where has the word "firm" been used before?*

**9.** *What does this verse say about the house of God?*

## A Mad King

The extravagant “Mad King Ludwig,” the King of Bavaria from 1864 to 1886, was no ordinary king. He was shy, introverted, and shirked many of his official duties. He was known as “the fairytale king.” He had an intense love of art, music, and architecture, which inflamed rebel ministers who wanted him gone. Eventually, they brought a report against Ludwig that referred to his erratic behavior, extravagance, and reclusive ways. They accused him of insanity. The day after he was removed, his body was found in Lake Starnberg. The exact cause of his death remains a mystery to this day.

Kings are imperfect human beings, and many have been seduced by power, greed, and lust. While others have tried to be just in their rule, all kings have one thing in common: their rule ends. That end can come peacefully but often plays out tragically. A person cannot trust in a king because they all are imperfect and ultimately fail.

King David realized his own shortcomings and knew that his life could be cut short at any time. He composed many psalms that shifted the focus from his fears and troubles to the all-knowing King.

King David, like the writer of Psalm 93, was aware that God’s steadfastness is solid like a rock. God is trustworthy. He would deliver David from his enemies. King David’s focus was heavenward. Christians living in a fallen world should always direct their focus in that same direction—toward the King of all Kings.

**10.** *What characteristics set a fair, just king apart from a corrupt, evil king?*

**11.** *Do you think it’s a good idea to put your trust in a world leader, whether they appear to be good or not? Why or why not?*

**12.** *What kingly attributes does God possess that makes Him the perfect King of Kings?*

## A King Who Provides in Every Way

In the ancient world, kings were expected to be just and to create laws that would protect the people. Now, take those expectations and apply them to God. Does He check all those boxes? God our king cares for us. Through Him, we find provisions in every way.

► *Reflect on a time when you faced a chaotic situation and felt overwhelmed. Did you think that the problem was insurmountable? Or were you able to focus on the fact that God in His power is bigger than anything you may face? Take time to meditate on how great God truly is and to praise Him for those things you've observed.*

*Areas where you can recognize God's rule in your life:*

*Strategies for building trust in God as your king:*

### KEY VERSE

The LORD reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; the LORD is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself: the world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved. —Psalm 93:1 KJV

The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed in majesty and armed with strength; indeed, the world is established, firm and secure. —Psalm 93:1 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of January 6 through January 12

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Revelation 19:11–21—Faithful and True.
- Tue.** 1 Chronicles 29:10–20—God Makes Great and Gives Strength.
- Wed.** Isaiah 52:1–12—Our God Reigns.
- Thu.** Psalm 47—Shout Joyfully to God.
- Fri.** Philippians 2:1–13—Exalted through Obedience.
- Sat.** Mark 4:35–41—The Wind and Waves Obey Jesus.
- Sun.** Psalm 93—Robed in Majesty.

## The Lord is Active

Edith looked out at family and friends sitting at the decorated tables. She was at the head table with her husband, Elderick, and her three children and their spouses.

It was Edith's retirement party, and her husband and children had planned a grand affair. She was so excited, grateful, and pleased to be retiring from the university after 30 years; those years included discrimination. Her supervisors were unfair, difficult, and harsh people. She had endured unkind and unwelcoming coworkers too. For all those years, Edith was overworked and overlooked.

But she would be remiss if she didn't recall her shortcomings, her mishaps, and her blow ups. Once, Edith had gotten into an ugly altercation with a coworker. This staff member eventually filed a formal complaint, but it included intentional lies about Edith. After an investigation, the complaint was shown to have no merit. As far as Edith was concerned, the Lord had protected her.

Edith's mind snapped back to the room as she was being called to the microphone.

"First, I want to thank God for His love and faithfulness to me," Edith said, looking from table to table. "If it had not been for the Lord, who was on my side, I would have not made it to retirement! And the Lord continues to be faithful to me."

"I'm so grateful," she said. Edith smiled when the entire room erupted into applause. "So thankful!"

**1.** *How would you describe God's relationship to His children?*

**2.** *Do God's children have a role in experiencing and noticing His faithfulness in their lives?*

**3.** *When have you experienced God's faithfulness in the past, and how can memory of that time help in present struggles?*

## Remember All of God's Benefits

*Psalm 103:1–5 KJV*

A Psalm of David.

1 Bless the LORD, O my soul:  
and all that is within me,  
bless his holy name.

2 Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits:

3 Who forgiveth all thine  
iniquities; who healeth all  
thy diseases;

4 Who redeemeth thy life  
from destruction; who  
crowneth thee with loving-  
kindness and tender mercies;

5 Who satisfieth thy mouth  
with good things; so that thy  
youth is renewed like the  
eagle's.

*Psalm 103:1–5 NIV*

Of David.

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD, my soul;  
all my inmost being, praise  
his holy name.

<sup>2</sup> Praise the LORD, my soul,  
and forget not all his  
benefits—

<sup>3</sup> who forgives all your sins  
and heals all your diseases,

<sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from  
the pit  
and crowns you with love  
and kindness,

<sup>5</sup> who satisfies your desires  
with good things  
so that your youth is  
renewed like the eagle's.

The psalmist begins by speaking to his own soul—a poetic way of saying what he should do. He encourages his soul to “praise the LORD.” He knows that he should be commemorating abundant “benefits”—which means gifts that God has generously given to him. Then he starts listing some of these gifts.

Forgiveness of sins is a recurring theme throughout this psalm (vv. 8–10, 12). The psalmist is aware that his sins could cause a rift in his relationship with God (v. 10), but God remains faithful in forgiving his sins. God's healing means not only forgiveness but also physical healing. Throughout the Old Testament, God often heals His people when they cry out to Him. This is evident in stories like the healing of Hezekiah, who asked God for aid and received 15 more years of life (2 Kings 20:1–11).

Verse 4 highlights God's deliverance of His people from “the pit” or “grave,” which is a metaphor for death. In its

original context, this statement referred to the threat of death, similar to the modern expression, “snatched from the jaws of death.” Subsequent promises of God’s eventual resurrection and exaltation of the righteous dead invite people to read this text more deeply, in light of Christ’s redemptive work and resurrection.

God proceeds to give them a “crown” to further glorify the recipients of grace, to show His love and kindness (v. 4b). This line invites Christian reflection, not only on God’s kindness toward us now, but also our future glorification, when Christ returns and restores us to life. In 2 Timothy 4:8, we hear of a “crown of righteousness” awarded at a future day of judgment.

Verse 5 depicts God as generous and loving, delighting in bestowing good gifts on His children (compare James 1:17). He renews people’s youth, so that they resemble the energy and strength of an eagle (compare Isa. 40:31).

**4.** *What are the specific benefits the psalmist mentions in verses 3–5?*

**5.** *What does the “pit” in verse 4 represent, and how does God respond to those in the pit?*

## Remember God’s Great Compassion

*Psalms 103:6–10 KJV*

6 The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.

7 He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.

8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

9 He will not always

*Psalms 103:6–10 NIV*

6 The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

7 He made known his ways to Moses,  
his deeds to the people of Israel:

8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious,  
slow to anger, abounding in love.

9 He will not always accuse,



chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever.

10 He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

nor will he harbor his anger forever;

<sup>10</sup> he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

The psalmist continues his reflection on God’s compassion toward sinners. Verse 6 describes special consideration for the lowly and downtrodden and those who are oppressed. In the ancient world, the poor faced injustice from others who were powerful, people who might swindle or cheat. Scripture says that fair retribution belongs to God (Deut. 32:35). Those who are harmed can be certain that God will execute justice, in His divine timing.

Verses 7–8 recall God’s revelation of His compassion in front of Moses. When God allowed Moses to witness His glory (Ex. 33:18–23; 34:5–8), He revealed a key aspect of His nature. The psalmist echoes God’s declaration in His self-disclosure to Moses, which says, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Ex. 34:6).

God “will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever.” The psalmist focuses on God’s immutable character, specifically His compassion. He urges his soul to remember that God will save His people from their sin.

**6.** *Who are the “oppressed” referenced in verse 6?*

**7.** *What do verses 7–8 tell us about God’s character as revealed to Moses?*

**8.** *What does verse 9 reveal about God’s feelings towards His people?*

## God Remembers Us

*Psalm 103:11–14 KJV*

11 For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his

*Psalm 103:11–14 NIV*

<sup>11</sup> For as high as the heavens are above the earth,

mercy toward them that fear him.

12 As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

13 Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.

14 For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.

so great is his love for those who fear him;

<sup>12</sup> as far as the east is from the west,

so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

<sup>13</sup> As a father has compassion on his children,

so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;

<sup>14</sup> for he knows how we are formed,

he remembers that we are dust.

The psalmist emphasizes God's love for His people and willingness to forgive their transgressions. He compares God's love to the height of the heavens. God's love for those who fear and respect Him is as vast as the distance between the earth and the heaven: immeasurable, limitless. God's profound love compels Him to remove people's sins as far as the east is from the west.

Verses 13–14 reiterate the theme of God's compassion for His children. Readers are invited to envision God as a compassionate and caring father. One reason for His compassion is explained in verse 14: God recalls "how we are formed . . . that we are dust." God recognizes human mortality, frailty, and weakness. Our mortality prompts Him to feel compassion towards us. God relents from His anger and shows mercy toward people because He knows their transience.

**9.** *What analogy does the psalmist use to describe God's love in verse 11?*

**10.** *What does it mean when the psalm says God has removed our transgressions as far as the east is from the west in verse 12?*

**11.** *What is the significance of God remembering that we are dust?*

## Choosing to Remember

Sarah and Damon were ready for their family to grow. They already had two children under five, both boys; and they were pregnant with their third, a girl. They named her Evelyn after her grandmother, and together their family prepared for new life. They picked out a new car seat, had a space for Evelyn to sleep, and Sarah was working tirelessly to be ready for maternity leave.

But the unthinkable happened. In their third trimester, Evelyn was stillborn. What made it even worse was that their family was grieving at different speeds. They couldn't expect the boys to understand, but they understood enough. Sarah wouldn't need time off from work after all; instead, she faced the prospect of explaining the loss of her daughter to clients and coworkers who might ask the wrong questions.

But God was there for Sarah and Damon, even when they felt undeserved shame. Their church community came alongside them, offering to watch the boys, to get them anything they needed, to sit with them as they planned a memorial. Somewhere in the longing and waiting, they found God's faithful presence. They had the intense impression that God was bringing them closer as a family and helping them to treasure one another. They decided not to hide their sorrow but to share it openly. The couple found that friends tended to listen when they spoke of God's enduring love and the way their family had faced tragedy.

**12.** *What role does remembering God's past faithfulness play in moving forward when life's lows are before us?*

**13.** *What are some practical things we can do when overwhelmed with life's inequity?*

**14.** *Share with someone a time that you experienced God's faithfulness in your life, when no one else could have gotten you through that time or problem.*

## Remembering God's Faithfulness

Remembering God's faithfulness can prove to be difficult at times—especially when trials barrage your life. Maybe God's goodness seems more like a mirage than anything else. Whether you are in a season of sorrow or joy, find hope in God's faithfulness by considering His Son in the following activity.

► *Psalm 103 describes God's immense love and faithfulness, as well as numerous benefits He provides His people. Take some time to read through Psalm 103 and pause whenever you see one of God's characteristics or one of His benefits. Consider how these things, though written long before Jesus' birth, have been made available for today's believers.*

### KEY VERSE

The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. —Psalm 103:6 KJV

The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. —Psalm 103:6 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of January 13 through January 19

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Revelation 4—God's Heavenly Throne.
- Tue.** Revelation 22:1–14—Life Springs from God's Throne.
- Wed.** Isaiah 6:1–8—My Eyes Have Seen the King.
- Thu.** James 4:1–10—Draw Near to God in Humility.
- Fri.** Hebrews 4:11–16—Boldly Approach the Throne of Grace
- Sat.** Isaiah 66:1–14—Heaven Is God's Throne.
- Sun.** Psalm 103:1–11, 19–22—Bless God's Holy Name.

## The Lord Is Praised

If you are getting the soap, I will give you a \$5 discount,” Courtlyn said. “Thank you so much.”

Once the customer took her bag and walked away from the table, Courtlyn turned around to resume talking to Alicia at their church’s Women in Business Fair.

“You have such a charmed life,” Alicia said. “A great husband, your own successful businesses, and a nice house. You have it all!”

Courtlyn was getting to know Alicia better since Courtlyn and her husband Montez had only just joined Abundant Faith Fellowship, four months ago.

“Well, to be honest, there’s a lot you don’t know,” Courtlyn said.

Courtlyn explained how, years ago, she had been in an abusive relationship. “The Lord rescued me from that situation and blessed me even more when He placed Montez into my life. But more importantly,” she added, “God delivered me from my destructive patterns and myself!”

Courtlyn shared about some of the difficult and unsustainable jobs she used to have. “This current job is a blessing,” she said. “There’s not a lot of drama and stress at work, and I’m able to fund my hair and skin business.”

“Oh, I didn’t realize you have had it so rough,” Alicia said.

“I’m only sharing this to show you how faithful God has been to me,” Courtlyn said. “The Lord has taken good care of me and continues to do so. I will always praise His name, because He is great, and He is worthy!”

**1. Why is it important to know basic truths about God’s character?**

**2. How can knowing God’s character encourage those who don’t know Him?**

**3. Who do you need to tell about God and His character?**

**LESSON FOCUS:** Tell of your king’s glory, protection, and deliverance.

## Tell of the Glory of the King

*Psalms 145:1 KJV*

David's Psalm of praise.  
1 I will extol thee, my  
God, O king; and I will  
bless thy name forever  
and ever.

*Psalms 145:1 NIV*

A psalm of praise. Of David.  
1 I will exalt you, my God the  
King;  
I will praise your name forever  
and ever.

The psalmist begins by exalting God, saying that he will sing the praises of God's name forever and ever. In the ancient Near Eastern world, when someone blessed another's name, they were praising their character. Blessing God's name refers to continuously speaking well of and honoring God's attributes and deeds. It represents an ongoing commitment to worship God and acknowledge His goodness.

This is the final psalm with a heading that could mean "by David" or "for David." It shows the humility of the king of Israel to be praising the name of God as the real king. King David could have exalted himself, but he chose the rightful place of submission to the one true God and king.

**4.** *What is the significance of addressing God as king (v. 1)?*

**5.** *What does the psalmist mean by "blessing God's name" forever and ever?*

## An Everlasting Kingdom

*Psalms 145:10–13 KJV*

10 All thy works shall  
praise thee, O LORD; and  
thy saints shall bless thee.  
11 They shall speak of the  
glory of thy kingdom, and  
talk of thy power;  
12 To make known to the  
sons of men his mighty

*Psalms 145:10–13 NIV*

10 All your works praise you,  
LORD;  
your faithful people extol you.  
11 They tell of the glory of your  
kingdom  
and speak of your might,  
12 so that all people may know of  
your mighty acts

acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom.

13 Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.

and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

<sup>13</sup>Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does.

The psalmist intends to praise God “forever and ever” according to verse 1, and verse 10 continues by choosing to dwell on all of God’s “works,” which the psalmist sets in parallel with God’s “people.” God created a people who are able to sing out and praise Him. God’s works include His creation, His care and providence for the universe, His miraculous deeds, and His acts of justice and mercy.

Verses 11–12 describe the content of creation’s proclamation of God’s glory. Everything God has done tells of His glory and might so that all people might come to see and know the mighty acts of God.

Verse 13 lets the reader peek behind the curtain to see the splendor of the kingdom of God. Unlike the kings and kingdoms of this world, the kingdom of God is everlasting and without end. While other kingdoms may totter on the edge of destruction when faced with their enemies, God’s kingdom endures forever throughout all generations. The king of this kingdom is not a self-indulgent king, but the Lord, almighty God, is trustworthy. God always keeps His promises, and He is faithful in all that He does.

*The final lines of v. 13 of the NIV are supplied by the Dead Sea Scrolls and other manuscripts which weren’t used in the making of the KJV.*

**6.** *How does verse 10 connect to verse 1 in Psalm 145?*

**7.** *What do verses 11–12 suggest about the purpose of God’s glory and might?*

8. *How is the kingdom of God described, and how does it differ from the kingdoms of this world?*

## God's Provision, Protection, and Deliverance

*Psalm 145:14–21 KJV*

14 The LORD upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down.

15 The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season.

16 Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.

17 The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.

18 The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.

19 He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them.

20 The LORD preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy.

21 My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD: and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever.

*Psalm 145:14–21 NIV*

<sup>14</sup> The LORD upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.

<sup>15</sup> The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time.

<sup>16</sup> You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

<sup>17</sup> The LORD is righteous in all his ways and faithful in all he does.

<sup>18</sup> The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

<sup>19</sup> He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them.

<sup>20</sup> The LORD watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.

<sup>21</sup> My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD.  
Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.

Verse 14 begins by saying that God cares for those “who fall” and “who are bowed down.” Those “who fall”



likely includes anyone overwhelmed by circumstances or by temptation. Those who are “bowed down” can also include people who are oppressed by society and rulers or who carry heavy burdens.

The Lord is the good and gracious king who gives everyone their daily bread. These verses emphasize that living creatures are dependent on God for their sustenance, and He generously provides for the needs and satisfies the desires of all things.

God is faithful in keeping His promises and caring for everyone who looks to Him. He is the reason that every creature takes breath, moment by moment. He causes the earth to continue to spin. He is the reason that the sun rises every morning. He is the faithful ruler, righteous and just in all He does. God is accessible and responsive to those who cry out to Him. He is near to all who call on Him. He cares for His creation and wants them to humble themselves before Him and ask for help (v. 18).

While God protects and provides for those who humbly rely on Him, He destroys the arrogant. This reminds us of God’s justice and judgment against wickedness, even as He is ready to forgive all who repent. As a good and righteous king, God executes judgment on behalf of His people, sometimes through providential circumstances. God is ready to forgive and wrap the wicked into his loving care, if only they would call on Him for help.

The psalmist concludes by recounting his commitment to praise God, while also inviting all of creation to join him in this eternal act of thanksgiving. God is a glorious king.

**9.** *What does verse 14 tell us about God’s nature and His care for all His creatures?*

**10.** *How does God respond to those who call on Him?*

**11.** *How does the psalmist conclude in verse 21, and why is this significant?*

## Speak the Word

“Mr. McCain died.” These words hit me like a hammer in my stomach. Mr. McCain was my boss for five years, and I never asked him about his relationship with Jesus. Yes, Mr. McCain knew that I lived differently from the other youth that worked for him. He respected my character and trustworthiness, but I never spoke to him about God.

Mr. McCain’s sudden death revealed to me that I could live a life exhibiting Jesus’ character, but unless I share the Word of God to those around me, it would not provide an opportunity for any person to decide to accept Jesus as Savior. We say that words need to be met with actions, but I learned that my words must accompany my actions. Without actually sharing how Jesus Christ changed my life and guides my actions, others will never know.

Truthfully, it’s easier for me to just live my life than to sit down and talk about my walk with God. Fear of rejection or being misunderstood hinders me from sharing about God and what He has done for me through Jesus Christ. I have had to learn to pray for boldness from the Holy Spirit to bring the conversation to spiritual things with friends, colleagues, and especially employers.

I try to remember that my responsibility is to share of God’s work in my life and to let God handle the rest, and that posture releases some of my fear. Whether the person listens and responds positively is not up to me. I need to be obedient and speak about Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection and trust God to move in the person’s heart.

**12.** *What are some major truths that should be shared when telling others about God?*

**13.** *What are some obstacles that keep us from sharing with those in authority about who God is and what He has done for us?*

**14.** *Why is it important both to live a life for Jesus and share Him with others?*

## Words and Actions

Throughout the Bible, especially the Psalms, we are instructed to tell others about God and His glory. Yet fear, lack of knowledge, and other hindrances can often keep us from telling what He has done for us.

- ▶ *Write down several reasons why you should tell others about God and all that He has done in your life.*
  
- ▶ *Ask God to give you the names of some people whom you should take the initiative to tell about God and His glory this week. Write their names.*
  
- ▶ *Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to open up opportunities for you to talk with these people this week.*

### KEY VERSE

Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations. —Psalm 145:13 KJV

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. —Psalm 145:13 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

**Week of January 20 through January 26**

**(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)**

- Mon.** Daniel 2:31–45—The Kingdoms of This World
- Tue.** Colossians 1:9–20—The Kingdom of God's Son.
- Wed.** Colossians 1:21–29—Christ in You, the Hope of Glory.
- Thu.** Zechariah 14:8–11, 16–21—The Lord Reigns over the Earth.
- Fri.** Hebrews 12:18–29—An Unshakable Kingdom.
- Sat.** Matthew 6:25–34—Seek First God's Kingdom.
- Sun.** Psalm 145:1–13a, 17–21—Bless God's Name Forever.

## Praying Properly

The noise level in the crowded room steadily rose higher and higher, despite the school superintendent incessantly banging his gavel to commence the meeting.

Kenyatta Brown and his wife sat in the audience with all the other parents who had come to the emergency school board meeting. They had been called together because of last week's incident. The Browns' 16-year-old son, Jarel, had told them about the fight when he came home.

Various versions of the story had been circulating ever since. According to Jarel, a white student had called a Black student a racial slur, resulting in the Black student fighting the white student. Lines had been drawn, walls had been erected, and sides had been taken. The Browns, however, had been praying for God's wisdom, peace, and love in the situation.

Finally, the room quieted. Kenyatta stood and addressed the board: "I am Kenyatta Brown, a parent in this community, and I respectfully request that we begin with prayer."

"We can't pray in a public meeting," someone shouted from the back of the room.

The superintendent banged his gavel when the room filled with chatter and murmurs. Once order had been re-established, the superintendent responded, saying, "Thank you, Mr. Brown. I'm asking everyone who wishes to pause for a moment of silence."

As Kenyatta sat down, he was touched on his shoulder and turned around to see four white faces smiling at him. "Thank you, brother," said the man in the middle.

- 1.** *Does prayer ever feel like work to you? Why do you think that is?*
- 2.** *When have you experienced a glimpse of "heaven on earth"?*
- 3.** *How can prayer help fill the divine ache within us and allow us to experience His presence and kingdom?*

LESSON FOCUS: Pray that God's kingdom would come among us.

## Praying Sincerely

*Matthew 6:5–6 KJV*

5 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

*Matthew 6:5–6 NIV*

<sup>5</sup>“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>6</sup> But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Jesus tells the crowd to pray with sincerity. He told His listeners to beware of praying like the hypocrites who stand in public places and pray for all to hear. They are seeking glory and praise for themselves, rather than for God. As a result, the praise of others is all the reward they will get. The Lord will not answer their prayers.

On the other hand, God hears and answers the sincere prayers of those who seek His glory. His people are to pray privately, behind closed doors. When His people pray in private, God will reward them with the opportunity to give glory and praise to God for what He has done.

Jesus' admonition does not mean there is something wrong with corporate prayer, when believers come together and pray with one another. There are plenty of examples in Scripture of people praying together (see Acts 2:42; 12:12; James 5:14–16). His point is that prayer is about seeking communication and intimacy with God, not bolstering a public image. Of course, cultural expectations have changed, and most people aren't expecting public praise for praying on street corners. But a modern

equivalent could be leading a congregation or small group in an overly lengthy or elaborate prayer designed to show how “spiritually mature” one is. God wants us to use our prayers to communicate with Him, not to make ourselves look good.

4. *What example does Jesus give of hypocritical praying?*
5. *How does God respond to self-glorifying prayers?*
6. *On the other hand, how are sincere prayers answered?*

## Praying Purposefully

*Matthew 6:7–8 KJV*

7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

*Matthew 6:7–8 NIV*

<sup>7</sup> And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Whereas some people are interested in receiving praise while they pray, others think that if they repeat a prayer over and over, God will surely listen. This is often how religious mystics at that time prayed to false gods. They thought that if they went on long enough, their prayers would be heard and answered.

Such prayers were doomed to fail, in part because their objects—idols—were inanimate objects which have no capacity to answer prayers. These idols cannot communicate.

Christians, on the other hand, can pray purposefully to their Father, for the “eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry” (Ps. 34:15). He is always with us and ready to hear the prayers of His people. He already knows our needs before we pray. Although God knows our every need, believers still turn

to Him in prayer for those needs. Doing so helps them acknowledge that He provides, and it allows them to respond with gratefulness. When believers turn to God for their needs, they remind themselves of their dependency on Him.

Vain repetition is not the same as persistence in prayer. The Bible encourages believers to be persistent. In fact, “Jesus told his disciples . . . they should always pray and not give up” (Luke 18:1). In His parable, a widow continually goes before a judge to receive justice. Due to her persistence, the judge gave in and granted her justice. Though the answer to believers’ prayers may seem delayed at times, they should never give up. They should instead trust that God hears and will always do what is best for His children.

**7.** *How would “babbling” in prayer be an issue in your modern context?*

**8.** *Why did certain people pray with many words?*

**9.** *How should God’s people pray?*

## Praying for God’s Will

*Matthew 6:9–15 KJV*

9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

10 Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us

*Matthew 6:9–15 NIV*

<sup>9</sup> “This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

<sup>10</sup> your kingdom come, your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

<sup>11</sup> Give us today our daily bread.

<sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation,

from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

but deliver us from the evil one.'

<sup>14</sup> For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

<sup>15</sup> But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Jesus begins His prayer by recognizing the Father's holy nature. God rules from heaven, and when believers praise Him, they approach Him with reverence and respect.

After praising God for who He is, Jesus brings requests to Him. The prayer for "daily bread" points toward God's provision. God alone can meet His people's needs. Jesus' prayer shifts from physical needs to spiritual needs. Confession of sins and requests for forgiveness are vital for fellowship with Him. Forgiveness is also vital for fellowship with one another. Unforgiveness is an offense before God. If we do not forgive, we broadcast that we haven't understood the forgiveness shown to us. A forgiving Father expects His children to forgive.

Another important request is to be kept from temptation. Thankfully, God will faithfully lead His people along the path of righteousness, especially when they ask Him to. As Paul puts it, "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13). Praise God that He will always keep His people from straying when they sincerely choose to follow Him!

**10.** *How should we begin our prayers?*

**11.** *What are examples of right and good things to ask our heavenly Father?*

**12.** *Why should we forgive others?*



## Praying for God's Kingdom

No matter how much a person knows, without the power of prayer, God's people are prone to wander aimlessly along the path of life. Prayer is for the here-and-now, as well as for the future. Jesus is already king, but the world doesn't recognize Him. The king's instructions are as relevant today as when He spoke to His disciples in the first century, when they faced persecutions and famine, difficulties and disease.

God gives His people prayer to live a victorious life that glorifies Him. When believers pray sincerely and seek God's glory, they pray for God's kingdom to come and transform their circumstances. Jesus' model helps us to ask God to fill the world with His presence.

Thus the Christian's purpose in prayer is to signal the glory of the king from within the world that doesn't yet know Him. Followers of Christ bring Him the honor and reverence due to Him as "the Lord Almighty . . . the King of glory" (Ps. 24:10). Following Jesus' example, believers first praise God with reverence and respect for His holiness. Second, they seek His will and His rule over their lives. Third, believers bring their requests to God and acknowledge that He is their provider. They surrender control of circumstances and depend upon Him. Finally, they ask forgiveness for sin and challenge themselves to be as forgiving as their heavenly Father. God hears such prayers, and He wants people to trust and follow Him on the path of righteousness.

**13.** *What does it mean to say God's kingdom is both present and future?*

**14.** *What is our purpose in prayer?*

**15.** *How is God's glory revealed through His people here on earth?*

**16.** *Why is it important to pray for God's kingdom to come?*

## Kingdom Prayer

Kingdom prayer is sincere, purposeful, grateful, and humble. It focuses on God and His will. Jesus provided a model that guides believers in praying for God's will. Reflect on the outline below to write your own prayer based on Jesus' model.

- ▶ *Recognize the holy nature of God.*
- ▶ *Praise the righteous, heavenly Father, who is also creator and king.*
- ▶ *Seek His will for your life.*
- ▶ *Bring requests for care and provision to Him.*
- ▶ *Confess sins, then ask for and receive His forgiveness.*
- ▶ *Ask God to direct your path in righteousness.*

### KEY VERSE

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

—Matthew 6:10 KJV

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

—Matthew 6:10 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of January 27 through February 2

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Matthew 11:25–30—Come, All Who Are Weary.
- Tue.** Psalm 4—God, Answer Me When I Call.
- Wed.** Luke 18:1–8—Cry Out for Justice.
- Thu.** James 5:13–20—Pray for One Another.
- Fri.** Psalm 91—God Is My Refuge and Fortress.
- Sat.** Psalm 92—God Will Deliver You.
- Sun.** Matthew 6:5–15—The Prayer that Jesus Taught.

## Heeding Wholly

I'll think about it," Darius said.

"What is there to think about?" Andre replied. "God has been so good to you."

Andre and Darius were sitting on the bleachers in the gymnasium following a friendly game of basketball.

Darius's team had won, in large part thanks to him. Half an hour after the game had ended and Darius still only wanted to talk about how good the game was. "Anyway," Darius said, "I could have played last week too, I'm telling you. We didn't have to lose."

But Andre didn't want to talk about the games anymore. Barely three weeks had passed since Darius had been broadsided in his car by a semi-trailer truck. Darius's car flipped over and spun several times, finally landing in a ditch. Emergency responders were shocked that Darius had been able to unbuckle himself and exit the car without help. Even more surprising was the fact that Darius only suffered scrapes and bruises. A few bandages and a few weeks of recovery were all he needed.

"The hand of God protected you in that crash last month," Andre said, looking intently at his friend. "That's gotta be it. I saw the pictures of your car. You shouldn't even be here."

Darius sat quiet for a few moments. "Yeah, I guess so."

"You guess so?" Andre said in shock. "Man, if I didn't already know the Lord, I'd be running to an altar after all the ways God has shown up for you. What is it? Why won't you accept Christ?"

"I don't know," Darius said, unwilling to look up at his friend. "I'm just not ready."

**1. What do you notice in your life that takes your gaze off of Jesus?**

**2. Why are worldly possessions unstable and temporary?**

**3. How does looking to Jesus satisfy our desires?**

LESSON FOCUS: Look to Jesus to find what God desires.

## Resisting God's Messenger

*Matthew 11:7–10 KJV*

7 And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?

8 But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

9 But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.

10 For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

*Matthew 11:7–10 NIV*

<sup>7</sup> As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John:

"What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? <sup>8</sup> If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces.

<sup>9</sup> Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

<sup>10</sup> This is the one about whom it is written:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."

At the beginning of Matthew 11, John the Baptist, while in prison, sends two of his disciples to Jesus. John instructed them to discover if Jesus was the coming king, or if they should look for another. During John's ministry, many people wondered if John might be the Messiah. He answered them, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Luke 3:16). John knew that he wasn't the Messiah, but he was looking to see if Jesus was the Christ.

Some of Jesus' listeners apparently did not expect John to speak so boldly. The people were not prepared for God's messenger to wear camel's hair and a leather belt, or to eat locusts and honey (Matt. 3:4). If they were

looking for someone with political power, they should have looked among royalty rather than gone out to a prophet in the wilderness.

Jesus pointed out that John was not only a prophet. He fulfills the words of Malachi: "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me" (Mal. 3:1). The Savior came humbly into this world. Likewise, the one who would prepare His way would not be encumbered by great wealth or reputation.

**4.** *Why were John's disciples there?*

**5.** *What did some of Jesus' listeners expect from John?*

**6.** *How was John more than a prophet?*

## Violence against God's Messengers

*Matthew 11:11–15 KJV*

11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

14 And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.

15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

*Matthew 11:11–15 NIV*

<sup>11</sup> Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. <sup>12</sup> From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it. <sup>13</sup> For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. <sup>14</sup> And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. <sup>15</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear.

No one born of women has been greater than John the Baptist. Apart from Jesus, no one has been born who is

due more respect than John. Nevertheless, Jesus says, those who have entered the kingdom are greater. But how? At this time, the majority of Jewish people were not convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. John still had many disciples and was well-respected, and even John wasn't sure if Jesus was the Christ. Jesus' comparison emphasizes that His ministry supersedes John's. Jesus' ministry saw the inauguration of God's kingdom.

From the beginning of John's ministry, there was resistance and violence against the kingdom of heaven. Throughout human history, there has always been resistance to God's ways. Even today, in many parts of the world, Christians are persecuted. Thankfully, believers can trust that God is with them, no matter the circumstances.

John fulfilled the promise that Elijah would come (see Mal. 3:1; 4:5–6). After Jesus' transfiguration, the disciples asked about this. Jesus told them that Elijah *had* come. Jesus' enemies had done what they wished to him, and "the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist" (Matt. 17:10–13).

**7.** *John was greatest of what group of people?*

**8.** *Who is greater than John, and why?*

**9.** *What other Old Testament prophet did Jesus declare John to be?*

## Woe to Those Who Reject God's Message

*Matthew 11:20–24 KJV*

20 Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:

21 Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in

*Matthew 11:20–24 NIV*

20 Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. 21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed

Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

22 But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.

23 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

24 But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>22</sup> But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. <sup>23</sup> And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. <sup>24</sup> But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

Jesus called out three cities where He had performed many miracles: Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. They continued in their sins despite what they had seen. Because of this, He pronounced woes on them. If the same miracles had been done in Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom (non-Jewish areas), the people in those cities would have repented.

In another context Jesus told His disciples, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (Luke 12:48). Considering all Jesus had done in the three towns, the people were without excuse for their resistance. Despite the world's resistance to God's ways, when believers look to Jesus and His Word, they can find what He desires of them.

**10.** *Upon whom did Jesus pronounce woes?*

**11.** *Why did He pronounce those woes?*

**12.** *Why might Jesus' rule as king disappoint some people?*

## Standing Strong against Resistance

Throughout history, people have rejected God's prophets, apostles, disciples, and even Jesus. According to Jesus, John was the greatest of God's human messengers. He was the one who prepared the way for the Messiah. People today continue to reject Jesus as Messiah.

In this week's Scripture passage, Jesus compared earthly perspectives with heavenly perspectives. Believers put their faith in Jesus for salvation from God's wrath. They declare their trust that Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection are sufficient to reconcile them to God in forgiveness for their sins. In this way, they are born again to enter the kingdom of God. The least of those in the kingdom are greater than people who have only experienced physical birth. As believers follow Jesus, they learn more about God's heavenly perspective. They then share His love and truth with others.

People do not always embrace the truth of their sin. They do not want to be held accountable, and they lash out against those who declare God's truth. Resistance to God and His message sometimes escalates to violence. Some unbelievers will attack God's messengers, in word and in action. No matter how unbelievers treat them, believers are accountable for what they have seen and heard from God. They can look to Jesus for strength to stand in the face of opposition. He will show believers what He has in mind for them, for their role in His kingdom.

**13.** *How can we stand faithfully, as John did, in the face of resistance and opposition?*

**14.** *What does it mean to be born again to enter the kingdom of God?*

**15.** *Why does God hold us accountable for what we know?*



## Set Your Heart and Mind on Jesus

With a partner, discuss practical ways you can put the lesson focus into practice (inspired by Col. 3:1–2).

► *What does it mean to set our hearts on Christ and heavenly things?*

► *How does looking to Jesus help us discover what God desires?*

► *Reflect on your discussion to complete the sentences below to commit to look to Jesus and follow Him this week.*

*I will look to Jesus by \_\_\_\_\_.*

*I will ask what God desires by \_\_\_\_\_.*

*I will set my heart on Jesus by \_\_\_\_\_.*

*I will set my mind on Jesus by \_\_\_\_\_.*

### KEY VERSE

Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. —Matthew 11:20 KJV

Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent.

—Matthew 11:20 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of February 3 through February 9

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

**Mon.** Joshua 1:1–9—Be Strong and Courageous.

**Tue.** Matthew 10:16–31—As Sheep among Wolves.

**Wed.** Matthew 10:32–42—Resistance and Reward.

**Thu.** Psalm 35:1–14—God Is Our Salvation.

**Fri.** Psalm 35:15–28—Rescue Me from My Enemies.

**Sat.** Proverbs 24:8–22—Don't Rejoice when Enemies Fall.

**Sun.** Matthew 11:7–15, 20–24—The Kingdom Presses On

## Living Lastly

Well, this is a first,” said Aniyah, observing the statue-like form of her friend, Delphine. “Sleeping standing up?” Delphine was just two weeks out from opening her second hair salon, and the renovations to the soon-to-be-salon were impressive. Soon, it’d be a chain! But Delphine had been working every day and every night.

When Delphine had taken her styling and braiding business out of her house and into a commercial building, she felt as if she’d won the lottery. Delphine had educated herself, had sought business advice and investors, and had secured dependable hairstylists. It didn’t take long for her business to grow. Delphine loved to recall her days of triumph—to herself or anyone who would listen. She seemed to dwell on the feelings of her success to fuel her goal of taking her business even further.

But Delphine’s obsession with success was becoming unhealthy. She was pushing her staff and herself too hard. “Maybe,” Aniyah had suggested, “you need to wait another six months or so before opening a second shop.”

Delphine exploded, accusing Aniyah of being small-minded and jealous. The accusation had stung, but Aniyah told her friend that she wanted to see her business succeed. She warned Delphine about her misaligned priorities. As a Christian, her ultimate pursuits and values needed to be Christ-likeness and the things which God values. Seeking success for successes’ sake is a destructive path.

- 1.** *What treasures do you have in your home? Why do you consider these to be treasures?*
- 2.** *How do you define heavenly treasures?*
- 3.** *Why are heavenly treasures so much more valuable than earthly treasures?*

## What Must I Do?

*Matthew 19:16–19 KJV*

16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

18 He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,

19 Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

*Matthew 19:16–19 NIV*

<sup>16</sup> Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”

<sup>17</sup> “Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.”

<sup>18</sup> “Which ones?” he inquired. Jesus replied, “‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, <sup>19</sup> honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’”

While Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem, He is met by a man. Matthew calls him “young” and wealthy (vv. 20, 22). He is a man with a question: He wants “eternal life” and acts willing to do any “good thing” to get it (v. 16). Funny enough, Jesus does not correct him. In a real sense, the man has the right goal. But Jesus tests his approach. Like a wise “Master” or “Teacher,” Jesus inquires what this man considers “good” (v. 17). Jesus points him back to God, who gave commandments that lead to abundant “life” (see Deut. 30:15–16). God is good, and so Jesus says to do the obvious thing: “keep [God’s] commandments” (v. 17).

But such a simple answer isn’t enough to satisfy the man. He wants to know “which ones” (v. 18). The Lord plays along and gives him a list of commandments that deal with other people (Ex. 20:12–16). These are obvious, or they should be to the man.

4. *What is the treasure or the thing that the man is seeking by coming to Jesus?*

5. *Why does Jesus point him back to the commands of Exodus 20?*

## What Am I Lacking?

*Matthew 19:20–26 KJV*

20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

23 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

25 When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?

26 But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

*Matthew 19:20–26 NIV*

<sup>20</sup>“All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?”

<sup>21</sup>Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

<sup>22</sup>When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

<sup>23</sup>Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>24</sup>Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

<sup>25</sup>When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?”

<sup>26</sup>Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

The young man is undeterred. He asks, “What do I still lack?” (v. 20). Now comes the true test, for Jesus asks him to give up “possessions” to follow Him (v. 21–22). Jesus is offering this man a chance to be His disciple, to follow the king as He enters Jerusalem. Only by setting aside the possessions that hinder can he be freed to follow Jesus, and he would receive a greater “treasure in heaven” (v. 21).

When the man exits the scene in disappointment, Jesus turns to His disciples, those who had followed Him and given up their former lives in the process. Jesus laments that “it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven” (v. 23). He means the abundant life that God alone can offer. To be in God’s presence, with Jesus as king, that is the real treasure the man gave up, without realizing his error.

To their credit, the disciples are shocked, possibly a little worried about their own motives. They say, “Who then can be saved?” (v. 25). It is like when a person is healed of blindness or—as Jesus proposes—a camel passes through the “eye of a needle” (v. 24). Except, “with God all things are possible” (v. 26). It is hard for rich people to let go of the idea that their wealth will provide them with happiness, security, and purpose. Jesus’ metaphor shows that it is impossible for a rich person to find eternal life, but it is possible with God. But it requires supernatural help to make that happen.

**6.** *How did Jesus expose the wealthy man’s weakness?*

**7.** *Why were the disciples astonished?*

## Heavenly Rewards

*Matthew 19:27–30 KJV*

27 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

28 And Jesus said unto them,

*Matthew 19:27–30 NIV*

27 Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?”

28 Jesus said to them, “Truly

Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

29 And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

30 But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.<sup>29</sup> And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.<sup>30</sup> But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

Jesus sees the sacrifices that His disciples made to follow Him. Where this other man had failed, they had shown a willingness to leave everything to follow their king. Jesus assures them that they will have authority as His representatives. Those who set aside earthly security shall be rewarded “a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life” (v. 29).

But with Jesus' words, “many who are last will be first,” He shows that this isn't an easy path (v. 30). The disciples will soon be in the position of seeming like “the last.” Jesus will be executed as a common criminal, and His disciples will have to flee for their lives. It will look like they gave up everything for nothing. Jesus prepares them as best He can, for the path to follow Him is the way of costly discipleship—the road that leads to the cross. Only by overcoming the powers of evil shall Jesus make their sacrifice worthy of authority in the kingdom.

**8.** *What does Jesus promise for those who must sacrifice earthly things to follow Him?*

**9.** *Who might Jesus mean by “the last” or “the first”?*

## The True Treasure

“What is here for me?” That is the question you might be asking when you hear Jesus challenge a man to leave all his possessions behind for the kingdom. Surely, Jesus cannot mean that we must do the same, can He?

I happen to know someone who could be called a “hoarder,” which is a serious mental disorder making it very difficult to stop accumulating more things. This person struggles to know what to do with anything of value. Doesn’t he need to keep it safe, perhaps sell it for a fair price? But the cycle repeats, and even his desire to “unburden” becomes another burden. How can he devote himself to God when he is owned by so many things?

But a close reader of the Gospels will find that, even though Jesus’ disciples left things to follow Him, they were supported by others who did not, like the women who “supported them out of their own means” (Luke 8:3). Apparently, Jesus did not tell those women to give up their possessions. Or, depending on how you look at it, perhaps that is precisely what they were doing by supporting Jesus and His disciples. According to Jesus, wealth has a deceptive logic of its own. As a king, Jesus had no use for it.

So again, what is here for me? I return to that question every time I read difficult words of Jesus. If you need to unburden yourself to better follow Him, that seems like the obvious thing to do. We can’t be like the man who asked Jesus what to do, only to be disappointed by an answer.

**10.** *What might be an example of a “deceptive logic” that comes with having many things?*

**11.** *Why do you think that Jesus told some people to give up all their possessions, but He doesn’t seem to have asked the same thing from other people?*

**12.** *What is an example of something that might be burdening you or keeping you from following God?*

## Enter into the Kingdom

Perhaps it is hard for rich people to enter God's kingdom because their faith is in their riches. Money *appears* to answer all our earthly needs. We buy food, clothes, all the essentials for life. What about medical insurance, which costs no small amount of money? If we want to travel and see the world, that takes money. All these things have a price tag. But the most important things in life cannot be purchased. There is no greater treasure than being in the presence of Jesus.

► *Start a new journal and call it "Heavenly Treasures." Every time you have an opportunity to share your faith, your time, or your resources, write an entry inviting God to show you the blessings you will experience in Christ's kingdom.*

### KEY VERSE

And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.  
—Matthew 19:24 KJV

Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.  
—Matthew 19:24 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of February 10 through February 16

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Matthew 20:1–16—God Is Generous to All.
- Tue.** Proverbs 22:1–9—Those Who Are Generous Are Blessed.
- Wed.** Luke 6:20–26—Blessings and Woes.
- Thu.** 1 Timothy 6:17–21—Be Rich in Good Works.
- Fri.** 1 Samuel 2:1–10—God Sets All Things Right.
- Sat.** Psalm 113—God Lifts Up the Poor.
- Sun.** Matthew 19:16–30—All Things Are Possible with God.



## Ministering Mightily

Really, Kenan?" Darrel asked. "You're going to drive out to the state prison today? On these roads?"

"Yeah," Kenan answered, dragging the last piece of his pancake through the remains of syrup on his plate. Kenan was finishing up breakfast with his friends after they had all enjoyed a morning workout at their neighborhood fitness club. He was looking forward to going to the prison, where he and two other men from his church held a men's Bible study. "They are expecting me. It's the third Saturday of the month."

"They just want to get out of their cells," Tyrell offered, who had just returned from paying the bill. "Besides, they're just playing jailhouse religion."

Kenan and his co-leaders took turns leading lessons. It was Kenan's turn, and he had the group studying the characteristics of a godly man. Today, the Scripture references were Proverbs 10:9 and Titus 2:7–8 and his example was the apostle Paul.

"There are probably some men there who are not that interested in the Bible study," Kenan said. "But I believe there are some who really want to hear the Word."

"How long have you been doing this?" Darrel asked. "Isn't there something better or more useful you would rather be doing with your time?"

"I enjoy going to the prison," Kenan said. "Really. And most importantly, I'm doing it in service to Christ. I leave the outcomes and usefulness to Him."

**1.** *Why do you think Jesus noticed the poor and the needy during His ministry?*

**2.** *What could it mean to see others through Jesus' eyes?*

**3.** *What does it mean to serve like Jesus?*

## The Day of Judgment

*Matthew 25:31–33 KJV*

31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

*Matthew 25:31–33 NIV*

<sup>31</sup>“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.

<sup>32</sup>All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup>He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Jesus gives a description of the final judgement. This echoes the teaching of other Jewish rabbis: God shall judge the deeds of all people and repay according to what they have done (compare Rom. 2:6–11). There will be two groups of people at the day of judgment: those who have been reconciled to God through saving faith in Jesus, and those who reject God and are dismissed from His presence for all eternity. And the “Son of Man” shall judge (v. 31). This is language from Daniel 7:13–14. Daniel saw God’s chosen representative and king who shall receive all honor and dominion. Jesus is this king—the one whom God uses to unveil His indisputable, final authority. Jesus shall sit on the throne and be surrounded by a myriad of servants who could strike terror in the hearts of mortals like us (v. 31). No one will miss this final sorting.

Jesus compares Himself, the judge and king, to a shepherd who separates sheep and goats. The lambs represent those who receive a favorable judgment, while the goats receive an unfavorable judgment. To be exalted to the “right hand” of the king was considered an exceptional honor and indicative of authority.

4. *Who will appear before Jesus in the final judgment?*

5. *How will Jesus separate the people in front of him?*

## The Sheep on the Right

*Matthew 25:34–40 KJV*

34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

*Matthew 25:34–40 NIV*

<sup>34</sup> "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.' <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

<sup>37</sup> "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

<sup>40</sup> "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

To those on His right, those who have received favorable judgment, the king gives blessing and reward. They receive an “inheritance” (v. 34) as children of God with positions of responsibility and authority in God’s kingdom. Jesus gives the reasoning behind this, and it seems to take the “sheep” by surprise. The king says that they were kind to Him when He was hungry, thirsty, and a stranger (v. 35). He focuses on their actions and doesn’t mention what they believe. As the letter of James says, “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:17). Genuine faith is dynamic and must, by definition, express itself in God-honoring ways.

Jesus reveals a profound truth about His relationship to humanity: to show acts of kindness to another is to do the same for Jesus. He experiences emotional and physical pain right along with people who are in need.

**6.** *How does the judge reward the “sheep”?*

**7.** *How is serving others like serving Jesus?*

## The Goats on the Left

*Matthew 25:41–46 KJV*

41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst,

*Matthew 25:41–46 NIV*

<sup>41</sup> “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

<sup>44</sup> “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you

or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

<sup>45</sup> “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

<sup>46</sup> “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

To those on his left, those who have received an unfavorable judgment, the king speaks words of rebuke and condemnation. They are removed from God’s presence like the enemies of God. As in the case of the “sheep,” the judge’s sentence seems to catch the condemned by surprise. “When?” they ask, did they ever turn their backs on the needs of the Lord before them, the one now sitting in judgment. They don’t recall seeing Him hungry, thirsty, unclothed, a stranger, or in prison (v. 44). The king says, “Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me” (v. 45). Their failure to reach out toward those in need was a failure to serve Jesus.

At this judgment, God in His perfect fairness gives to each person according to what they have displayed from the heart: either a desire to place God’s grace and compassion at the center, or a desire for a selfish existence apart from God. According to Jesus’ words, everyone can display their reception of Him through acts of compassion and mercy. It simply cannot be true that we know Jesus, while at the same time turning our backs on the needs of His people—those with whom He identifies. What our hearts lead us to do reveals our choice between eternal life or a curse.

**8.** *Why does the judge rebuke the “goats”?*

**9.** *How are our actions connected to our experience of grace?*

## Moved with Compassion

“Compassion” is a buzzword today, but what does it mean? Some synonyms are sympathy, empathy, understanding, and care. Sometimes I ask myself, “What if I don’t feel those things?” It’s easy to be wrapped up in my own story and my needs. But we can examine the story of Jesus to find Him moved with compassion, and perhaps that can help.

It seems like Jesus was constantly meeting people with physical needs. In Matthew 14:14, Jesus felt compassion for a crowd of people who were looking for a leader, “sheep without a shepherd” Mark calls them (6:34). Like a good shepherd, Jesus fed the people and took care of their physical needs; He didn’t turn away. Then on a second occasion in Matthew 15:32, Jesus was once more confronted by people who were hungry. He says to His disciples, “I do not want to send them away hungry.” Jesus could have let people fend for themselves, but He treated their physical needs as His responsibility. He gave them food and care, satisfying them just like God had done for Israel in the wilderness.

Jesus’ words in Matthew 25:34–46 don’t require us to make a dramatic show of anything, only that we address the real needs of those around us. If we are detached, it may require that we start to look with new eyes. Perhaps we might enter into a new context to meet people who are poor and in desperate need. If that weren’t enough, we read that Jesus is going to be there, present in the midst of the people we serve. The sheep were surprised by this revelation. I imagine the strangers they helped and the people they fed didn’t seem glorious or kingly. It scares me to imagine that I might blink and miss the opportunity to shake Jesus’ hand, to greet Him at the door, and welcome Him as a brother.

**10.** *How do you define compassion?*

**11.** *Do you recall a time when, like Jesus, you were moved with compassion? When?*

**12.** *How has Jesus been present in your midst?*

## On His Right Hand

Jesus wants us to know that when we look at the faces of hungry children and give them a meal, we are doing this for Him. This is also true when we give a drink to the thirsty, and clothing to those without clothes. It carries on when we visit those in prison and the sick in the hospital. Jesus wants us to know that, although He is king and Lord, He is connected to everyone—the small and great.

► *There are many charity organizations and non-profits that assist those in need. Choose a friend, and ask whether he or she has found a way to serve others. We can expect to be judged according to whether we respond to the needs we see.*

### KEY VERSES

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in. —Matthew 25:34–35 KJV

Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.”

—Matthew 25:34–35 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

#### Week of February 17 through February 23

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** 2 Timothy 3:10–17—Equipped for Every Good Work.
- Tue.** Psalm 119:17–24—Delight in God’s Ways.
- Wed.** Matthew 25:1–13—The Bridegroom Is Coming.
- Thu.** Matthew 25:14–30—Praise for a Faithful Servant.
- Fri.** Psalm 119:41–48—Choose the Way of Faithfulness.
- Sat.** Isaiah 58—The Fast That God Chooses.
- Sun.** Matthew 25:31–46—Compassion for the Least.





COMPREHENSIVE BIBLE STUDY  
**Lesson Cycle**

FOR 2022-2025

	SEPTEMBER	DECEMBER	MARCH	JUNE
2022/23	<p><b>God's Exceptional Choice</b>                      (Studies in Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Judges, 1 Samuel, Ephesians)</p>	<p><b>From Darkness to Light</b>                      (Studies in 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Joel, Luke, 1 Corinthians, 2 Timothy, James, 1 Peter)</p>	<p><b>Jesus Calls Us</b>                      (Studies in the Gospels, Acts)</p>	<p><b>The Righteous Reign of God</b>                      (Studies in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Matthew, Romans, Galatians, 1 Corinthians)</p>
2023/24	<p><b>God's Law Is Love</b>                      (Studies in Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians)</p>	<p><b>Faith That Pleases God</b>                      (Studies in Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Chronicles, Proverbs, Isaiah, Daniel, Habakkuk, Matthew, Luke, Romans, Hebrews)</p>	<p><b>Examining Our Faith</b>                      (Studies in the Gospels, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, 1 Peter, Jude)</p>	<p><b>Hope in the Lord</b>                      (Studies in Psalms, Lamentations, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, Colossians, Hebrews, 1 Thessalonians, Titus, 1 John)</p>
2024/25	<p><b>Worship in the Covenant Community</b>                      (Studies in Genesis, Exodus, 1-2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Psalms)</p>	<p><b>A King Forever and Ever</b>                      (Studies in Ruth, 2 Samuel, Psalms, Matthew, Luke)</p>	<p><b>*Costly Sacrifice</b>                      (Studies in Exodus, Leviticus, Hebrews, 1 John, Matthew, Revelation, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah)</p>	<p><b>Sacred Altars and Holy Offerings</b>                      (Studies in Genesis, the Gospels, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Hebrews, 1 Peter)</p>



# Coming Up Next Quarter

**March, April, May 2025**

## **Costly Sacrifice**

The upcoming Spring quarter's theme of worship, sacrifices, and offerings runs through the Scriptures. Understanding the Old Covenant sacrifices and offerings is essential to understanding the New Testament's view of Christ's sacrifice.

Unit 1 explores texts from Exodus and Leviticus that describe the system of sacrifices and offerings that created a holy people and place for the presence of the Lord.

Unit 2 turns to New Testament texts to explore the significance of Jesus's perfect sacrifice.

Unit 3 explores the unique relationship between the sanctuary and offerings or sacrifices.

*Comprehensive Bible Study* lessons are organized according to a thematic study of the Bible following the International Sunday School Lessons series. In six years, this cycle will touch on the Bible's key themes through studies of books in both the Old and New Testaments.

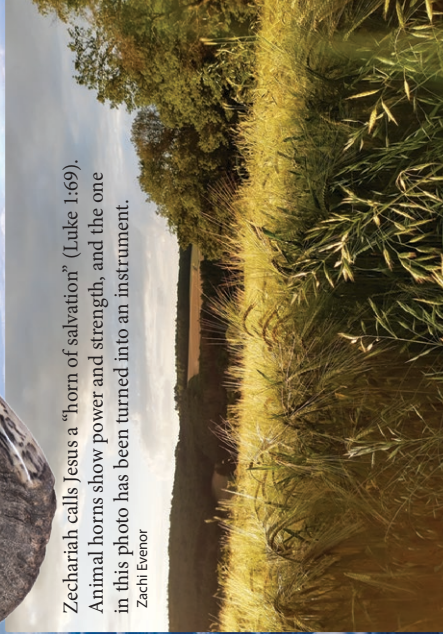
# GOD'S KINGDOM HAS NO END

Each person in Jesus' lineage is a testament to God's faithfulness and His redemptive plan for His creation. Since the very beginning, God had in mind to rescue His people and establish an everlasting kingdom. It wouldn't be someone else who would show up to save His people; it would be God in the flesh. With the benefit of looking back on all of Scripture and Israel's history, we see that God's reign as king is a consistent expectation and hope. Even in times of struggle and exile, God's people could look forward to a future when evil and injustice would come to an end.



Zechariah calls Jesus a "horn of salvation" (Luke 1:69). Animal horns show power and strength, and the one in this photo has been turned into an instrument.

Zachi Evenor

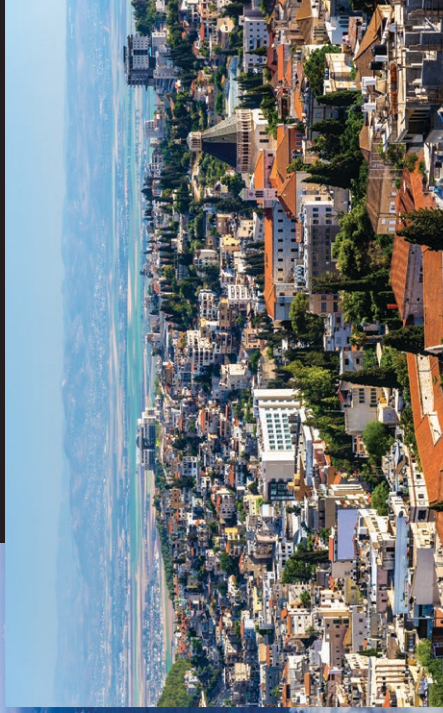


This photo shows a field of barley, like the one that Ruth was allowed to glean. There she met her future husband, Boaz. They became the great-grandparents of David.

Gerda Arendt

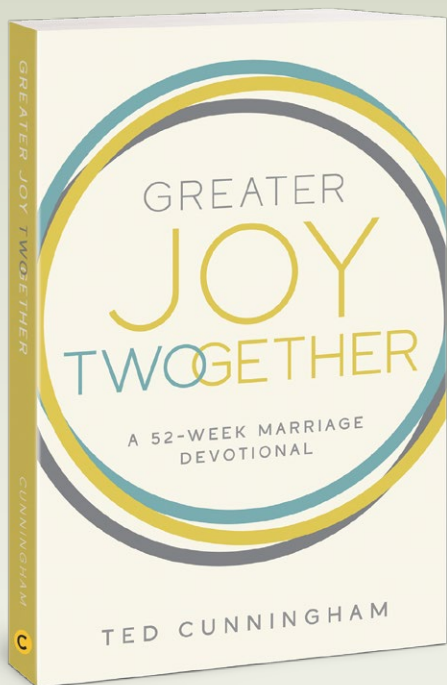
The distance of heaven above earth is mentioned in Psalm 103:11, and this is how far the love and mercy of God reaches "for those who fear him."

© Aleksandar Georgiev/Getty Images



Modern-day Nazareth is no longer the rural town like in Jesus' youth. In John 1:46, Nathaniel remarks, "Can anything good come from there?"

© Leonid Andronov/Getty Images



## LAUGH TOGETHER. PRAY TOGETHER. GROW TOGETHER.

This fun and practical couples' devotional will help you nurture your marriage even on the craziest days. Each weekly devotion includes a short reading, a Scripture verse, conversation prompts, ideas for putting the week's theme into action, and prayer starters to draw you closer to God and each other.



A leading voice in marriage ministry, **Ted Cunningham** is the bestselling author or coauthor of numerous books, including *Fun Loving You*. He and his wife, Amy, founded Woodland Hills Family Church in Branson, Missouri, in 2002. They have two grown children.

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