



VERITY

**Meditations on the
Scriptures**

By the '07 and '08 Classes of Verity

Job 1:18-22

While he was still speaking, another also came and said, “Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house, and suddenly a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you!” Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshipped. And he said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.

How would I respond if I suddenly lost most of my possessions as well as many of the people I love? This is precisely the situation that was handed to Job. One minute, he had everything going for him, and the next minute, he had everything going against him. I can think of nothing worse than to have to deal with losing my children and most of my possessions in rapid-fire succession.

The response of Job to this catastrophe is nothing short of incredible. Was he sad? Of course he was; he was just a man. But the Bible says he did not sin even in his deep grief, nor did he rashly accuse God. How can a man have this perspective in life? It is so different from the normal response we would expect.

Job’s secret was that he did not hold on to anything tightly. He realized that everything in this life is temporal; he came into the world with nothing and he would leave it with nothing. This is such a hard attitude to learn and it is hard to maintain. Material things seem so important to me and yet, they really do not matter much in the long run.

Not only did Job have the correct attitude, but the verse goes on to say that he blessed the name of God. Blessing God is a step beyond simply accepting whatever comes your way. Job had such a faith and trust in God that he was able to bless God even at his lowest point. I hope one day that I will have such a faith in God.

It is comforting to remember that God is sovereign even when it may appear otherwise. Satan was the one who brought the attacks against Job, but he could do nothing until God gave him permission to attack. God allows hard things in our lives so that we will deepen our relationship with Him and look to Him for strength. As Tom Harmon says, “That preaches real

good, but it lives tough!” It is my prayer that I will walk with God so closely that I might be able to respond to life’s crises like Job did.

Ian Lawrence

I was scared.

My grandparents had come in the night and taken me to their house. I knew something was not right, but my young mind could not fit the pieces together. Five months earlier my parents had told me that my prayers had been answered, mom was pregnant. In fact the angels must have gotten through quite well- because I was not only going to have just one sibling, I was going to get two, two boys Eric and Jeffery. Our family had been excited beyond belief.

But now something was terribly wrong. My mom had not been well the last couple of days, and all of a sudden grandma and grandpa were tucking me into their bed. I found out later the boys had been born early, and their little hearts just weren’t ready to take on the cares of this world yet. God gave, and God took away- but unlike Job, I couldn’t bring myself to bless God for it. I cried for days, and then when I looked to my mother for comfort, she was no longer the person she had been before. Looking back I understand that her grief was more than I ever would know, but again, I was too young to understand that. I blamed God for taking the promised brothers, but more than that I blamed Him for changing my best-friend, my mother.

For many years I would learn to thank God for other trials, but when He would bring up the boy’s death, I would close my heart. It was very much like clutching the thorns on a rose. Only by letting go would I appreciate the beauty God wanted to give me. Finally, almost twelve years later, after hearing a message on clearing the heart of resentment and bitterness, I gave it to God. I fought, and struggled, and cried, I turned to the Bible in a moment of turmoil, and came across these verses in Job. I read, “...The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away...” in disgust, knowing that God wanted me to have the reaction of Job. Lying on my bed, unable to fight anymore, I said it...

“Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

After that initial repentance of all the bitterness I had held towards God, it was an up-hill battle, to really break free from those emotions. I rebuilt the relationship with my mom, and began to bless the doctors that had made mistakes. Through every hurdle God taught me more and more to give forgiveness freely, just as He had forgiven me, and given me back the joy I had lost, by rebelling against the lessons He had wanted to teach me.

Fast-forward a year.

I was scared- what could I say to this poor girl.

“My two brothers and father died in a car crash a year ago” she whispered

I put my arm around her; I remembered how much I had wanted an arm around me.

“Are you scared?” I remembered how scared I had been.

“Yeah...”

C.S. Lewis once said, "[Pain] removes the veil; it plants the flag of truth within the fortress of a rebel soul." Through my pain, God was able to soften my heart enough to be sensitive to the pain of others, and then to remember what things I wished people had said- or not said to me, and now, kinda like Job, I truly bless God for it.

Cheri Anderson

When Horatio Spafford lost his business, he planned to travel with his family back to their native country. In England the Spafford family hoped of beginning a new life. At the last minute, Mr. Spafford was delayed by business. He sent his family to England ahead of him on a ship. Before he began his own journey to England, he received a message from his wife saying that their ship had sunk and she was the only person in their family left alive. Although he was grieved, he boarded a ship sailing for England. Like Horatio Spafford, Job experienced extreme tragedy. His response to tragedy was not only a result of his inner character, but also of his view of God.

My inner character defines the principles by which I live my life. It is best tested through tragedy and suffering. By choosing to rejoice in suffering, I give God a chance to glorify Himself through my life. In one day Job lost all of his wealth, and his sons and daughters. His body

broke out in boils, and his wife told him to curse God and die. His friends believed that he was guilty of some unconfessed sin. They would not believe that Job was innocent. Job's godly character was revealed through his response.

My view of God shapes the way that I respond in difficult situations. Because God is good, Job viewed all good things as gifts from God. God never sends evil, yet He does allow it to come into our lives. James 1:13 says, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempted he any man:" If I believe that God sends evil things into my life, I will find it hard to believe that He loves me. This is the response that I see in Job's wife when she tells him to curse God and die. However, I can see the love and mercy of God in the fact that nothing can come into my life unless He allows it. Sometimes God allows things to be taken away from me, so that I can appreciate the better things that He has for me. This is the response that I see from Job. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28, KJV)

Like Job, Horatio Spafford had every reason to feel sorry for himself. However, his inner character and view of God were revealed in the way he responded properly to his suffering. When his ship bound for England passed over the unmarked graves of his children, Mr. Spafford penned these words:

*"When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul."*

Rebecca Gaither

One of the most sobering stories in the Bible is found in the book of Job. This is an account of man brought to his lowest, at his most helpless and insufficient. Having a godly response to suffering can seem hard or even impossible at times, but how Job chose to respond to disaster provides an example for us all.

The first point that should be taken from these verses is that none of us is safe from calamity. Things seemed to be going well for Job and his family—they were at peace and living well. Then, what we might call a freak accident (although in this case there are unseen spiritual forces involved) occurs, and Job has suddenly lost everything. The same could happen to any

one of us. God is not obliged to give us an easy life, and often He must use negative or unpleasant circumstances to produce the character He wants to develop in our lives.

Secondly, the proper response to suffering is to thank God. When Job was told that his flocks, his servants, and his children were dead, he first of all tore his robe and shaved his head as an expression of his grief. Feeling pain at a loss is not wrong, and it is unbiblical to pretend that suffering doesn't matter. But then Job acknowledged that his family and possessions had been given to him by God, and instead of getting angry at God—as might be expected—he worshipped, accepting God's will in his situation. Though Job acknowledged that God was in control of the situation, he also realized that he could not accuse God of acting unjustly towards him, whatever the outward appearances. Therefore, in faith he worshipped and blessed God's name.

Thankfully, I cannot boast of sufferings anywhere near equal to Job's. But this formula can still apply to my everyday problems and disappointments. Trusting in God's omnipotence and thanking Him for everything that happens does not come naturally to me, and it is something that I will never do perfectly. However, I will continue to grow as I comprehend that along with every bad situation an opportunity exists to draw closer to our perfect, loving, and holy God.

Alex Damon

Job 40:1-5

Moreover the Lord answered Job, and said: "Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer it." Then Job answered the Lord and said: "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand over my mouth. Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; yes, twice, but I will proceed no further."

Job has come a long way in his struggles. He lived a life that was pleasing to God and, as a result, received God's blessings. Instead of becoming angry or bitter at God during his time of difficulties and struggles, he was still able to bless God. We can learn from his example by depending on God to see us through our struggles and to finish the work He has begun in us.

Prior to this passage, Job has faltered in his steadfastness toward God. He has begun to doubt the power of God. He feels God has rejected Him. Here God questions Job about questioning Him. Who can argue with God? Who can teach God? Pastor Gary Fraley once stated

that the first spiritual law can be summed up as God saying to us, “I am God, and you are not!” When we are having a difficult time, how often do we actually remember that God has total control of the situation? More often than not, we run our own way chasing circles and getting more depressed by the minute.

It is like God asking Job, “Are you willing to allow Me to be in control of your life? Are you willing to give your desires and ambitions to Me?” This can be a hard question to answer. We may know that letting God be the one in charge is the right thing for us to do, but are we really willing to surrender ourselves to Him? That is the challenge we must all face. Once we do let God take control of us, the struggle becomes His to deal with. We can begin to roll our cares on Him (Psalm 37:5). God will take care of us.

When we contemplate the awesome power of God, we can have a greater awareness of His presence. When we surrender our lives to Him, He can guide us through our struggles toward His goal of making us fit for His kingdom.

Daniel Lee

Questions, frustrations, and confusion all make great grounds for prayers which are not in the least serene. For Job, these words are understandable, taking into consideration all the trials to which he was subjected. Yet God still rebuked him. What God said must have been a slap in the face to Job, as it is to me when I read these words on the pages of my Bible.

In the face of trouble, it is easy for me to either intellectually work through emotions or attempt to reason with God. Especially in a situation similar to Job’s where I have not sinned or done anything to deserve the trials bombarding my doorstep, the biggest question to ask is, “Why?!” *Why, Lord? What have I done to deserve this? I’ve been gracious, forgiving, and obedient. I’ve been doing my quiet times daily, and I try to meditate on Your Word day and night. If You are supposed to be blessing me right now, then why is all this happening?* To this God says something to the effect of, “If you know My will and the way things are supposed to be, then why don’t you know the answer? If you are capable of arguing with me, then why don’t you answer your own question?” It is then that the enormity of my impertinence, self-sufficiency, and pride strikes me, and I feel as Job felt: *Lord, I am grossly sinful; what can I say to You? I just need to stay silent. I spoke before, and I will speak no more.*

The God of Job is sovereign, and the God of me is sovereign. Arguing and reasoning with a sovereign, omniscient God is futile. It only makes me look like a fool. Why should I be instructing God from my limited perspective when He sees the full picture and everything is in His hands? Breaches in friendships, low scores on tests, unintentional breaking of the rules—all these are in the hands of God. God wants my heart to be right with Him, and beyond that everything belongs to the sovereign God of Job, Who is also sovereign over me.

Joanne Lu

For 39 chapters, Job has been asking God questions. He has asked why everything has happened to him. He has asked why he was even born. When God confronts Job about his questioning, Job can do nothing but realize that he has put himself in God's place. He realizes that he can not reply to God, because nothing he can say could be anything before God.

What can we say when confronted by Almighty God? All that we could say He already knows. And who are we to question God? He knows why things happen, and has a plan for everything. A friend of our family, Kim, was in a similar standing with God. She had married the man of her dreams, did clowning in her off time, and looked forward to raising a family, because she loved kids so much. But, a few months later, she found out that she could not have children. While this was a disappointment, the final blow came when her husband ran off with another woman. Her whole life – and all of her dreams – was in shambles. Out of the ashes of her despair, arose a fiery bitterness toward God. Why did He have to let this happen to her? Her bitterness and questioning went on for several years, until she was finally able to accept what God had allowed. It was only then that she met up with an old friend from high school, Paul. He had gotten married since, but his wife had passed away a few years prior, leaving him to raise their two daughters. As Kim and Paul renewed their friendship, they began to feel a mutual attraction, each hurting in a similar area. As they talked and prayed together, they realized that God had brought them back together for a purpose: to help the other heal their sorrows. After a few months, they decided to marry, and Kim is now happier than ever before. God had a plan for her in what seemed like a hopeless situation. There was Paul, a man in need of a wife for support, and Kim, a woman hurting and in need of a man. God, in His perfect time, brought them together.

In the same way Job suffered the loss of his wealth, his possessions, his children and his friends. He had no idea why God allowed Satan to strike him, but still he didn't curse God. Instead, he blessed him. God rewarded Job for his faithfulness by restoring all that he had before, in greater abundance. When hard times and trials come my way, I need to remember that God is in control, and that He has planned out for me what is best. And above all, I need to remember to never argue with God. He will always win.

Brian Jones

Psalm 145:1-4

I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts.

I will extol Thee; I will bless Thee; I will praise Thee . . . these are all phrases used in this passage to express awe, humility, and thankfulness. God is so big and beyond comprehension that human beings must express something when they discover His awesome power and glory. Why should we praise God and how do we about doing that?

Every time I would grumble or complain about something, my father would say, "Praise the Lord about it." Of course, that was not what I wanted to hear. There is something powerful about praising God even when you do not feel like it. It tells God that you trust Him with the circumstances even when you can see no good in them. God says to rejoice evermore and not to worry about anything at all. Praising Him even when it is most difficult obeys these commands. When you praise God through the trials He puts you through, most likely to teach you a lesson, He will bless you for it and lay off the pressure. God inhabits the praises of His people - if that is not incentive enough to praise Him, then I suggest you read something else, like Dr. Seuss.

Now we know why we should praise God, but how do we do it? There are many ways to praise God, and there is no 'right' way. The Bible says to praise him by considering his creation, or with singing, or with playing of instruments. Praise is not always just 'doing' something, but a state of being. You can praise God when you wash the dishes by doing the best you can. You can

praise God in anything you do by acknowledging Him in it. Praise can also be shown through obeying His commands.

How about all the times you were aware of God's great awesomeness and wanted to thank Him for it, what did you do? The scripture passage above reflects the soul of a man in awe of God's holiness and greatness. I find the psalms helpful and sympathetic to almost any mood I am in. When I want to express my praise to God, I read or sing the psalms.

Praise also puts us in our place. God is so huge and powerful that acknowledging Him in praise shows us our insignificance and utter smallness. How are you going to show praise to God? If all creation cries out in praise to their Creator, then far more should we - His very children.

Rebecca Copu

Ten years ago, when I was eight, another phase struck. I had already gone through my "I want to be an author" stage, my "I was born to be an actress" stage, and my "a librarian is a good future occupation" stage. However, the first day I enrolled into SCATS, the gymnastics school an hour away from my house, I knew that God had made me to be gymnast. Classes were every Saturday, and it was perhaps the hardest thing as an eight year old to wait a whole week before rolling down those blue mats. Two months down the road, and I had already landed the splits, the kick-over, and almost pinned down the flips. If I could learn that much in two months, it seemed to me that I could reach the Olympics before I was even fifteen!

Due to this aspiration, I watched the 1996 Olympics with jaw dropped and eyes the size of tennis balls. Flips, roundoffs, and bars covered with chalk invaded my thoughts. Then the final day came when the teams were competing for the gold medal. The US team was the last one up. With their previous performance, it was clear the gold medal would go to the US, but there was still one more gymnast to go. Kerri Strug, an 18 year old US gymnast powdered her hands, and then stepped up to the horse. She tumbled across the blue mat, then did two vaults on the horse with no hesitation. The world watched as she did one more vault and landed perfectly, holding her stance in the plant for the needed time, and then collapsed. It turns out she had sprained her ankle severely after the second vault, but held in the pain and did one more for the team. The coach carried her off the mats, but the world was able to see her for one last time as she stood unsteadily to receive the gold medal for the US team. For weeks, months afterwards, and even today, I still am awestruck by Kerri Strug's sacrificial performance.

The word “extol” in this week’s verse made me think of my admiration of Kerri Strug. However, if I am to extol Kerri’s achievement, how much more should I extol the Lord for His? He not only created us, he died for us, which is a lot more than Kerri did. That is not to say that I shouldn’t admire Kerri, but it does help me realize how much more significant Christ is in comparison. And because of that, I praise Him. For He is worthy to be praised.

Anonymous

The Lord is worthy of our praise and worship. He created us all, and takes care of us all. The Lord had made us and our entire living environment for us to enjoy.

This week all the guys at Verity went on a three day two night camping trip to a state park. During this trip I felt really close to nature. I can hear, smell, and see the wind walking through the leaves, the chattering of the critters, and the burning of the camp fire. Every one of these actions of nature brings me closer to God. I felt that I can feel God’s presence through hearing, smelling, and seeing as these things occur.

When the logs are thrown into the fire pit, they would first be burned dry, and then they would be burned to produce heat. We are very similar to the logs that are being used for warmth. It is the same with our lives; God would first prepare and equip us in our lives, then He will use us for His great work. Before the logs are thrown into the fire pit, it needs to be cut into the appropriate size; it is the same with our lives. God makes a plan for our lives first, then He throws us into training for our road in front of us.

When I walked under the trees onto the thick layer of fallen leaves it felt as if I just walked on a layer of nature carpet. Besides feeling it under my feet, I can also smell the freshness of the grass and the leaves. I can also see the wind blowing on the dirt on the ground creating sand cyclones blowing everywhere. Seeing all these makes me feel close to God, and want to praise God for His majestic design.

Joseph Su

“...His greatness is unsearchable.” This line from the passage snatched my attention. I can hardly be blamed; unsearchable things are fascinating to human beings. Kids dream about finding new species of animals in the deep sea, or discovering sunken ships filled with treasure on the vast ocean floor. Novelists write about uncharted places. Jules Verne, for instance, wrote

the following books all involving quests to unsearchable places—*20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, *From the Earth to the Moon*, and *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. TV writers and moviemakers have devoted a whole genre to the unsearchable called science fiction. In sci-fi, starships fly through the galaxy exploring previously unvisited solar systems and aliens. It is symbolic of man's longing to explore what is "out there" in the great unknown.

In a logical world such obsession with unsearchables would not make sense. Pursuing something that does not have an end in sight consumes time, effort, and resources. However, God has planted a desire within the heart of humans to reach beyond themselves to something greater and higher. By being unsearchable God appeals to the adventure nature He created within man to explore Him. If God was searchable, there would be no incentive to pursue Him.

Pursuing God is the greatest adventure on which a human can embark. All other roads lead to a dead end. The King's Highway, however, winds on from adventure to adventure. Through the valleys of pain and suffering, up to the mountains of joy and peace it climbs. Across the forests of challenges and changes, and over the tedious deserts of monotony it travels. The wandering adventurer, on the quest to search the unsearchable God, follows in the footsteps of the guides sent by God to show him the way. Sometimes he stops, scratches his head, and wonders aloud, "Why am I chasing after an invisible being who first heaps blessings upon me and then brings me to hardships and difficulties?" Then a guide will tell him, or the invisible being Himself, will softly nudge the sojourner's soul with the thoughts, "You follow Me, because you are the most complete and whole when you are with Me. I am unsearchable. Come and plumb Me as deep as you can, and revel in the delightful fact that you will never find the end of Me. I am the greatest adventure in the world. Come and seek me still."

Lily-Bea Jenkins

Proverbs 1:1

The Proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: to know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, Justice, judgment, and equity; To give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion –

In this introduction to the book of Proverbs, the writer, Solomon, states the purposes for his writings. At first he says, "To know wisdom and instruction." The word "know" used in the

original Hebrew language means literally, “to ascertain by seeing”, and can be used both figuratively and literally. The word “instruction” used is the word for chastisement, reproof, or restraint, not the kind of instruction we normally think of receiving in a classroom. Therefore Solomon is saying that he is trying to teach us wisdom and keep us from evil by showing us the consequences. The book of Proverbs is full of examples and contrasts between good and evil, literally putting before our eyes the consequences of sin and choosing the path of evil.

Later in this passage when the word “wisdom” is used, it is not the same Hebrew word as the one used previously. The first use of the word means simply wisdom, however the second time the word means to “consider, instruct, to prosper, to have good success, to guide wittingly.” Wisdom is not a quality that we can gain on our own. Many places in Scripture tell us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and in Job 28:18 it says, “...the price of wisdom is above rubies.” These passages tell us that the wisdom we should seek is not wisdom as the world sees it, but the wisdom of God that can only be obtained by seeking God and living in a constant relationship with Him.

Often wisdom is associated with old age, and many people think that young people cannot be wise because they have not had enough experience living in the world. However, Solomon says in verse four that he aims to give knowledge and discretion to the “young man.” Young people today should not listen to people when they tell us that we can play around now and grow up later. In the Bible it teaches that young people can have wisdom, if they truly desire it and ask God for it. The word “discretion” used in the passage literally means “a plan”. Young people today should not sit around waiting to grow up and do something, they can and should have a plan to do something for God, and take back the world for His kingdom.

Elizabeth White

While at ALERT, God taught me a lot about people who have tons of head knowledge about Jesus and His word but no understanding or wisdom. Sadly I have met an alarming number of “good ATI young men” who have no clue about what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus yet they claim to be “sold out” for Him! You shall know them by their fruits, the Bible says. As a basic training squad leader, it is my responsibility to look out for the spiritual well being of the five to eight guys that are on my squad. I have had to deal with some pretty interesting cases. By far the most challenging and destructive men are those ATI guys that just

plain deceived. Now don't get me wrong. ATI is a great program! I am an ATI young man myself, and proud of it. But I am finding that some guys just fill their heads with facts, phrases, and key verses and forget that God is a real God and that He desires a personal relationship. Let me give you an example.

He was average looking, nothing particularly special about him; he smiled a lot, looked like a hard worker, your typical ATI homeboy. That was my first impression as a squad leader. I would soon learn however that this guy was a good liar, a master deceiver, extremely proud and arrogant! He was double minded. Yet he, quite honestly, knew far more scripture from memory than I did. He had all the right answers, yet it was painfully obvious that he had no idea what he was saying, he had no practical understanding of simple concepts like: telling the truth, being under authority, submission, humility, servant's heart, and so on. He would use this terminology constantly but he never got around to making it a part of his life. Trying to counsel this young man was a nightmare. My authorities strongly doubted that he was even saved. How did this happen? If you looked at this guy you would never guess that he was a fake, he looked and sounded like the real thing. I think that it is important that we keep our eyes open and be discerning. Don't scrutinize and pass judgment on others but test the fruit, see if it is good or evil. Watch out, Satan is a master of deception, the fruit of someone's life may look great but it might taste horrible if you know what I mean.

Knowledge without understanding and application is a dangerous thing. Those who have heard the truth and believe it have the responsibility to live according to it. Satan doesn't care how close you come to the truth, just so long as you never find it. You have got to make the transition from the brain to the heart. The distance between the two isn't that great, but it makes all the difference in this world and for all eternity.

Jared Anders

Solomon was a man, a son (of David; the man after God's own heart), and a king; he was the greatest man in all of history, except one. Solomon had wealth, honor, and wisdom, given to him by the owner of all things, receiver of all honor, and author of wisdom—God Almighty (I Kings 3:5-15). God was a man (Jesus Christ), a son (the son of God), and a king (the High King of Heaven); He is the greatest in all of history. It is on this foundation that the book of Proverbs is placed to elevate, magnify, and give credence to the 31 chapters that follow.

From this book, we are to learn wisdom, instruction, understanding, justice, judgment, equity, subtlety, knowledge and discretion—qualities not a few! The fool is displayed in all his foolishness, the drunkard in his stupidity, the sinner in wickedness. Lofty or low, themes from the book of Proverbs are written to affect multiple aspects of life.

Why should I read such an eye-opening, conscience-pricking, fault-revealing book? The obvious answer would be because it will ultimately help me in my Christian walk. Even a non-Christian who follows the principles from the book of Proverbs can attain a degree of material success. But to look more deeply, I believe that for a Christian, the study of Proverbs leads to a fuller, more complete, more accurate view and understanding of God. If Solomon was the wisest man because God gave him wisdom, a study of Solomon's writings would reveal the character of God. A violin maker who learns his art from a master like Stradivarius is likely to produce a beautiful, high-quality instrument. When he sells it, he can say, "Stradivarius taught me how to make this; it's pretty good." The one who purchases the instrument takes it home and realizes that it has a beautiful sound and has been expertly crafted. He has been indirectly made aware that Stradivarius is a master violin craftsman. So, my goal is to see the Craftsman behind the wisdom of Solomon and learn more fully who He is and what He desires of me.

Rosemary Scheiman

Proverbs 1:5-9

A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise council, to understand a proverb and an enigma, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother; for they will be a graceful ornament on your head, and chains about your neck.

These first few chapters in Proverbs are interesting to look into further because they contain advice for the young, and phrases are noted in direct address such as "my son" or "ye children." The theme of the book of Proverbs is found in Proverbs 1:7 where fearing the Lord is revealed as a result of wisdom. The proper application of wisdom includes the ability to use God-given talents wisely, the realization of his moral obligations, and his own intellectual maturity.

Solomon wanted the best for every man and desired for everyone to become wiser and excel in their leadership by exploring depths of meaning in the truth of the Bible. This is a great example to me as I continue to search the Lord's word at a deeper level and not only pick out everything that is good, but rather learn and become aware of sins which God desires for us to avoid in our lives. I believe that there is a difference between reading your Bible just because it is the right thing to do and actually reading it to trust God that He will show you a rhema and use the few verses or chapters you read as encouragement for the day or week.

One of the first steps in becoming wise is trusting and showing reverence to the Lord. Bringing this one step down in the authority structure, would be just the same with my parents. For me to be wise in the relationship with my parents, I need to trust them and honor them as my authority. As I grow older, my focus should turn more to the Lord as He will give me wisdom and instruction in my walk with Him.

In verses eight and nine I can see the benefits of obtaining instruction from my father and mother. They are the ones who the Lord put in my life as strong Christian parents and have raised me with wisdom and understanding. My parents have such a huge impact on my life and who I am today because of their guidance and the examples they have set for me. Proverbs 4:1 and 6:20 are verses that support the benefits of wisdom and continue to explain the importance of the honor and respect we should exhibit to our father and mother.

Andrea Welfel

Every parent tells his child "Do NOT run in the house." Just because a child hears this counsel does not mean that he will obey it. The Bible says in Ephesians 6:1, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right." God commands children to obey; in order to obey, one has to listen. Listening to counsel and obeying counsel are both very important.

As a child, I listened, but I did not obey this warning. I ran to the garage to relay a message to Dad. On my way back from the garage, I hit my finger on the door facing. I wailed. Since I was a drama queen, everyone thought that that I was exaggerating, again. After a little while I was still complaining about my finger hurting. Mom looked at it and sent me to bed. Listening is important, but if one does not apply the things he has been told, there will be consequences.

If I would have obeyed, the next day, my right index finger would not have been swollen and bruised. Mom took me to the doctor to see what was wrong. I had fractured my knuckle. We ended up having to go to a bone specialist. If I had listened and obeyed the warning about not running in the house, I might have avoided some pain and not caused so many doctor bills. Listening and obeying instruction are important for a person's physical well-being.

After this experience, I better understood the importance of listening and obeying. Disobedience can cause even greater consequences than a little pain and a few doctor bills. It can cause permanent physical harm, loss of property, or loss of life. If one learns the importance of listening to counsel and obeying that counsel as a child, he will be spared much pain in the future.

Amanda Gaither

As I read and memorize this passage, there are several key things that have "jumped out." One thing especially has seemed to come out, and it is in verse 6: "...*the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.*" How can there be "dark sayings" with the wise? Without having a Strong's Concordance or something with me, I'm going to attempt an etymology of this phrase "dark sayings."

Something that we cannot feel; a substance that we can only see, or the lack of sight; a pervasive atmosphere of the absence of light: this seems to be the definition of the term "dark." A wise person, or wisdom, will say or do things that not everyone can see; only that person that has taken the time or gone through the work of obtaining light will be able to view in this atmosphere. "Dark" then, seems to be just the absence of light, just as "cold" means the absence of heat. It requires no energy to be dark, but in order to see, some kind of energy source must be consumed.

Of course, the term "sayings" is simple enough to understand. In this context, it is very obvious that "sayings" is not just words that come from someone's thoughts. It is a whole attitude, an outlook on life. Therefore, a wise man will have an entire being that not everyone can see.

To bring these two things together and to apply this to everyday life, we can see that a wise man will increase in learning through a quiet, sincere, discreet walk with Christ. His "dark sayings" will show the level of wisdom that this Wise Man has achieved, and the level of

godliness prevalent in his life. We can apply this by thinking about our life in a sincere, “dark” kind of way, and be light to a lost world.

Jeremy Page

After listing the aspects of wisdom in the opening verses of Proverbs one, Solomon emphasizes the responsibility of the listener. He must be willing to hear and follow the teachings of wisdom if he is to “increase learning.” Furthermore, before true knowledge can be gained, he must possess an attitude of reverence for God. With a recognition of who God is and a desire to learn of His wisdom, there is potential for great understanding and rewards.

What is the “fear of the Lord”? First of all, it means knowing who God is. As Jehovah, God is holy and cannot tolerate sin. His moral standard is unchanging, as He is Himself. Thus, the fear of the Lord is living with the constant awareness that God is watching and will ultimately judge me for my actions. The daily decisions I make should reflect this understanding. Rather than a debilitating fear, the fear of the Lord is a proper reverence for God which becomes my “strong confidence” and “fountain of life” (Pr. 14:26-27). When I have this perspective on life, I will be able to make wise decisions (cf. Job 28:28; Ps. 111:10; Pr. 9:10).

With a foundation in the fear of the Lord, I also need a teachable heart to hear and apply God’s wisdom. Not everyone readily accepts it. To fools, it is contemptible and insignificant. However, God’s people must heed His principles and continually amplify their understanding of His truth. In addition, He commands obedience to the instruction of parents. Rather than rejecting their words, I must cling to them. When I have willing heart, God will graciously bestow the riches of His wisdom (cf. Ps. 25:5, 32:8-9; James 1:5).

Finally, God promises great rewards to those who seek and apply His wisdom. In fact, God says that those who follow their parents’ commands will be ornamented with beauty and favor, as if wearing a sparkling necklace. In Isaiah, the prophet calls the fear of the Lord the “treasure” of God’s people (Is. 33:6). Although the world scorns those who follow Biblical wisdom, God abundantly blesses those who pursue His counsel. In Him are hid all the “treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3).

Heather Terrall

Proverbs 3:3-6

Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

The air was tense with hatred and fury as the Japanese heartlessly pursued the Chinese. Almost everyone had evacuated this certain town where the Japanese were to invade within 24 hours. Besides the soldiers, who had stayed to hold off the enemy a little longer, the only able-bodied person left was a little English woman, named Gladys Alward. She was trying feverishly to minister to a few old folks who could not leave the town. With deafening sounds the Japanese made their appearance sooner than originally expected. Gladys, realizing the urgency of escaping and the lack of an escape route, closed her eyes and sent up a “flare prayer” to the Lord. After spinning around with her eyes closed, Gladys opened her eyes and saw an escape route straight up a concrete wall and into some bushes. With the Lord’s help she quickly seized the opportunity and within moments climbed the wall with the Japanese only steps behind her. In God’s divine protection, Gladys was able to get away without the ruthless Japanese soldiers seeing her although they were within sight.

This story displays a dramatic picture of the admonishment in Proverbs to “trust in the Lord...” and to acknowledge Christ in everything. Gladys could have had more of a “normal” life had she stayed in England. But she chose to acknowledge the Lord’s leading in her life and go to China. Gladys was trusting God to protect her, to provide for her, and to direct her. She did not rely on her own “common sense” or the opinions of others. She did not let mercy or truth forsake her. In other words, she was faithful to God’s call for her life. Because of the choices that Gladys made, the Lord directed her steps and blessed her with favor and success in His calling for her life. My desire is to be a Gladys Alward for Christ in the 21st century.

Laura Frahm

These beautiful verses hold valuable instruction and a precious promise, but so many times I rattle them off the tip of my tongue without thinking about what they really mean, because I have heard them so many times.

Trusting is such an important, powerful concept that I fail to employ so many times. Real trust is believing in God even when I can't see the reason why He is asking me to go through the fiery trials of life. My thoughts and my ways of understanding are so shallow and temporal compared to His magnificent, eternal purpose for my lives.

God gave me a good picture of trust last week Friday when Rebekah and I kidnapped Charity for her birthday. Part of the "kidnapping" included handcuffing and blindfolding her. Charity could not see anything, and she had no hands of her own to feel with or use to assist her in maneuvering throughout the building. She had nothing of her own left to depend on; thus, Rebekah became her guiding anchor, the one she knew she could trust to safely guide her down the stairs and through Flint. Even though she couldn't see, she trusted Rebekah. Rebekah was watching out for the things that would hurt Charity, such as the roof of the car, or the brick wall of the building, and carefully guided her away from them. Charity could not see the puddles at the bottom of the slide at the park, but she listened to Rebekah's voice that told her to stop before the bottom, and she obeyed even though she couldn't see why she had to stop before she wanted to. Charity trusted Rebekah, even though everything Rebekah did didn't make sense to her, and sometimes she thought she was falling or about to get hurt. Rebekah was always right beside Charity, leading her by the arm, yet her eyes were constantly roving back and forth ahead and beside her as she watched for things that would be in the way. As they approached the soggy puddles in the grass, Charity was not prepared for them because she didn't have good shoes on. So Rebekah bent down and picked Charity up in her arms. Charity could have screamed and said, "What are you doing to me?! Where are you taking me?!" She could not see, she did not understand, but again Charity trusted Rebekah's judgment, because Rebekah could see more than she could see at the moment, and Rebekah only wanted what was best for Charity.

Similarly, God can see further ahead in life than I can, and He only wants the very best for me...and that is to make me more like Him and more useful to His service so I can bring Him more glory. He is always by my side, right next to me, but yet He constantly looks ahead for things that would hurt me and gently guides me away from them. Sometimes, however, I need to contend with the obstacles before I can learn the lesson He has for me, but He is always there to take me away when the time is right. He will guide me safely to my home above.

But my part is to trust Him. Rebekah couldn't have taken Charity anywhere if she had dug her feet in and resisted, but because she yielded to Bekah's gentle touch, even though she

couldn't see where she was going or understand why, Rebekah was able to carry out her plan for Charity's birthday, and her ultimate joy.

God is always by my side. He wants the best for me, even more so than Rebekah wanted for Charity. Just like Rebekah's strong arms swooped Charity up when she knew there was more than she could handle alone, so God will always sweep me up in His arms when life is too difficult. He always picks me up when I fall down and holds me close to Him. His love and presences are precious, and if I trust Him, I won't need to know where I am going, or why I encounter trials. I will just be happy to be with the One I love, because I have absolute faith in His perfect will for my life.

Michelle Eng

Micah 6:6-8

With what shall I come before the LORD, And bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O man, what is good: And what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God.

I feel that overall this passage has been a powerful reminder to me that I am totally dependant on God's grace. Considering that even my good aspects and deeds are like dirty rags before God forces me to be humble before Him and others. The very best I can offer to God that comes from my fallen nature is actually offensive to God. This is the main theme of the passage.

The beginning of verse six emphasizes our inability to come before God. By what means can we come before the LORD? Even if our intention is to bow before Him and worship the one and only God we would be consumed by His holiness. The author now begins to search for a means to come before God. He asks if even the burnt offerings established in the law can give us access to God. I think that this is a rhetorical question. The answer is obviously no. Only taking on the righteousness of Christ through faith can grant us access to God. It is Christ's sacrificial work that Old Testament believers looked forward to. Continuing with examples of thousands of goats and tens of thousands of rivers of oil only serves to underscore the inability of religious acts to please God.

What, then, does please God? God is pleased with proper heart attitudes. Loving mercy, behaving in a just manner toward others, and walking humbly with God are all pleasing to God. Of this list the most profound attitude/action is walking humbly with God. It is an awesome thing to realize that God has chosen me to be his adopted child. Knowing that all I deserve is damnation makes God's desire for me to walk with Him even more amazing. Although I've never understood why God chose me I am grateful He did. I know that he does all for His glory, but it still baffles me. Particularly special to me is the word "with". God does not ask me to walk in front of Him where I am exposed to any hazards that lie ahead, neither does He call me to be behind Him where I cannot see his face, but beside Him. Here His hand is ready to catch me quickly, I am able to see His face, and we are able to have fellowship. I still struggle with really understanding how to live like this but it is what I want, and I know God will help me because it is what He wants too.

John Lovette

What can I give God that will please Him? What makes me worthy of coming before Him? These questions brought on a train of thought in the prophet Micah that made him really think about what God *really* desires.

The things that Micah listed were interesting: burnt offerings, calves, sheep, oil, and his first born. These were things that were held in very high value in that day. Burnt offerings were the way that they appeased God, to gain forgiveness for their sins. A man determined his wealth by how many calves and sheep he owned, and how much oil he used or traded. And of course, the first born was probably the most important of all these. It was upon the first that the family wealth, heritage, and blessings went to. So to give these things up, especially the first born, demonstrated the strong desire he had to be in fellowship with God; to come into His presence.

What am I willing to sacrifice in order to gain fellowship with God? Jesus came down from heaven to pay for our sins, eliminating the need for killing animals to pay for our sins. I am not married, and thus do not have a first born, which takes away that option. Of my wealth, the thing that I can do with that is to give it in support of His work. But the thing that I see that I – and many others – value most is our time. In order to make time for everything that I do, I have to schedule out my day, having most of my time allotted to various things. To get in fellowship with God, I need to (to use the colloquialism) "give Him the time of day." What really makes

this neat is that really, there is nothing that we have to give. Jesus has paid for us to *always* have access to God. God doesn't require us to give Him anything to be with Him. The only thing that is used up is the time devoted to fellowship.

So what do I need to give? I need to give God the best of my time. He needs to be able to have access to any of my day in order to speak with me and commune with me. How do I do this? I can do it by putting His time first. I give Him the beginning of my day, before my schedule has a chance to push His time out of the way.

Brian Jones

The passage in Micah leading up to verses six through eight speak about God's justice and his great righteousness (vs. 5). Only because of God's contrasting mercy and forgiveness do we have the ability to come before the Lord in our sinful human condition. Jesus was our blood sacrifice for all time, thus today we do not practice the act of killing animals on the altar. However, God tells us in verse eight what he does require of us today, and that is to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly.

To do justly. This phrase reminds me of a courtroom jury: the anxious defendant awaiting the charges pressed upon him, the accuser who demands impartiality and justice, prepared witnesses ready to give any information needed, and a stern judge ready to pass the verdict. The word justly is defined in by Strong's concordance as divine law, a verdict, a sentence or formal decree, judgment, ordinance. We are to live in a way that shows respect for God's laws and judgments which he has set up for us on this earth. He himself does not need rules or restraints, but we in our fallen human nature must be guided by a greater power than our own. Therefore, we should strive to live in accordance with all of God's laws and use scripture as our rulebook.

To love mercy. This simply means to be affectionate, to love kindness, and to do good deeds. Even if we obey all the laws and commandments but fail to take the love and kindness of Christ to others, we do everything in vain. As it says in I Corinthians 13: "And though I have all knowledge and have not charity, I am nothing." For about a year when my family was looking around for a church to go to, we probably visited 20 or 25 churches. It wasn't the church that was the most perfect or professional that we felt the most comfortable in, rather it was the church that showed the most love.

To walk humbly. It is commonly phrased "save the best for last;" well, in this case it

could be said, “Save the hardest for last!” This is without a doubt the most difficult quality for human nature to achieve, humility. The Hebrew definition for this word is amazing -- it means...humility! To be humble, or lowly. This is, however, the key for a truly righteous life and a pure sacrifice. Getting rid of all pride in the small accomplishments is what we as Christians are expected and “required” to do.

The sacrifice of explicitly following God’s sovereign laws, of showing kindness and love to even those who may not be very loveable, and walking in humility no matter what circumstances arise will please our God.

Rachel Dalrymple

In this passage, there are a few rather rhetorical questions posed to the audience, then an answer to them. The simple fact is that God wants us to want to be with Him, and He wants us to want to be like Him.

God is pleased with us when we obey Him – when we walk like He walks; justly. He wants us to love mercy – we are to be merciful to others if we are to expect mercy from Him. The last phrase in verse 8, “to walk humbly with thy God,” is the key to our Christian life. It seems strange to say that we need to humble ourselves in order to walk with God, who is infinitely more wonderful and glorious than we can imagine, however we as sinful humans often put ourselves on a pedestal and think of ourselves as far higher beings than we truly are. How foolish and prideful we are!

God’s desire is that we walk with Him; that we pursue a relationship with Him. Who am I that such an infinite Being would want a relationship with me? It seems too wonderful to imagine, but it is true. Personally, I have struggled with this on more than one occasion. I have doubted that God really loved me as much as He said He does. I have wondered how He could possibly even *notice* me among the billions of people on this earth.

God is far more omnipresent than I could ever imagine. He sees me personally, and desires a relationship with me! He wants me to want to know Him. I can have a personal, one-on-one relationship with the awesome God who created everything, and He will love me as if I am His only child. What a wonderful gift! When I think of what this means, I am humbled. I do not deserve to be loved this way. Without God, I am nothing. To God, I am everything. What an awesome God I serve, what a wonderful privilege I have obtained through Christ.

In my personal walk with God, I have struggled a lot. It has been difficult, and I have failed often, and yet God has *always* been faithful to pick me up where I fall. I pray that He will continue to mold me into a creature fit for His kingdom, and that I would never grow weary in my walk with my Father and my King.

Robyn Johnson

Malachi 3:8

“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,” Says the Lord of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field,” Says the Lord of hosts; “And all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land,” Says the Lord of hosts.

Will a man rob God? In a word, yes, he will. But, there is more to this question than what is apparent from the begging. The study notes from the Geneva Bible tell it best: “There are none of the heathen so barbarous, that will defraud their gods of their honor, or deal deceitfully with them.” Because of the robbery of God the Nation of Israel was “cursed with a curse” that is to say, they were cursed with a double curse.

To regain favor with God, the Children of Israel must make a punctual and full payment of all tithes. Then, God says to, “prove me - make the experiment” and He will, “*open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*” Meaning, He will not consider how much is needed, but will give in abundance, so that there will be nothing lacking, and there not be enough room to store the excess.

God will rebuke the devourer, the locusts, the canker - worm, the caterpillar, and whatever destroys. For, a rebuke from God has power over all things on earth and in heaven; He even has dominion over the wind and the waves. But, not only will the crops be spared the tooth of pestilence, but they will not drop their fruit until it is fully ripe.

Then all nations will call Israel blessed, for it will be a pleasant, delightful land. John Wesley describes how this happens, “The revival of religion in a land, will make it delightful, both to God, and to all good men.”

As for us, we must take this command and promise, from God, to heart. For though the command and promise was originally given to the Israelites, we have also become the children of Abraham through the blood of Christ Jesus and so, partakers of the Abrahamic-covenant along side of the Israelites.

Joel Vaquero

The importance of tithing to God is made clear in these verses. It is a vital aspect of a personal relationship with Christ, and it can also be a measure of our faith. It is impossible to be in a growing relationship with Him if we do not obey His command to tithe. The principle of tithing is that we are giving back to God a portion of the resources that He has entrusted to us. When God blesses us with money we should want to give part of it back to Him rather than it seeming like a bothersome chore that we have to do because everyone else does it. All of the money that we have is a gift from God, and it is temporarily lent to us to use for His kingdom. As such we have to be careful how we use it, and we should always seek God’s guidance in how to use it wisely. If we have the Biblical view of money, it will be easy for us to give as much of it as God directs back to Him.

There are many examples of how God has blessed those who put Him first by giving even when they do not even have enough money for the necessities of life, but the one that means the most to me is something that happened to my father right after I was born. My dad had just started his own business, so money was tight, and with the new baby it made things even worse. At church one Wednesday night, there was a missionary speaker who my dad really enjoyed, and although he didn’t have any money anywhere except for the twenty dollar bill in his pocket, my dad felt led of the Lord to give it to the missionary. My dad struggled with the choice for a moment and then decided to obey God’s prompting and give the twenty dollars, knowing that he would then have no way to buy food for our next meal. After walking out of the service completely broke, my father found an envelope on the windshield of his car with one hundred dollars in it. To this day he does not know where it came from.

We can be confident that if we honor God's command to tithe, and to put His will first in our lives, that we will be blessed far beyond anything we could imagine.

Elizabeth White

Verse 8 brings out a misconception that many of us operate under most of the time. We think that we actually own things. While we may admit that everything we have belongs to God and that we are just stewards, few of us actually live this way most of the time. True, it is rather inconvenient to have to say "Will you hand me God's ping pong paddle that He has entrusted to me?" as opposed to "Will you hand me my ping pong paddle?" Still, this is the attitude that should be in our hearts. If we can truly come to live in a way that we don't consider anything ours but rather God's we will be radically freed to minister.

The people of Israel had been operating under the false premise that I just mentioned. Neglecting to pay their tithes and offerings, they had violated the law of God. Further, they had forced the priests to leave their holy duties in order to sustain themselves. Not only had the people of Israel ignored God's ownership, but by not supporting the priests they had shown their disregard for their faith in general. During this time Israel's main problem was not its failure to tithe, but rather a full blown case of apostasy. They had abandoned God's ways; they were adulterous, oppressive, and greedy. A further symptom of their backsliding was rampant divorce.

Before you convince yourself that I am off on a pointless tangent talking about divorce think of the similarities between Israel then and America and the church today. Divorce is important because it is an indicator of a people's regard for covenants. Since the relationship we have with Christ is a covenant, and marriage is a type of our relationship with Christ, our view of the sanctity of marriage has some impact on our relationship with Christ.

The issue at the core of all these problems is not committing our hearts 100% to God. When Christ redeemed us with His blood he took possession of our souls. God has a right to demand a tithe of our possessions since they are His anyway. Similarly, since Christ owns our hearts, He demands a tithe of the heart. The only difference between the tithe of possessions and the tithe of hearts is that the tithe demanded of our heart is 100%. When I give part of my heart to the world, or to money, or to fame, or to any thing other than Christ I am robbing Him of His lawful tithe. Christian, have you robbed God? But you say "How have I robbed God?" Could it be that you have robbed Him in the tithes and offerings of your heart.

John Lovette

Is it possible to rob God? Though God owns everything and is omnipotent, it is possible to rob Him. It is not that God needs our tithes and offerings as monetary support, but that He wants to have our devotion. Last week's passage said that "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." If we place our treasure in God and His work then our heart is with Him. If we decide not to invest our money into God's work, then it does not matter how much we say we love Him, our hearts are far from Him. God is not after our money, He is after our devotion. When we rob Him of our money, we rob Him of the opportunity to show Himself strong on our behalf. If we hang onto our money we depend on ourselves, but if we give to God our dependence is on Him. God can do a much better job of taking care of us than we can ourselves.

In verses 10-12 God describes His plan. He wants us to give to Him so He can be free to give to us. He wants to bless us in such a way that the heathen will desire to be like us and see our testimony. Many times I am afraid of giving things to God because I think that God will make my life miserable so I will grow. The very opposite is actually true. It is the exercise of giving through faith which causes us to grow. God is out there looking for people who are willing to give everything that they have to Him so He can bless and protect them beyond our comprehension. As mere human beings we go through life like a horse with blinders on. Not only do we have the intellect of a horse (not a compliment at all) but our field of vision is very restricted. It is only when we yield to the reigns of our driver, Jesus Christ, that we can expect to be successful.

Chris Storm

Matthew 6:19-21

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

In the broad scope of eternity, my life is extremely small and insignificant. Seventy or eighty years, if that long, is merely a gust of wind "that appeareth for a little time, and then

vanisheth away” (James 4:14). However, my life does not have to be just a drop in the bucket. God has given me the opportunity to transform history by investing in eternity.

First and foremost, I have to be connected with God in a personal relationship. Heaven must be my home for eternity if I am going to deposit treasures there. My relationship with Jesus Christ needs continuous, high-connectivity. It is not something that, once begun, can be left alone. Abiding in Christ is like breathing, consistently occurring until death.

Another step in the process of eternity investments is to identify the treasures or wealth to be invested. The Bible talks of many different treasures. A few broad categories of riches include the souls of men, God’s work on earth, our talents, and the fear of the Lord. Investment prospects flood my life. If I take my eyes off of myself and see the world through Jesus’ eyes, I will not be able to count all the opportunities.

To me, the hardest part of investing treasure is just doing it. Making the time, expending the effort, and sacrificing the cost require motivation and determination. This is where my heart comes into play. In his book *Treasure in Heaven*, John MacArthur says, “Our heart has an inseparable attachment to wherever our treasure is. Conversely, wherever our heart is, that is where we put our treasure.” If my heart is in a right relationship with God, my treasure will go toward God (stored in Heaven). Also, I will have the inspiration and enthusiasm to follow through with the investment if my heart has high-connectivity to God.

May God give me the grace to stay rightly related to Him so that I can make eternity investments that will change the world for Christ.

Laura Frahm

“Then straight I ‘gin my heart to chide: and did thy wealth on earth abide? Didst fix thy hope on mouldering dust? The arm of flesh didst make thy trust? Raise up thy thoughts above the sky, that dunghill mists away may fly. Thou hast an house on high erect; framed by that mighty Architect, with glory richly furnished, stands permanent though this be fled. It’s purchased, and paid for, too, by Him who hath enough to do—a price so vast as is unknown, yet by His gift, is made thine own. There’s wealth enough; I need no more. Farewell, my pelf; farewell, my store; the world no longer let me love. My hope and treasure lie above.” Anne Bradstreet penned these words in “Verses upon the Burning of Our House, July 10th, 1666.” In

this poem, Anne tells about how she felt when her earthly treasures were lost and how she felt when she realized that her real treasure was in heaven.

When Anne Bradstreet's poem started, she was only concerned with her earthly treasures. One night her home burned to the ground. Later, as she would walk by her burned home, she would see where ". . . there lay that store I counted best; my pleasant things in ashes lie, and them behold no more shall I." She learned that earthly treasure was temporal.

At the beginning of Anne Bradstreet's poem, she was only concerned about her earthly treasures that were lost, but as the poem continues, she realized that her real treasure was in heaven. When a person's treasure is in heaven, one can realize that no matter what happens to his treasures on earth, his real treasures in heaven are safe. Like Anne Bradstreet this person will be able to say, "My hope and treasure lie above."

Anne Bradstreet, at the beginning of her poem, thought that her treasures were her earthly goods. When she lost these things in a fire, she discovered the importance of not laying up treasure on earth. The Bible shares this concept in Matthew to warn Christians so they do not have to learn the hard way. Christians need to heed this warning and lay up their treasure in heaven and not on earth.

Amanda Gaither

"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also..." is such a powerful verse. I think that a lot of times people do not consider that the things that they speak of, think of, and meditate on are where their heart is. When you love something enough, your heart is bound by that treasure, that gift. So in this verse when Jesus talks about laying up treasures in heaven, He is saying to totally give your everything to win souls for Christ, to live for Him, and to surrender your all for the sake of Christ. I believe that when Christ died for us, and paid the ultimate sacrifice for us, he was in a way showing how to store up treasure in heaven. He was the ultimate and perfect example of how love should be shown. True treasure and love show no boundaries. You can't treasure and love something with an "if" attached to it.

Another point that these verses bring is that when you fully give your heart to Someone, or something that cannot perish, no one can steal it or destroy it. It is so indestructible. The passage in Psalm 119:11 really backs this up when it says "your words I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You." To me, this verse is saying that when you treasure God's

Word and hide it in your heart, you will not want to sin. You will want to treat your treasure as if it were a fragile gift. You will protect it from every intruder who wants to steal it and destroy it. The heart is so precious and valuable. It is what separates or brings together, destroys or builds, loves or hates. The Bible says that out of the abundance of the heart a man speaks. You cannot truly fake Christianity or love for the Lord. What is in your heart will come out. We should strive to store up treasures in heaven, where it will never be stolen or destroyed. Where is your treasure?

Erin Williams

Investment occupies the whole heart. Thoughts, dreams, hopes, planning, strategy, and sacrifice all pour into one's investments. Whether it's stock, land, business, or even our collections, hobbies, and fetishes, we give a huge part of our heart to our investments. Naturally we invest in what we value, and we value that in which we invest. It is for this reason that Christ warned us to be careful where we lay up treasures for ourselves.

Treasures on earth are many of the things I listed earlier—stock, land, businesses, collections, hobbies, and fetishes. Christ was by no means prohibiting earthly or financial investments. In fact, many of His parables commend wise financial investments made by stewards. Instead, He was warning against obsessions. “Well, that's easy,” one may say, “Just do everything in moderation and don't obsess.” However, this is harder than one may think. How do obsessions start? Obsessions begin when one invests not just physical assets, but also his heart into something. When one's heart is in something, he will continue to invest more and his heart will be continually drawn toward that thing. This is a huge problem for a child of God who should be seeking the kingdom, but is devoted to something earthly and perishable instead. His heart is divided between the world and the Lord, and his heart increasingly yearns for that which it should not.

However, what if this obsession is for the Lord and not the world? What a dynamic Christian that person would be. How does one begin to obsess in the Lord? In the same way that one begins to obsess in the world, one can invest in the things of the Lord (the church, ministries, missions, for example). Instead of our thoughts, dreams, hopes, planning, strategy, and sacrifice being invested in the world, they will be invested in the kingdom of God, causing our hearts to

be drawn even more toward God "...for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."
There is potential for going both ways—the choice begins now.

Joanne Lu

Luke 9:23

Then he said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels."

In this passage, Jesus speaks of contrasts: saving life yet losing it, gaining the world yet being cast away, etc. There are two main ideas I'd like to discuss here: denying yourself and losing your life, and being ashamed of Christ and His words.

Jesus clearly asks us to deny ourselves and follow Him. What does this mean? I think it is best illustrated through the phrase, "take up his cross." Jesus was the ultimate example of denying yourself when He died on His Cross, for *us*. He wants us to follow Him by losing our lives for His sake as He did for us – yet not in the same exact manner. Taking up our cross *daily* points this out – though we yet live, we can give up our lives, day by day, by serving others. We live for Christ as we live for our brothers and sisters. Jesus says that whatever we do to the least of His brethren we do for Him. As we surrender daily in service to those around us, we "lose" our lives for Christ's sake... yet in so doing we find true life.

If we are ashamed of Jesus and His words, He shall be ashamed of us. As one of my friends put it, "What's to be ashamed of about Jesus? We have everything we could ever ask for in Him." This is true. It's so easy, however, to forget all this and focus on our own reputations, our fears and insecurities. It's easy to say we're Christians when there are other believers around, but perhaps we start to squirm when we feel God calling us to share our faith with the cashier. Are we ashamed of the Gospel?

I want Jesus to be pleased with me, not ashamed. I don't want to be cast away. Lord, help me to remember that I'm serving You when I serve others, and give me the boldness to declare You wherever You ask me to!

Luke 16:1-4

He also said to His disciples: “There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. So he called him and said to him, ‘what is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.’ Then the steward said within himself, ‘What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.’”

In this parable Jesus told, the trusted servant of a wealthy citizen was accused of unfaithful service, and as a result, would no longer be steward in his house. A shrewd man, the servant devised a scheme to make friends with his master’s debtors. Although Jesus does not endorse the servant’s dishonest plan, He uses it as an illustration for believers. From this passage, I can learn several key principles of stewardship.

First of all, as a daughter of the King of kings, I am accountable for how I use the goods He has entrusted to me. Can anyone accuse me of wasting what God has given me? If so, I am damaging God’s reputation to the world and am no longer worthy to be His steward. Often, God will use His Word to rebuke me when I have sinned against Him in this way.

When the master of the house heard rumors of his servant’s irresponsibility, he summoned him and told him to “give an account” of his stewardship. During this period of grace before he was fired, the servant had an opportunity to reassess his service to his master. In the same way, God in His mercy allows time for me to acknowledge my sin and repent before He closes a door completely. When He does close the door, He does so out of love. This time of discipline will force me to evaluate my life and priorities. Rather than “punishment,” it is part of God’s classroom of life.

Finally, Jesus gives this illustration to show how “mammon” can be used to “make friends” for His kingdom (Luke 16:9). This does not mean that I can use money to “buy” souls for heaven. However, I should use the resources God has given to invest in eternal treasure. While the riches themselves will not last, I can use them as a tool for ministry. Money has potential for both evil and good. Will I use it for God?

Heather Terrall

This passage in Luke tells the tale of a rich man and his steward. The steward is accused of wasting the rich man's goods, but there is no mention of whether or not the steward is truly guilty of this. However, the rich man calls for an accounting of his goods, and decides to dismiss the steward. As the steward ponders what will become of himself, he resolves upon a course of action which he hopes will endear him to his master's debtors. This action involves dishonesty, and only after it is completed is the steward referred to as being dishonest. Later in the chapter, the steward is commended by the rich man for his shrewdness and ability to think ahead.

I have often wondered about this parable, since the steward did something wrong, yet was commended in the end. As I meditated on this section of it, I realized that the action itself, though dishonest, was proof of a mind-set that is important in a steward. He was planning ahead, evaluating his possible options, and designing a battle plan to prepare for future needs. This action shows wisdom, the way the plan is carried out shows shrewdness.

In my life, I am like a steward who has been given the goods of a rich man to manage, and God is like the rich man. I can choose to manage either truthfully or dishonestly, but what I do will have consequences in the end. God does not want me to manage deceitfully, as the dishonest steward did in the parable, yet He wants me to learn an important lesson from his conduct. I am to manage what I have been given honestly, but I am to do it with the wise mind-set of the steward. I must think ahead, plan, and evaluate my options, searching always for the course of action that will bring the greatest good to my Lord. Only then will I truly be a faithful and just steward of all that my God has given me.

Jennifer Williams

Through this account of the rich man and the steward, there are several life applications that can be learned and taken into consideration. If we view the rich man as our heavenly father and the steward as ourselves, it gives us several examples that we can live by and shows us ways that make our character important through various situations.

Just as the rich man hired an accountant to handle his affairs, the Lord has appointed us here on earth to carry out his plans and follow through with them with respect and honesty and

make them our high priority. When we are given tasks either from our parents or authority, the Lord commands us to honor and obey with diligence.

The rich man then called for the steward and asked him to give account of his stewardship. The rich man found out about the steward's dishonesty and told him to pack his things and leave. We must all come to the realization that one day we will have to give account of everything we have done here on this earth. God has placed authorities in our lives to help us grow and teach us numerous important things, but it is up to us to use the wisdom that the Lord also graciously grants us to make wise decisions about our actions.

When the Lord takes certain things away from us, it is only for our benefit. He is the God of both the good and the bad and we cannot blame the Lord for taking things away or placing situations or people in our lives that we do not like. The Lord sends us people or events that will change our hearts and improve our character.

Only with the Lord's help will the answer to our problems become clear and work out in our lives. He gives us the grace to become good stewards of the things in our life and the wisdom we need to work through things as we give our account to the Lord.

Andrea Welfel

1:59, 1:58, 1:57 As I watched the microwave timer count down, waiting for what I was heating up to finish, I was struck with the realization of how much time I waste. How many times a day do I watch my life tick away? It was a stark image of how fleeting time is, how fast it goes by. I had to ask myself what I was doing with my time, and if I was really using every minute that God has given me to His fullest.

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." – Ephesians 5:16 There is nothing better Satan would like us to do than to waste this gift of time on earth that God has given us. *"You will no longer need a good book, which he really likes, to keep him from his prayers or his work or his sleep; a column of advertisements in yesterday's paper will do."* – C.S. Lewis (The Screwtape Letters) That quote was really convicting to me when I read it because the night before as I was waiting for a phone call I found myself reading through the classifieds of the newspaper from the day before, for no other reason than I had nothing better to do at that moment. How much time do I waste doing needless things, when I could be reading the Word, or praying, or having a good quality conversation with someone?

We will have to give an account of every minute we have spent here on earth. If I am totally sold out to my Master I will want to use the time that He has given me wisely; worship my Father with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, encourage my brothers and sisters in Christ, and unselfishly serve those whom God has placed around me. When I am before the judgment seat of God I want to have no excuses, no regrets for how I used the time I was given here on earth. Is it good, or is it His best?

Rebekah Johnson

Luke 16:5-8

So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.

The most important decision that I made that has impacted my life the most was the decision to give myself to the Lord. I willingly turned over my mind, will, and emotions to God. All of these aspects now belong to Him because I have dedicated my life to serving Him and accomplishing His will for my life. As it says in Mark 8:34-35 ". . . Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it." Jesus was explaining to His disciples that they must render their lives over to God so that God could use them in ways they could never imagine. When I gave my life to Christ, I realized that my life would never be the way it had been, because I was now entering new territory while my life was being governed by the Lord.

There are still times in my life when I neglect my stewardship to God. I selfishly struggle with the Holy Spirit attempting to take back the ground that I gave Him so that I can accomplish my own selfish desires. Even though the things I want to do may not be considered wrong or sinful, they are just not a part of God's ideal for me. Thankfully, God gave me a strong desire to please Him, and I refuse to stray from the ultimate plan He has in store for me. Because I fully

trust God, I rest assured knowing that He is leading me to His perfect will. I praise the Lord for allowing me to have fellowship with Him so that I can learn more about Him and how to better serve Him with my life. The only things I must do are rejoice in the fact that there is a perfect plan for my life and trust and obey God.

Ellen Gibilisco

To review last week's cliff-hanger ending, the steward of a rich man has just thought of a way to secure his future after being discharged by his master. In these verses the steward cancels debts left and right to make himself popular just before leaving his office. Through his knowledge and experience of handling his master's finances, he knows just how to appear beneficent while serving his own interests at the same time.

At the end of the parable, Jesus points out that often worldly people are better than Christians in shrewdly making the maximum use of their resources. Those like the steward in the parable are motivated by desire for gain, but still end up helping out others. How much more should Christians give to others out of spiritual motivation! The unjust steward gave away his master's money to make friends out of wrong motives, but Jesus implies that we ought to practice the same sort of shrewdness. God is our master, and he has given us stewardship over many resources, not to hoard but to share.

God wants us to give away his treasures to others, but first we must acknowledge that they belong to Him. Once we see ourselves as stewards over everything we have, we are enabled to use those things wisely. Specifically, we ought to use our money and resources to make a spiritual impact in the lives of others.

The unjust steward told the man whose debts he was relieving to "sit down quickly." He understood that his time was limited. Likewise, it is important for me as a Christian to realize that my time on earth is relatively short—maybe very short. There is a need for timeliness in distributing God's resources. I need reminding that giving, whether in tithes or in some other way, is something that should not be put off. Being a faithful steward is a high calling, and I hope that by God's grace I will someday hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

Alex Damon

Too often, I see a bible verse in a different light than others do. Too often, I pull a different meaning out of the gospel's words. And this is one of those times. Try to understand.

Too often, I feel like I cheat God out of what is his. Too often, I doubt my identity and wonder if I am really a child of light...or a child of the world. Too often, I feel like my flesh leads me to make "wise" choices that are shameful to God. Too often, I feel I am the unjust steward.

Too often, we undermine the gravity of our sin. We seat ourselves in front of the maple desk and ask ourselves what we owe God. How have we wronged him? What should we pay for? With those asked, we shrug our shoulders and with a flick of the pen, we divide our sins in half, writing it as a lesser amount instead of realizing how important the sin is. We leave the desk and the pen behind, and stash the receipt to collect dust in the closet. Too often, we forget what the price means and what kind of debt we owe in the first place. I have often belittled my sin and found myself exasperated later on when the full force of the sin hits me. I had often thought I had the right to redeem myself. But then again...

Too often, we forget the glory of God. We forget about the one who had walked into the room before us. When Jesus himself came in front of the steward and when asked what he owed, he named the amount of our debt. Instead of the price being slashed, his back was slashed. Instead of being offered a seat, he was ordered onto a cross. He paid off our debt so when we walked into the presence of the steward, there would be nothing left to slash except for the weight of our sin. However, this should never be an excuse for me to forget about my debt.

Too often, I find myself thanking God for what he has done for me. Too often, I think of what he went through for me, and I weep. But then again in the last case... Maybe "too often" is not often enough.

Anonymous

As I meditated on this passage, I began to consider my goals in life. I will be graduating college in May; after that, I am unsure of what God has for me to do with my life. As His steward, I want to use my life—which, in reality, is His possession—as *He* desires.

It is my tentative plan to work for one year and earn enough money to attend the ELMS program at Eagle Springs in Oklahoma. My heart's desire, since I was young, has been to help troubled girls and young women find help and healing in the Lord. ELMS will provide me the

skills I need to do this; Verity will provide the credentials. But is that really what *God* wants me to do?

I do not want to have a “career,” in the normal sense of the word; I do not think I could survive in an environment where all that matters is earning money for myself! My spiritual gifts are prophet and servant—not giver—so I feel that seeking a career and climbing the corporate ladder is not the best use of the gifts, talents, and desires God has given me. However, back at home, many of my relatives, friends, and fellow church members expect this of me. They look at life the way the world does, believing that the only way to live is to go to college, get a good-paying job, raise a family, and retire, going to church and “serving God” the whole time, then dying and being with the Lord forever in heaven. Perhaps this is what God has for them, but not for me. I could not thrive in a lifestyle that seems so fruitless and vain to me. Yet, Jesus does say to be wise “in our generation,” doesn’t He? Does he mean that we are to follow the ways of this world in our life goals as well as our finances?

I believe the answer is “no.” Jesus wants us to use our money, gifts, talents, goals, and motivations to “win friends” for the kingdom of heaven. This is the point He is trying to make: That the people of this world know how to use money to “gain friends,” but gain them in a selfish way; as Christians, we are not skilled in how to handle money and often do not realize we must use it to “gain friends” for *heaven*.

In this sense, I see that the peer pressure I felt to conform to the world’s ways is wrong. I should use my talents, desires, and resources for heaven and be skilled in so doing; this is what Jesus would have me learn. Working is good, and I will hopefully find a job that allows me to earn enough money to support myself as I seek to lead others to the Lord. But I must not conform to the world’s standards of life; I must show this generation that there is a better way! I feel confident that the Lord will lead me in His way, in His timing, as I continue to seek to use the things He has given me to advance His kingdom. Seeking to minister to others is certainly one thing that Jesus calls us to do, and I believe my desire to do so is from Him. May God give us all wisdom and discernment to use His possessions—our lives—skillfully in the ways He desires.

Kristina Zaloum

Luke 16:9-13

“And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man’s, who will give you what is your own? No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

“...But a faithful man who can find.” Proverbs 20:6. It is difficult to find a truly faithful man these days, or rather, among humans in general. God’s call for responsibility among men rests on faithfulness. Anyone can resist sin- for a while. But can we remain consistent? It is quite impossible. God is constantly on the search for a faithful man, someone who will hold up his standard and be willing to run his best all the way to the end.

God has a difficult task for men in this life. He is looking for faithful men to accomplish it. The reward at the end is very attractive. We shall live and reign forever with The Almighty free from sin. But as with all attractive jobs, the responsibility and the difficulty of obtaining the prize is enormous. Being a Christian is way harder than any Christian has imagined. We often become lazy in our task, not wanting to leave our comfort zone and abusing God’s grace. Whereas God wants us to fight our hardest trusting in Him and furthering His Kingdom however He has planned it for us.

Christians also tend to get the reward and whole point of being faithful mixed up with the human view of heaven. The greatest thing to look forward to is not heaven primarily. The greatest thing a Christian can ever desire and strive for in this life is to please the Lord. It is quite clear in Scripture that we are His servants. If we are servants, then we are to do our jobs cheerfully and without complaint. The whole essence of existence should be to hear our Master, Father, Creator, and Friend say “well done thou good and faithful servant.” This is why we are to be faithful. This is the greatest gift we could ever receive after this life. True, the Lord has given us riches as a reward too, but we will realize our unworthiness of all rewards and the unspeakable joy we can receive if we strive in this world to hear Him say, “Well done thou good and faithful servant.”

Ryan Ludvigson

The best thing a Christian can ever hope to have is God's blessing. God knows exactly what is best for each one of his children. Jesus said in Matthew chapter 7:11 "If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" Nothing this world has to offer can compare with God's blessing and the joy and peace that comes with it. Pursuing God's blessing might take you to some unlikely places, doing some not so pleasant things, but no one has ever been obedient to God with a pure heart and regretted it. Psalm 115:13 says: "He will bless those that fear the Lord, both great and small." I think many Christians today, myself included, miss out on many of God's good gifts because we fail to apply the lesson Jesus is teaching here in Luke 16. Those who are unfaithful in the little things will be unfaithful also in much. Are all God's blessings big, grand, and earthshaking? No, many of God's blessings we are not even aware of. Often we are not paying attention, never taking the time to consider what God has given us and our responsibility to acknowledge Him.

I believe this principle of being faithful in little things directly relates to how God blesses our lives. If we are unfaithful to acknowledge or be good stewards of God's little blessings, will He bless us with much? God does not just randomly bless us with random gifts; everything is given with a purpose. The key is being aware and attentive to the Holy Spirit's direction. There are no off days in the Christian life. Every single day, no matter how mundane or routine, is filled with decisions concerning what God has given you or entrusted to you and what you ought to be doing about it. For example: God has blessed me with the ability to play the piano, the ability to sing, two great roommates here at Verity, an opportunity to get a college degree, and the list goes on and on. First of all I must recognize that these are all gifts from God, secondly I need to thank God for all He has given, and thirdly I should ask myself the question: what does God want me to do with these gifts? That is what being a good steward is all about. Faithfulness in these decisions opens the door for God to entrust us with greater blessings. God's blessing may come in the form of earthly treasure such as money, or it may be His comfort and joy that you can share with others, or both. Either way, it is our responsibility as Christians to be thankful and alert as to how God wants us to use His good gifts, big or small.

Jared Anders

Luke 22:24-30

Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. And He said to them, "The kings of the gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves. But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at my table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

Darkness. The swish of the water lapping at the shore and the low-key hum of highway traffic in the distance were the only sounds. The small airport complex was silent, the daily traffic abated, most of the airport staff having left for home hours ago. Only the isolated light of the drowsy security guard pierced the night.

A quiet splash broke the solitude, then another. A dark shadow slipped up onto the beach. The shadow moved its head back and forth, scanning the airfield. Hand signals summoned a dozen specters from the water behind the dark shape. The three platoons of U.S. Navy SEALs began a slow tactical approach towards their target: a lone hanger housing the personal jet of Manuel Noriega.

Manuel Noriega was the sadistic dictator of Panama, who had recently incurred the wrath of the United States government with his corrupt double agent practices and drug trafficking. The SEAL's mission was to prevent Noriega's escape by disabling his Learjet. The elite commandos planned to destroy the plane and exfiltrate before the Panamanian Defense Forces could react.

As the SEAL platoons approached the target building, they scanned the area with their night vision equipment. A cursory look at the hanger revealed dozens of PDF soldiers hiding inside. Before the SEALs could react, the silence was shattered by the sound of the PDF AK-47s. The runway erupted with the impact of rounds hitting the pavement. The SEAL team quickly hit the ground and returned fire; rifles and light machine guns spitting foot long flames of death. Several team members were wounded and a couple were killed instantly. The

overwhelming firepower emanating from the hanger convinced the SEAL mission leader that an immediate withdrawal was necessary for survival. Giving orders to his men, the SEAL officer began moving the team towards the waters edge. While two platoons laid down suppressive fire, the other one shifted backwards closer to the safety of the ocean. This platoon then turned around and covered the second platoon as it retreated. Using these leapfrog tactics, the SEAL team was able to extract itself, along with it's dead and wounded, out of the airfield and into the water. There the team was able to conceal itself from pursuit until they could swim out to meet the rendezvous ship early the next morning.

This story provides a good example of servant leadership. The SEAL team members could have left the slow and wounded soldiers and gotten to safety, but they sacrificed as a team to work together and bring everyone out. They risked exposing themselves to death in order to protect their comrades. The SEAL officers didn't run for cover at the first sign of ambush. The safety of their men was the first and only priority. By exposing themselves to danger and discomfort, the team members were able to protect those among them incapable of defending themselves.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus showed the disciples what Christianity was all about. The body of Christ should function as a team. The well being of the body is ensured by each believer's commitment to the welfare of his brother. When Christians set aside their personal ambitions and become team players, the body of Christ functions as it was designed. It becomes a self-sustaining organism, alert to the promptings of the Spirit, and capable of undertaking great things for the Kingdom of Heaven.

Micah Hubbard

The world is pervaded with the desire to be the greatest, look the greatest, and act the greatest. Name recognition and public accolades appear to be the ultimate glory in life. On the contrary, Jesus explained to His disciples that those who are truly great are those who serve. Serving, in the context of this passage, is more than just getting what someone wants or needs and bringing it to them.

Serving is being a friend who will stick with a person through thick and thin. When all of life seems to be falling apart, a servant is the one who comes along side and helps pick up the

pieces. A servant is a cheerleader for the losing player, an intercessor for the one going through a crisis, a listening ear for the burdened heart, and an optimist for the discouraged student.

Serving is a loyalty to someone. When an offense wounds someone, a servant refuses to pick up an offense or to spread gossip. Instead, a servant will speak the truth in love to only those who are directly involved in the situation.

A servant also recognizes God at work in a person's life and refrains from doing the work of the Holy Spirit or being a distraction to what the Lord is doing. A true servant reminds others of the ultimate purpose of Christ-like character in us that God is continually working towards. And if need be, a true servant will graciously expose the blind spot of another person with only their best interest at heart.

As key elements of serving, faithfulness, loyalty, and truthfulness comprise the beginnings of a "great" person in God's eyes. It seems backwards for the greatest Person to be servant of all, but Jesus has proved that those who serve here on earth will one day have incredible rewards in heaven.

Laura Frahm

John 6:37-40

"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

I serve a wonderful God. He knows who will accept His redemption, yet He gives each individual the opportunity to accept or reject Him. He gives light to every man to accept or reject. Romans 1:19-20 best expresses this idea:

"Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them."

"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:" (Romans 1:19-20, KJV)

God provides light for every individual through natural revelation, and special revelation. Natural revelation is the revelation by which God reveals His presence through His creation. Through this revelation alone, I cannot be saved. However, through creation, I discover basic truths about God. If I respond properly to the light that God has given me, then He will send me more light. Special revelation is the written Word of God. Through special revelation, I can learn that I am a sinner, and that Christ became the Ultimate Sacrifice for my sins. Both types of revelation are means of “light” that God uses to reveal Himself to man.

The best example of this principle is found in the true account of an Indian woman named Mimosa. One morning Mimosa heard that there was one true God, and that He loved her. Although Mimosa begged her father to allow her to stay and learn about this God, He refused. She went back with him to their village, but not to their gods. Her father’s god was no longer her own. Mimosa was rejected and abused by her family and neighbors. However, she never forsook her God even when it seemed that He had forsaken her. Many years of faithfulness later, Mimosa heard God’s special revelation: the story of the Gospel. She believed and was baptized. The story of Mimosa’s faith amazes me. Mimosa didn’t just accept the light that she was given, she clung to it. Because she responded to the light that she had been given, the Lord blessed her with more light.

Yes, I serve an amazing God Who cares for every individual personally. He gives every individual light to accept or reject Him. Amy Carmichael ends her account of Mimosa’s life with these words: “Will not prayer that can be as a shield in battle, as dew in heat, as a cool wind on a breathless day, as the light of moon and stars at night, be round about any anywhere who, enchanted by a glimpse of the loveliness of Christ, are following Him today- dear, unknown fellow-lovers? For God has other Mimosas.” (*Mimosa*, by Amy Carmichael, p. 161)

Rebecca Gaither

Romans 12:1-8

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. For I say, through the grace to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think

soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

This week was my first CLEP exam, and I only had a week to learn and study how to analyze and interpret literature. But I felt that the memorization scripture for this week really spoke to me.

When I was preparing for the exam, I was very nervous; I did not want to fail this exam. This was my first important exam in my college years, and I wanted to pass it. It might be a superstition to other people, but I sometimes feel that if I pass the first one, I can pass all the other exams that are forthcoming. While I was preparing for this exam, I had a heavy feeling in my heart; it was like a burden that no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't take it off. No matter how hard I practiced, my scores on the practice tests were not that satisfying. I know my limits, I may not get high scores like everyone else, but I can do my best and pass the exam.

During this week, I kept on praying to God—for Him to grant me the wisdom He had given King Solomon, and the power of analyzing and interpreting literature. When King Solomon requested wisdom, God granted it to him, and today I also ask God to grant me wisdom. Since He is the creator of all things, He is also the creator of literature and poems, and He can definitely grant me the knowledge of reading, analyzing, and interpreting literature.

But God did not grant me this knowledge until I offered Him my burdens and when I also offered myself as God's instrument for His ministry. Afterwards, I even devoted my mind to memorizing God's words. By accomplishing these actions, I am freed from my burdens and my heart has indescribable joy. With the faith that God has given me, I am sure that He will guide me through my college years, and eventually through my life.

Joseph Su

The Lord will always ensure that you are constantly being put into situations where you do not have everything that is required to get a job done. In order to fulfill the will of God for your life you are going to have to draw upon the skills, knowledge, and wisdom of those that the Lord places all around you. The Lord designed us so that we need each other, and he is especially one to assign us tasks that are too big to be accomplished only by our own set of skills and abilities.

One thing that stood out powerfully to me in verse seven is that we should "wait" on our ministry, whatever that may be. To me this means that, whatever it is that God has given us in this earth, we need to do it with everything that we have and are. We need to be devoted to being absolutely excellent at every task the Lord would have us do. To wait on something in this context means to put your most determined effort into it, to take great thought as to how you will work toward a thing, and to eliminate anything in your life which might hinder your effectiveness in a certain field of pursuit.

It is vitally important that we each individually know the main area of calling for our own lives. As Winkey Prattney said, "Those who don't have a vision for their future don't plan for it." In other words, one of the main ways that Satan is able to destroy us is when we don't have any vision or specific purpose for our lives. Paul made it very clear that whatever direction God is leading us to pursue, we need to do that one thing and not get distracted by a lot of other "good" things. God may use us in many other ministry capacities in order to teach us skills and to develop a broad range of experience in us that we will need to draw upon in the future. However, in the end, we need to take everything that we are learning and apply it to that main will of God for our lives.

Gayla Pulliam

The first section of this week's passage gives a very convicting admonition that the growing thinking Christian, or for that matter anyone who wants friends, would be wise to heed. It basically commands us to have and to keep a right perspective of ourselves and others: to "esteem others better than ourselves," as the Bible states elsewhere. We humans are naturally selfish, self-centered, self-serving, self-exalting, egomaniacs. Some people never get to the place of realizing this and dealing with it. These people are hard to hang out with, and nauseating to me personally, because all they do is talk about themselves and their interests. This is something

that is hard to see in ourselves, and many times it takes seeing it in others to wake us up to it. It is something that has been with us since the fall, and none are immune to it. The wise Christian would take this passage seriously and begin to daily practice the art of selflessness and humility. As a wise man once said “everyman is my superior in some way.” This is a phrase we should all remind ourselves of daily.

The passage goes on to speak of the other members of the body of Christ, and the need for all to work together and use their differing gifts to edify the body of Christ, and to further the Kingdom. It speaks of the folly of arrogantly thinking we are independent and self sufficient. “All cannot be an eye or else where would be the hearing? all cannot be a foot or else where would be the speaking? Etc.”

All Christians have a different office and use, and yet we are not to make excuses, because of our specific gifting, to neglect doing something that needs to be done. We can't say, “I won't clean the church, I'm a 'prophet', the 'servers' are supposed to do that,” or “I'm a 'mercy' I can't tell that person he is doing something wrong, I might hurt his feelings, that's what the 'prophet' is for,” or even worse “I'm an 'exhorter,' I'm not supposed to be organized, and it is ok for me to go on “rabbit trails,” (even when I have a power point) as long as I think you are exhorted, details and organization are for the organizers and 'teachers'.”

To sum it up, the wise Christian should realize he is not Mr. Independent or the “center of the universe”, and should allow others to help him every now and then as needed. Letting others help you, even if you in reality truly don't need them, lets them feel important, and is a good thing to do every now and then. Avoiding praise of self and beginning the practice of praising others will open all kinds of doors for the love of Christ to flow, and the kingdom to be furthered.

James Samaha

In this section of Scripture, Paul explains how Christians should relate to each other as they use the gifts God has given them. The fifth verse tells us that all Christians belong to each other in Christ, as living parts of a whole, namely, the Church. There is no cause for strife or envy among us, because we are each created differently, with special gifts and talents, to serve God together. If all of us were good at doing the same thing, some things would never be done, and others would be done badly. However, as it is, God chooses to express the different facets of

His character through us in many different ways. This enables the Church to reflect the nature of Christ to the world, that they may see and know that He is God.

The next three verses go on to describe how the gifts that God has given us should be used. The seven spiritual gifts outlined here are generally considered to be “motivational gifts;” that is, ways in which different Christians are motivated to serve God. By paying attention to these gifts, and understanding how they are expressed in the individual members of the Church, Christians can be more effective in their ministry to others.

The seven gifts are the gift of prophesying; the gift of ministering, or serving; the gift of teaching; the gift of exhorting, or encouraging; the gift of giving; the gift of ruling, or organizing; and the gift of showing mercy. Prophets are urged to use their gift as they are given the faith to do so. Servers are told to simply wait on, or serve, others. Teachers are instructed to teach. Exhorters are told to encourage. Givers are told to give generously to the needs of others, without ulterior motives. Organizers are urged to use diligence as they rule, and Mercies are reminded to show mercy cheerfully, not begrudgingly.

If a Christian ministry of any kind truly wishes to succeed, it must remember these seven gifts, and distribute the work load accordingly. Otherwise, a Server may be told to teach a class, a Prophet may be given the responsibility of organizing an event, and a Teacher may be asked to donate funds. All of these tasks are necessary, but if given to people whose gift does not match the job, they may not be done as efficiently, effectively, or joyfully as they otherwise would be.

However, if the instructions given in these four verses are carried out, the Church will be blessed, and individual Christians will sincerely enjoy doing exactly what God has designed them to do. Just like a human body, the body of the Church in Christ is designed for all of its many parts to work in perfect harmony for the good of the whole. By God’s grace, and the faith given to us, will we all be able to love and serve Him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Jennifer Williams

The body of Christ is such a neat explanation of how Christians are to work together. If everyone were exactly the same, this world would be incredibly boring. There would be no variety, no color, no inspiration, no creativity, no spontaneity etc... We would be like robots with no real reason to keep living. No one would have the desire to do anything since there

would be no individuality. But praise the Lord we were not made that way! God made each of us unique in our own special way with different gifts, talents, and desires. One man's gift may be the total opposite of someone else's, and that is how we can complement each other in accomplishing the will of God. It makes life so much more exciting! The image of a body is the perfect description of how we all fit together. Each of us forms a different part of the body; however, we all belong to same body. This is what binds our uniqueness together in unity.

The key to unity, though, is being willing to work together. Because we are all so different, we have to make an extra effort to lay down our pride for the benefit of the entire body. One thing I need to work on at times is being content with the gifts God has given me. I cannot be jealous wishing I had someone else's gift. As a result, I would not be fulfilled in my calling. If we are always wishing we could be better at something instead of perfecting the gifts we have, we could very well miss our opportunity to minister. Plus, if everyone did their own thing without submitting to the will of God, the body would never get anything accomplished. It is also encouraging to know that each part of the body is significant. Even the smallest parts which seem so trivial are really important. We need every part in order to work properly.

Above all else, however, we have to remember that it is only through Christ that we are able to form one body. If we tried it any other way, it would not work. Only through His grace and mercy are we able to submit, be content, and work together for His glory. When that happens, life is so much more meaningful!

Molly Dietrich

Romans 12:9-13

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

Love is the most powerful force on earth. I considered that thought a lot last week Monday. In the middle of the hardest course of my degree, weary, and worn out, I had just been given these verses to memorize. As I sat in accountability group with two people I love very much, we all stopped to contemplate what the world would be like without love. No doubt it

would be horrible...because that's what hell is like. Hell is a place with no compassion...no second chances...no mercy. Compassion, second chances, mercy, and love are some of the things that make life worth living, and they are characteristics of my loving heavenly Father. I am to be like Him, to the extent that I am able. It is no wonder that He told me to love, and to be kindly affectioned one to another.

Love has such a mighty, eternal, positive impact that I so often take for granted. Paul tells us that faith, hope, and love will last forever, but the greatest of the three is love.

God wants me to love Him most and foremost with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. Sometimes it is a struggle for me to remember to love Him first when there are so many things and people on this earth that I love. But loving Him must be my first priority. And He loves me back with His everlasting, unconditional love.

God also wants me to love the people He put around me, especially those that are hard to get along with and love. It is then that I realize that I don't even have the power to love them on my own, and I must daily ask Him for His grace to love them the way He does. As I look at each person as someone created in His image, it helps.

God wants me to love Him, others that are "unlovable", and He also wants me to love the precious family and friends He has given me, too. These are the people I find easiest to love, because I can show my love to them in tangible ways. I enjoy being with them and serving them because I love them so much.

Love is what makes life worth living. But to love means to risk, to be open and vulnerable. When I love others I open myself to the hurt of losing that love in the future. But isn't it so interesting how the thing that hurts the very most is the thing that God uses the most to heal that hurt? Despite the risk and the pain, it is worth it all to love. It's better to have loved and lost, than to have never loved at all, because the joy God gives me, and the lessons He teaches me are treasures that I will carry in my heart for the rest of my life.

To love one another is the second greatest commandment Christ gave us. Through His love for me, and my love for Him, my love for others can be an outpouring and overflow of the love that He pours through my heart, and by His grace, I will strive to be a channel of that love to others.

Michelle Eng

Romans 12:14-18

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

Little Johnny and little Aaron are enjoying a lovely summer afternoon playing together at the beach, the sun is bright and cheery and the surf is playful and inviting. The small boys laugh and giggle as they play in the sand constructing magnificent sandcastles and inventing stories about the kings and knights and of their daring feats, that is until little Johnny smashed little Aarons sandcastle to a unrecognizable blob of beach. Little Aarons reacts by returning the favor to little Johnny's sandcastle. In furry and retaliation little Johnny attacks little Aaron inflicting bodily harm to him. Little Aaron does not passively let his attacker beat him to but fights back. Punching, kicking, biting, scratching, and screeching echo across the beach. Startled parents come running to the melee to try to tare the two urchins apart. Chaos interrupts this beautiful day with an unruly display of human nature.

It would be uncharacteristic for little Aaron to say "Oh dearest Johnny, I forgive you for destroying my sandcastle that took me all afternoon to perfect, in fact to show no hard feelings I will let you have my new bucket and mold mother gave me for my birthday." This would be the Biblical way to deal with a situation like that, but not the way we as humans would instinctively act. In the Bible Jesus speaks of doing well to those who harm you, and in Romans Paul speaks of blessing those who persecute you. Actions such as these go so strongly against our natural tendencies. How can we as Christians overcome such a strong urge to avenge themselves against those who do evil to them? How can we live at peace with our fellow brothers and those in the world? Paul gives us the answer in Romans 12:1-2. We must offer ourselves to God, giving up our rights to Him, then we must allow Him to change our mind, and our whole way of viewing the world. Only God can transform us into people who are able to bless those who persecute us, and not repay evil for evil. What about vengeance and getting even, where is the justice to this mode of thinking and acting? Romans 12:19 answers that question by saying "*Vengeance is Mine (God's), I will repay.*" We are His beloved children and He is watching out for us.

Because of our sin nature, and without Christ's regeneration of our mind, we as humans can never display agape love to a person who has hurt them. We will always be like two children fighting over smashed sandcastles, unless we allow Jesus and His precious word to renovate our mind.

Charity Larson

Sometimes there is quite a fine line between compromise and living in peace. Often there have been times in my life where I have tried to live in peace with other people, and in doing so dropped the standard or conviction with which there was a problem in the first place. In other times it has been easy to make a dogmatic stance when on that particular thing it was not necessary. Achieving this balance is what I would like to define in the following essay.

Two questions can be asked to help in achieving a godly balance of standing for what is right, and "if it be possible...[living] peaceably with all men." The first question is: *what is my motive?* Is this statement or action going to dishonor God and His word? If this action or statement won't make a difference in eternity, then simply leave it out, or not do it. Part of the whole problem with trying to live peaceably is knowing when to stand on one's own beliefs, thereby offending the person or group to which the problem occurs. "I want to do _____, because..." should be the question before any confrontation, and the Bible should be the ruler to which we measure our motive.

The second question we should consider is: *what will be the outcome?* Obviously, it is very important to think through every action we make when in a controversial situation. Thinking about every response, and analyzing every action that comes as a result is an important process to thinking about the outcome. Many times it is so easy to just make a bold statement that would not bring about God's glory, or make a strong stand for Christ, but that would make that person look like he or she is more spiritual than earlier perceived. This should be strongly avoided. It sometimes may not be obvious what the outcome will be, but just simply thinking about it many times resolves the conflict, and makes one avoid something that should not have been done or said.

In conclusion, we should be reminded to consider all acts things that matter in eternity. "Whatever we do on earth, shall be done in Heaven," as the Bible says. Living peaceably should be the principle to follow, not trying to be right in everything. Sometimes it is necessary

to keep a good testimony for the Lord and thereby forfeiting human relationships, but often with a little prayer and checking of our motives allows us to remain peaceful in all that we do.

Jeremy Page

I keep telling people that the combination of my spiritual gift, personality type, environment, and culture has shaped me into the strange sort of person that I am. For example, I have the gift of mercy, the phlegmatic/melancholy type of personality (shy, easygoing, glass-is-half-empty, etc.), a “sterile” home school environment, and a Chinese background and culture. When you throw all that together, someone like me turns out. But I think what Paul is saying here is not to let our surroundings or personality traits influence us as much as our new life as Christians does. We are to be movers, shakers, and changers, like Paul, and especially like Christ. Paul did not let his education or what happened to him dictate what he did with his life. Christ “overcame” His birth in a stable and being from a village by the name of Nazareth to have the greatest impact on world history any living person has ever had before or since.

The Apostle Paul was trained as a Pharisee. He knew the Law and the Prophets inside out and backwards and was filled with zeal to carry them out to the letter. All that changed when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, and he was never the same again. Instead of becoming a Jewish rabbi or sitting on the Sanhedrin, he began to teach and preach the Gospel. His education helped him in reaching his fellow Jews, but it did not make him orthodox. After Paul began preaching, he experienced intense persecutions. Beatings, shipwrecks, and stonings—pretty much everything that could happen to him short of execution did. Even so, he wrote letters telling believers to bless their persecutors and to live in peace with all men. He did not let those circumstances deter him from what he knew he was called to do, and he continued to exhort the brethren until his death at the hands of Nero. The Apostle Paul was a mover.

Jesus Christ was born in a stable, and his first cradle was a manger. The first people to visit him were lowly shepherds. He was not born to inherit a throne, but to take over his father’s trade as a carpenter, in the town of Nazareth, of all places—nobody wanted that name on his résumé. Despite these environmental deficits, Christ continued to do what He was sent to do. He questioned the teachers in the synagogues so that they were filled with wonder, He taught the people with authority so that they were astonished, He did mighty miracles by the power of His

Father, and finally He died on the cross so He might reconcile the world to Himself. Jesus Christ did not go with the flow.

So, how about me? With those examples to follow, will I still be blaming my environment and personality for the way I am now? I don't think so. What Paul says in this passage is revolutionary—who besides Christians would refuse to return evil for evil? Who but we would dream of blessing our enemies? I should not passively allow myself to be distorted by the influences around me. Instead, as a Christian, I should be shaping the world. It's about time that I stood strong in the Word and changed the world around me. Paul made a difference. Christ really made a difference. I can too.

Isabelle Ku

As I pondered the above passage this week, verse sixteen really stood out to me. There are three lessons I have been learning from this verse: be of the same mind, condescend to men of low estate, and be not wise in your own conceits.

First, this verse tells us to be of the same mind one toward another. As Christians, we should think of each believer in the same way, without respecting some above others. We also should be unified in thought and belief. The many denominations present within the Church often do not demonstrate this mindset. While each one plays a part in the Body of Christ and each offers important insights into the different parts of Christianity, these denominations bring division to the Church. We must work together as one body. The basics of God's Word are essential to Christianity, and we should unify regarding them without compromising our individual convictions in any way.

Second, we should condescend to men of low estate. I believe this means that we should associate with those who are scorned and shunned by society. This is what Jesus did; He kept company with prostitutes and tax collectors, the least esteemed in His culture. We should not be afraid to talk with goths, punks, bums, pregnant teenagers, or others of that sort. They are often the most receptive to the Good News of Jesus! We cannot shun them – especially if they are poorer brothers and sisters in Christ.

Finally, we should not be wise in our own conceits. We must not think of ourselves more highly than we are. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 8:2, “if any man think that he knoweth any

thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.” If we become proud and think we have all the answers, then we are wrong – only God is all-wise.

As I considered these lessons this week, I realized that I must be in unity with other believers, love them all the same (regardless of their station in life or personality), and be humble about my own achievements. As God gives me grace, I will practice applying these things into my life.

Kristina Zaloum

I Corinthians 9:24-27

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Olympic athletes are some of the most disciplined men and women in the entire world. Every four years these athletes from around the globe compete against one another for the prize of being the best in the world at their particular event. They spend years, even decades, of their lives trying to be the best. Only a very few will make it to the world stage known as the Olympics where the world will applaud them for their prowess and determination.

It is easy to look at these physical specimens and desire to be like them. And who would not want to be among the best in the world at running, or gymnastics, or a team sport? But we often fail to remember that Carl Lewis did not become the fastest man in the world by riding in a car everywhere he went. Nor did Michael Jordan become a great basketball player by playing video games. No. It took years of discipline and practice – hours upon hours spent when there was no glory, no attention, no limelight: only grueling hard work. Everyone wants the fame and the glory of being the best but few are willing to pay the price that it takes to become the best.

If all of these men and women are willing to expend so much in pursuit of an Olympic dream, should not we, as Christians, be willing to expend that kind of effort in the name of Christ? Even the greatest Olympians age, slow down, lose their edge, and eventually die. Their fame decreases, their records fall, their memory fades. Their crown is corruptible.

The promise then, of an incorruptible crown should fill us with energy and determination. We have God's promise that the things we do in His name will never fade away or go unrewarded. How often He encouraged us to lay up treasures in heaven. Why are we so reticent to train for and run the race of life the way a runner trains for and runs a marathon?

Discipline is an ongoing part of the Christian life. There are many things which can hinder a Christian's walk and growth. These must be cast away like the weights and sin mentioned in Hebrews 12:1. Athletes cannot do whatever they want and expect to do their best. Neither can Christians do whatever they want and expect to serve God in the best way. Discipline in one area of life will carry over into other areas just as slothfulness in one area of life will carry over into other areas. The disciplined life brings a smile to God's face and gains a reward from His hand.

Ian Lawrence

I've heard a lot about the "Race of Life" and how I must press on toward the goal, run with perseverance and patience, etc. Now what is this about "running all" and "only one receives the prize"? No one else is living my life, and I'm not living anyone else's. There is only one person running my life race—me. Theoretically then, I should be able to take all the time I need to finish. Yet why did Paul use the analogy of *many* running the race? The "others" need not be people; they can be things that distract me from fulfilling what I am called to do during my short run, things that take my time without giving me worthwhile results. I myself am also included in the list of "they which run." Like runners who race against themselves trying to improve their time each time they run a certain distance, my new self must endeavor to keep ahead of my old nature so that when I reach the finish line, I can say that I have run well and won.

Many of my fellow runners look good. They have cool running outfits and sunglasses. These things distract me from doing what I am supposed to. For instance, I am here at Verity to study. I often closet myself in my room, ostensibly for that purpose. But once I sit down, I discover a host of other things that I would rather do, such as writing in my journal, organizing my desk, doing laundry, making my bed, cleaning the bathroom, getting a drink of water, or vacuuming the floor. Notice that they are all things I *should* do; they are good tasks that have immediate benefits. However, when I do them at the wrong time and use minutes or hours that

would have been better spent working on my calculus lesson, they turn into hindrances that prevent me from improving my running time.

Another runner in my life race is my other self; you could call her my evil twin. I used to be very close to her, but lately we've grown so far apart in every way that I am ashamed to admit I know her anymore. When I want to get up early, she wants to sleep in. When I want to send my assignment in ahead of schedule, she wants to sit around and do nothing. When I am completely full after dinner and cannot take another bite, she asks me for a bowl of ice cream. More often than not, I am persuaded to take her part. I help her to run and support her when she lags behind. By doing this, I know that I am jeopardizing my own chances of winning, but being the very loyal person that I am I find it difficult to simply leave her behind. I'd say she is my fiercest rival, egged on by Satan himself to prevent me from reaching the finish line first. Since only one of us can win the prize, however, I must close my ears to her calls and strive to triumph over her.

I am not the only one running in this race of my life. There are others who are trying to keep me back so I do not make the best time I can. They include good and right things that take up my time, needless activities that just waste my time, and my own old nature. With God's help I will gain the mastery over all and obtain the incorruptible crown.

Isabelle Ku

A horse trainer is a vital part of a racehorse's support crew. The trainer is the one that knows the horse the best. He is the one that works with the horse day in and day out. He works the horse under all different circumstances and conditions to determine the horse's true character, and to test how he will respond to different situations. But there is one thing that sets a good horse trainer apart from the average horse trainer. A good horse trainer will never ask his horses to run in a race that they are not ready to run. A good horse trainer will make sure he has thoroughly equipped and prepared his horses before he unleashes them on the racetrack.

I am so thankful that God, as our "trainer", does not just turn us loose on the racetrack and expect us to win the race. But rather, He patiently coaches and equips us to do all He has called us to do.

Ruffian is one horse that is my hero. She was a great example of running to win. That game little filly won every single race she ran except for one—her last one. In that last race, she was pitted against the best colt of her time—Foolish Pleasure. Ruffian kept her nose ahead of his

the whole way out there, even though the colt was hot on her flanks. But coming around the corner, she landed on her leg wrong and fractured her shoulder. Her jockey panicked and tried to pull her up, but Ruffian would not stop running. She was bleeding, dying, in severe pain, but she would not quit. Her trainer had asked her to run this race, and she was determined to run it and win...at any cost. As it was, the colt pulled ahead of her, and the race cost Ruffian her life. I pray that I will die doing the work God has called me to do. He has called me for something, something that I do not know for sure yet. But I want to run and die running, like Ruffian.

Michelle Eng

This summer I had the privilege of watching my sister run a couple of races. The race that will stick in my mind the most was a 15k she ran in Peoria, IL; in addition to the 15k there were also people running a 4 mile race that was billed as the fastest road race in America. The first female to finish ran her first two miles in under nine minutes, running the entire race in under eighteen minutes, the third fastest time in the world. That woman had trained in all kinds of conditions, she knew her goal and was going to do anything to accomplish it. She had her eyes fixed on the prize; a prize that won't last.

Do I have my eyes so fixed on the end goal that I won't let any other competition get in the way of me receiving the prize, a prize that is incorruptible? There are so many things competing for my time and affections, things that will win out if my eyes stray off the course that is set before me. Those things will not only cause me not to obtain the prize that is before me, but it will also hinder others who are running with me. When I don't stay true to what God has called me to do I not only cause myself to stumble I also cause those around me, those whom I have been called to build up and encourage, to stumble.

I have made a habit of getting physical exercise daily. But along with physically training my body I have come to the realization of how important daily spiritually training is. We have an enemy, and He is looking for any chink in our armor to come in and destroy us. I have to daily be putting on the armor of God, seeking out the areas in my life that are keeping me from having an intimate relationship with Him, and live continually in His strength. Without God's strength and blessing on each day, I would give into the things that are competing against me, the things that are a hindrance to me finishing and winning the race that is set before me.

Everyone is running a race, but the end goal for each individual is different. Some run for personal pleasure, some to be better than others, some run aimlessly, and others with great purpose. Each person's race has a different finish line, but everyone will come to an end. Then it will be revealed why they were running—for personal gain or for the glory of God.

Rebekah Johnson

Philippians 2:5-11

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

What is the mind of Christ? Paul lists a few attributes to explain his meaning. “*Of no reputation,*” would mean that Jesus wasn't out to make a name for Himself and try to become famous. “*Took on...the form of a servant,*” refers to the fact that Jesus was here to serve mankind, from giving freely of Himself, to healing others, washing His disciple's feet, and sacrificing His life for all of us, He is the model servant. “*He humbled Himself*” by leaving His lofty position as part of God, and stooped to the utter lowliness of taking on the likeness of man. This is the mind of Christ.

He was beaten, despised, afflicted, and murdered. Yet through it all He still was obedient to His Father's Will. How could he do that? Such a painful death, such abject humiliation, the utter torment of separation from God, due to the sin he bore. How could he ever do it? How could He let Himself be dragged down to Hell, who had never done wrong?

“*Greater love hath no man than this: that he lay down his life for a friend.*” – John 15:13. In His own words, Jesus explained how He could bear these things. It was His love for others – His love for me – that bore Him through His trials. If He can love someone so much that He would endure a death by crucifixion, then surely I can learn to show love to others, especially

in the easier setting I am in. But, if I were in such a situation, where I would have to put my life on the line for a friend, or someone I don't even know, would I be able to do it? I think that I may be able to, if I knew for sure that the one I was sacrificing myself for knew why I did it. If I could tell them, I would say that I do it as a way of thanking another who died to save my life, even though I didn't know Him. He didn't even know me, but cared enough about me to put Himself in the way of a sure death for me.

Thank you, God, for sending your Son. Thank you, Lord, for setting me free.

Brian Jones

These verses especially have spoken to me as we continue our study on developing our life purpose. As the amplified version states, "Let this same attitude and *purpose* and [humble] mind be in you which is also in Christ Jesus." How can we better fashion a life purpose than to model it after that of the Son of God. This was a wonderful consolation to me before the Lord showed me what He wanted me to do with my life. I needed merely to imitate my Savior in preparation for that time when He saw fit to show me His design for my profession. However we must never take the revelation of a life purpose to mean we need no longer seek to emulate Christ. It must be a continual state of mind in which we live for the rest of our lives.

In these verses Paul is slightly more specific than merely charging us to imitate the mind of Christ. His main focus in these verses is the *humble* mind of Christ, as seen through His incarnation as man and His death on the cross. In this same manner, those who have received a specific calling from God for their lives should not consider themselves on a higher level than those who are still searching. Our focus should rather be to build up and encourage those believers, to love them as Christ loves them, for in His eyes all are equal.

Throughout Jesus' life on earth He continually stressed the importance of childlike faith. There is a subtle beauty to the simplistic, yet immeasurable, faith of a child. It is only through this humble mind and attitude of the heart that this powerful faith can be achieved. It is only when we seek to serve the Lord, not for our own acclamation, but solely for the Glory of God the father, that He can use us for His purpose. The last verse attests that God has raised Christ up so that all in heaven, all on earth, and all below the earth must bow before the name of Christ "for the glory of God the father." So let us do likewise.

Benjamin Katterjohn

Often we have the idea that to be great, we must work as hard as we can – promoting ourselves, jockeying for position, and increasing our visibility. Sometimes this strategy works. We have all met successful people – those who have money, position, fame, or influence – who are full of themselves and are not pleasant to be around, but they have achieved a measure of success in this world.

While many proud and selfish people may achieve some success in this life, someday they will die: and then all of those worldly accomplishments will vanish. True success does not lie in that which is temporal but in that which is eternal. Yes, they may have received the accolades of men during their lifetime by doing it their way, but they will miss out on the eternal rewards that God gives to those who live His way.

What is God’s way? God rewards those who are humble and resists those who are proud (James 4:6). Humility is not natural nor is it easy. Pride is not easy to conquer; it is at the root of every sin. The process of learning humility forces us to develop a relationship with God and draw on His strength as we fight the natural inclinations of our flesh. Jesus Himself lived out this principle during His earthly ministry.

I do not think that I will ever fully understand just how much Jesus humbled Himself or how much He gave up to come to earth as a man. The One Who spoke the universe into existence became flesh and bone and dwelt among us. He was tempted in every way like we are (Hebrews 4:15), and He died an excruciatingly painful and humiliating death on the cross. He emerged victorious, and now the reward He has received from God the Father makes all the suffering and humiliation well worthwhile.

Which would I rather have: an eternal reward from God or the temporal praise of man? Humility before honor – that is the way to receive God’s blessing. Am I willing to humble myself and pursue God? The reward is sure for those who do.

Ian Lawrence

This passage is an exhortation to have the same mind as Christ. The only way to accomplish that is through brain swapping, (quite improbable because my finite brain would never serve as Christ’s brain,) or through brain washing—an idea generally reserved for the movies and television. However, Christians are supposed to become “brain-washed,” (as Romans

12:2 puts it, “be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.”)

The passage above specifies some characteristics that are quintessential to the mind of Christ. First, it states that he did not deny his own rank as God, but became a servant nonetheless. Second, it declares that he humbled himself and became obedient unto death. These two examples give clear insight into the mind of Christ. He knew his position, but he forewent a reputation on earth to serve through love. After lowering himself to a human level; he humbled himself further to obey.

What will it take for me to have obedience unto death? I could do a hard thing for God. I could go to Africa or India for him. I could look at a loaded gun in the hands of a terrorist and refuse to deny my faith. But, what will it take for me to have obedience unto the death of my selfish nature? Can I do the small things as bravely and as obediently as the large, hard, glorious things? No—not unless I am brain washed.

There is no glory in washing the dishes when no one looks. There is no glory in going the extra mile for someone who does not care. There is no glory for saying cheerful things when I feel like snapping. God, however, wants me to have the mind of Christ.

He wants me to be mindful of my rank—a child in his kingdom, a joint-heir with Christ, one who will judge angels—but to serve others through love. He wants me to forget glory and reputation and become obedient to the death of my selfish motives. The only way to accomplish this is to spend so much time with the him, that I begin to think like him. I must wash my brain in his word and wash my soul with prayer until I can have the mind that is also in Christ Jesus.

Lily-Bea Jenkins

Hebrews 11:1-6

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, “and was not found because God had taken him”; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But

without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Faith is the defining element of Christianity, yet it is somewhat of a mystery to understand. What most people do not realize is that faith is not limited to “religion”—it is an integral part of life. The difference is all in where we put our faith. Yes, faith can move mountains, but only if it the right kind of faith. True faith comes from God. It is not something that we somehow will to be present in ourselves. It is as God gives us grace that we can believe in the things not seen. Faith is not some kind of opponent for reason, as some see it, but rather a perspective on reality at its deepest level.

It is by faith that we can comprehend the fact of existence itself. By faith we believe that God created the universe, with all its spiritual and physical components. Such belief is actually more rational than believing that existence came from non-existence, or that irrational matter always existed. However, since finite human reason is incapable of fully comprehending itself, whichever position we take it must be one of faith.

In this passage, the author of Hebrews looks at faith and its results in the lives of individuals. We know very little about the people mentioned, but we do know that they both were men who had an exemplary faith. Despite not being able to see God, these men had the faith to act as though God were the most real thing in life. How often do we say that God is the most real thing to us, but instead act as if worldly things like trials, emotions and circumstances are the focus?

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for.” In the preceding chapter it can be seen that what is being hoped for is the second coming of Christ. Our salvation rests on what Jesus did for us, and we assured of it by faith, believing in His promise that He will come one day for us. If we are not living like we expect Christ to come back, then ours is a weak faith. The author states that we cannot please God without faith, which seems obvious. Yet there are people who try to do just that. They try to somehow be on God’s good side without really believing that God can be present in their life, or that He really cares about them. We must be careful to exercise all the faith God has given us; to believe in His character, His goodness, and His promises. If we will only obey and act out our faith, God wants to reward us with an ever closer and more meaningful relationship with Him.

Alex Damon

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen...”
What is faith? Elton Trueblood said that “Faith is not belief without proof, but trust without reservation.” The word *faith* means to believe in what you cannot see. Sometimes that is the hardest thing in life for me. I do not want to wait for things that I’m not sure will happen. I like to know up front what my life will be like and what the future holds for me. I want to be in control, but God has different plans. He wants me to wait and trust Him. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Take the first step in faith. You don’t have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.” I was really struggling with some personal issues on trust, faith, patience, etc., but when I read this, it was like God was telling me to trust Him fully and completely, and to give everything to Him. I don’t have to know what will happen. If I just fully and completely trust Him, He will be there when I stumble, fall and mess things up. He’s always there, ready to catch me and set me back on the right track. But if I do not take that first step of faith, how will I ever know the true beauty of what my life could become?

Many times God uses the people that He placed in your life, to walk beside you, encourage you and sometimes to tell the truth in love, no matter how much it may hurt. I would like to share with you a letter that a very special friend recently sent me, when I hit rock bottom during a rough time in my life.

God is in control, Erin. Trust Him. He knows exactly what’s going on. He knows your heart’s deepest and most fervent desires!! He knows. He already knew all this was going to happen before the world began. It seems hard to believe, doesn’t it? It’s true. He did know. And He already knows the ending to the ‘novel’. You just have to let the pages glide by...let Him turn the pages, Erin. It’s best that way. He wrote your story...it’s already written, so don’t worry about the future. You’re going to get through this...and when you do, you’ll be even more ‘refined’ by this fire! It may seem hot now, it may hurt, it may burn, but He is our “Perfect-er”. He’s doing it for you. All you need to do is trust Him. He’s got the best...just for you. Just have faith.

I hope this letter will be as much of an encouragement to you as it was to me. Remember that God knows everything that is going to take place. It's not always the easy road, but He was the One who planned it! "If God brings you to it, He will bring you through it."

Erin Williams

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Running is painful. Patience is a virtue. Running with patience is for saints. How can I run the race of life patiently and still make it to the end alive? Sometimes it seems to me that others are far ahead of me and that it will take me a long, long time to reach the mile marker they are just passing. That's the pessimistic view. I should really be encouraged that there are so many running with me, casting aside all weights that drag them down and sins that entangle them, keeping the hope of joy before their eyes all the way.

Running is painful. I distinctly remember the very first time I went jogging, *really* jogging. No more "jog five yards and walk the next ten." It was dark, it was cold, and it hurt to get out of bed and dress to go outside and torture my body. That plus the fact that I was running with others whose legs were considerably longer than my own made for a slow morning. We went two miles that freezing day, the farthest I had ever gone in my life, and it felt like we would never get to the park. Along the way, I kept stopping and walking, until the others were far and away ahead of me down the street. Because I had never run the distance before, I was frustrated because I could not judge how much longer it would take me to get to the end. When we finally arrived, my lungs hurt, my feet hurt, my nose was running, and I thought I would pass out. And we still had to walk back! Life is like that. I can't see the end; I just have to keep running. My partners goaded me on the whole time we were out there, and once even grabbed my arm and dragged me along. God has set many others around me to keep me going. Even though they may

be far ahead, that is still an encouragement, because if they can make it that far with God's help, then so can I.

"Patience is a virtue," but these days it's more like a cliché. I say it jokingly while waiting in long lines at McDonald's or sitting at the airport gate during a three-hour layover. But what is patience? To me, it is keeping my mouth shut during times of stress, maintaining an unresponsive silence. Somehow I think it's more than that though. When Christ was on the cross He was not silent. He made sure His mother would be taken care of, He cried out to His Father to forgive his executioners, and He assured a thief of eternal life with Him. Each word He spoke was deliberate, and He did not even have an attitude of complaining. I know that I am called to follow His example. In fact, I may have an easier time of it than He did because I am surrounded by people who have the same worldview and mindset that I do, that of glorifying God in all that I do. So patience is more than simply not complaining; it involves actively seeking ways to encourage and edify others even in the midst of my own suffering.

It is easy for me to find the negative in situations. I do think that I am a pessimist by nature. It is one of the weights that I carry and a sin that besets me wherever I go. But when I look to Jesus who gives me faith and gives me situations to develop it, I am encouraged to continue running the race in patience, giving praise to His name, until I reach the finish line.

Isabelle Ku

James 2:14-17

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

There has long been a debate in Christianity regarding faith and works. Is a person saved by faith or by works? Many have argued in defense of each position. Unlike many other theological debates, however, this issue is clearly explained in Scripture.

Biblically, it is certain that a person is saved by faith alone. Our works of righteousness are "filthy rags" to a holy God. At first glance, James seems to contradict this statement but this is not so. The position that James takes is that, yes, it is by faith that we are saved but it is proven

or demonstrated by works. Good works are the “feet” of faith. A person who claims to be a Christian but continues to live in sin shows no evidence of a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. It is extremely doubtful that such a person is saved.

One should not have to wonder if a person is truly a Christian or not. There should be such a mountain of evidence to back up the claim. One oft-used illustration is that of an accused Christian and it asks, “If you were accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” Dare I ask this question of myself? It is my sincere hope that the answer would be yes, but this question must be answered not only by me, but by the ones who know me best. What would they say?

Christianity is no good if it is a religion of words. It must be a relationship with works. Jesus does not, at this time, live and walk on the earth. Christians are the only picture many people will have of Christ. That is a serious charge. Saying all the right things and saying, “God bless you,” is not sufficient. The world is lost and dying, and many need to see the love of Christ expressed through the hands of those who love Him.

Jesus said that the world would know that we are His disciples by our love. Love cannot be expressed solely by words in long-term relationships. There must be actions which back up and confirm those words. Does my faith have “feet?” If not, why not? God grant us the grace to meet the needs of the lost, and in so doing, point them to the Savior.

Ian Lawrence

There are times in the Christian life when there are tasks and goals we must complete; however, we cannot just sit around hoping that someone will see our need and give us the means for accomplishing that goal. As Christians, we must first put our faith in God that He will give us the tools required for the goal, but we must also be willing to work at those goals.

The feeding of the five thousand is told in each one of the gospels, but the recorded account in the book of John gives more detail into where the five loaves and the two fish came from. We read about this little lad who has five loaves and two fish and is willing to give them to Jesus to feed the five thousand men, but do we really comprehend what the lad was thinking when he was about to give up his lunch? John 6:9-10 says, “One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, ‘There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?’” Even a disciple of Christ could not see what a lad

giving up his lunch for a multitude of five thousand could do. Verse 11 says, “And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.” Jesus used a little boy and his lunch to perform a miracle and accomplish a goal.

It seems that in the Christian life the Lord chooses to use us especially when we are minding our own business. That is when God gives us a calling or asks us to use our gifts or talents to accomplish a goal He has for us. Just as Philippians 1:6 says, “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” We must sacrifice ourselves for the work of the Lord. What a challenge to know that the little lad was willing to give up his lunch for Jesus. How much more do we as Christians need to sacrifice ourselves and our talents to follow the Lord’s will for our lives.

Ellen Gibilisco

Think of yourself walking into a mall, you happen to stop into an American Eagle store. You find something that you like and make your way to the check-out counter. As you approach the counter, you casually greet the check-out guy and start a pleasant conversation. As you are talking, the twenty-something guy looks at you and says, "Hey man, what’s up with you? There’s something different about you."

You find yourself walking through the mall food court and you pass two guys sitting at a counter. A little while later you come backtracking the same way you came before and pass the two guys again. This time you stop and strike up a conversation, nothing too forward, just a kind word or two. The next thing you know, one of the two guys is asking you about your faith in Jesus, and you are walking away with the second guy’s business card having promised to contact him about your faith.

Your faith. Everyone even loosely associated with Christianity claims to have faith. We all say that we have faith. However you will either be saying it through your actions of love and mercy towards others or through your empty words. What is it that causes people who were total strangers a moment ago to want to reach out to you because they desperately want what you have? Whatever it is that people are looking for out in the world, they are not finding it. What would cause them to come to you for what you have?

"What doth it profit...", says James, "though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can his faith save him?" If we are doing our job right as Christians, we will not have to go around announcing our faith to people. They will instead be coming to us asking why we are different because they will see something different in us. This particular guy that James is referring to, however, does not even have a faith that will save himself, let alone anyone else. If this man with the useless faith had any of the power of the Word of God operating in his life, he would not have been so ineffective in reaching out to those who were hurting around him. The fact that he was not doing anything to reach out to others signifies that he did not even have enough of the Word in him to overcome some of his own total selfishness. Conversely, when Christians do begin to operate more and more from true faith, they will be compelled by the Holy Spirit to do whatever they can to bring practical help to those within their sphere of influence. True faith comes only from consistent hearing and rehearing of the Word of God. Without the Word as your foundation, you are reduced to a series of mind-sets based upon purely emotional belief, and selfish actions will ultimately be the result.

Gayla Pulliam

What good is anything when it is dead? There is no use in having it if it is not alive. It would be better to throw it out and get rid of it in order to avoid the stench when it rots. In the same way, what good is faith when it is dead? Why have it if you are not using it? It is pointless. The key to having a blossoming faith is by accompanying it with good works. We can say we have a lot of faith, but if we do not carry it out by our actions, then it is the same as if we do not have any at all.

This passage clearly shows us the importance of stepping out and acting on our faith. When we see a fellow brother or sister in need, we should not just wish them well, hoping everything will work out, when we have the resources to help. Even if we do not have the resources to help, it would be better to actually take the initiative in helping them find some, instead of standing off at the sidelines simply watching.

Many times I believe it is hard to live by faith because we cannot see the evidence with our eyes. We want to see it before we believe it. However, faith is not about living by sight. It is the complete opposite. We have to "step out of the boat" in faith believing that God is going to be there. Numerous times in the Bible He promised He would never leave us. Knowing this,

we should be more confident since we know in our hearts that God is always with us. He is not going to lead us on a path and then leave us out there by ourselves to find our way. Many times, though, it will be our faith that carries us through when we cannot see clearly.

Consequently, the way to keep our faith alive is through good deeds. You cannot have one without the other and truly be prosperous. They go hand in hand. Faith without works is dead, and works without faith are accomplished in vain.

Molly Dietrich

I Peter 2:13-17

Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

The alley was dark. Only the dim lights from a nearby street corner pierced the darkness. Four shadowy shapes dashed through the lighted street and into the safety of the obscure passageway. With deliberate motion, the delinquents reached into their bag and removed the tools of their trade. The contents of six cylindrical cans were methodical applied to the alley walls. In less than a dozen minutes the cans were discarded, their destiny complete. A brief moment of silence was observed by the foursome as they scrutinized the results of their labors: a six foot long section of alley resplendent in phrases describing the government in unapproved adjectives. Their mission complete, the young thugs began a swift retreat to the shelter of a nearby bar.

The police officer stepped out of the shadows of a doorway on the opposite side of the street. This movement was detected by the four anarchists and had the effect of temporarily arresting several of their bodily functions. The awkward period of silence was broken by a general consensus among the four suspects to vacate the immediate location. A commanding shout and the sound of a sidearm being drawn quickly halted the ad hoc migration and transformed the surly young men into submissive adolescents. While being escorted to his

holding cell, one of the delinquents worked up the courage to glare at the officer and mutter, “We was only using our rights of free speech!”

“Young man,” the officer replied, “you didn’t exercise your freedoms, you abused them. Because you demonstrated that you cannot handle the freedom our society has given you, your independence will be taken away. You could not control yourself, so we will restrain you until you can.”

As Christians, we are not bound to the Mosaic Law. The Law of the Hebrews has given way to the freedom of Grace. However, it is our responsibility to exercise our freedoms conscientiously. An abuse of the liberties that Christ has given us can result not only in spiritual consequences for ourselves, but can also tarnish our effectiveness as an ambassador to those around us. One foolish act of irresponsibility can destroy another’s interest in the things of God and create spiritual wounds that will never fully heal. We must keep our focus on the souls of our fellow men. It is only when we see the world around us through the eyes of the Savior that we will be willing to yield our freedoms for the sake of His Kingdom.

Micah Hubbard

I John 4:7-11

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

The greatest love a person can show their friend is to die for them. Yet Jesus showed the world a greater love than just dying for people who loved Him. He chose to die for humans who hated Him. God has called Christians to emulate Jesus by loving their brothers. When a Christian harbors bitterness and hatred in his heart toward another brother how can he say he loves God? Hatred has not part in God. When a Christian entertains hatred in his heart toward another person it is an indication that he has strayed from God. Love in a Christian’s life shows that he knows God and is walking close to Him.

In J. M. Barrie’s book Peter Pan, Peter and the Lost Boys live under a huge tree in

Never, Never Land. Each boy has his own personal tunnel into the tree. Peter tailors each tunnel to fit the boy's body shape, so only that boy can use his tunnel. If one of the boys gets a little pudgy and his tunnel is a little tight, Peter does not widen the tunnel to match the boy's growing girth. He changes the boy until the boy fits his tunnel. God is like that with His children. He calls them to love one another, but some people seem impossible to love. God does not change the unlovable person; He changes His child's heart, making him able to love the unlovable individual.

How does this occur in a Christian's life; how can their hatred be turned into love? By drawing close to Jesus. A person that loves is a person who knows God. A child of God cannot know God unless he draws close to Him. When a Christian learns to walk with Jesus and sit at His feet, willing and eager to learn from Him, then he will become a channel for Christ's love to flow through to others.

Charity Larson