

"MEN OF MY COUNSEL": APPLYING GOD'S TRUTH TO MY TIGHT PLACES

MCBC Man of the Word Spring 2021



"MEN OF MY COUNSEL": APPLYING GOD'S TRUTH TO MY TIGHT PLACES

THEME

Through the pulpit ministry and the last cycle of MOW, we understand that tight places are God ordained events in a believer's life to conform him to the image of Jesus Christ. Given that knowledge, how should one respond to a tight place? Are there any Scriptural examples that one can learn from? This booklet is a ten-week study highlighting seven men in the Bible and noting their response to their tight place. By God's grace, we desire to view tight places through the lens of Scripture and to respond in a way that brings honor and glory unto God.

THEME PASSAGE

"Your testimonies are also my delight; They are my counselors."

Psalm 119:24

MANUAL

Each week's resources consist of:

- SCRIPTURE MEDITATION A passage pertaining to the week's article to be read and considered during the week
- BOOK READING Maurice Roberts, The Thought of God (Banner of Truth, 2013)
- QUOTATION FOR MEDITATION Additional food for thought
- M'CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE A way to keep on track in reading through the Bible in 2021 using the M'Cheyne system
- Personal Reflections A week-by-week place to record what God is teaching you
- ARTICLES Testimonies and devotionals related to the theme, written by Mount Calvary Baptist Church men

Don't let these materials become daunting. Let whatever you do be a delight. If you can't keep up every component, choose the ones that you can

use consistently and stick with them.

TIME

10 weeks: January 30 - April 10, 2021

GOALS

- 1. To cast ourselves upon God for His abundant help in our tight places through scriptural meditation.
- 2. To draw benefit from a compilation of editorials over a 15-year span from the former editor of Banner of Truth magazine to help cast our care and gaze upon Christ.
- 3. To edify fellow Mount Calvary men through prayer and accountability.

EVENTS

Men's Prayer Breakfasts: January 30, March 6, April 10

My Prayer Partner (name, phone number, email):

MAN OF THE WORD PROGRAM

The leadership of Mount Calvary Baptist Church created the Man of the Word program in obedience to the command of 2 Timothy 2:2: "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." This ministry functions under the leadership of Pastor Mark Minnick and Pastor Jerid Jones. The following men are the current Man of the Word officers.

| President | Eric Newton |
|---------------------|---------------|
| Vice President | Tom Kendall |
| Treasurer | Roger Bradley |
| Food Director | Al Ellison |
| Project Coordinator | Jesse Keck |
| Manual Director | Ries Barlow |

We are grateful to Pastor Mark Minnick for his encouragement and leadership and for his vision for the men of Mount Calvary Baptist Church. We would also like to express our gratitude to the men who have donated their time, energy, and gifts by writing spiritually edifying articles for our growth and encouragement.

FOREWORD

A new year provides an opportunity to start fresh again - a time to make resolutions. As you list your goals, I challenge you to make a mental note of those who catch your ear. We live in an age where there is an overwhelming amount of chatter. It used to be that if you had something intelligent to say about a topic and were qualified to speak on it, the floor was yours - not so in today's culture. No doubt in the new year you can expect some tight places. Who are you going to turn to for help?

The profitability of your tight place depends on the speech of the one to whom you are listening. Our first parents listened to the speech of the serpent and plunged the whole race into sin and alienation from God. The cover of the MOW manual captures your two choices perfectly. This famous painting by Raphael, *The School of Athens*, represents the philosophers, mathematicians, and other great minds of the past. You could choose to listen to them and lose the blessing of your tight place, or you can reject the counsel of worldly wise men in favor of the Scriptures. Notice how Justin depicts this as the much better choice – the wise men are in the background while the white lettering is prominent. May you choose Scripture as the men of your counsel [Ps. 119:24] and therefore obtain the blessing God has in store for you in your tight place.

Ries Barlow

January 31 - February 6

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

"And raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

Ephesians 2:6

BOOK READING

Roberts, pp. 95-99

QUOTATION FOR MEDITATION

"They [Christians of the past] were in heaven as to their affections long before their souls got there." (p. 99).

| Jan 31 | Gen 32 | Mark 3 | Esther 8 | Rom 3 |
|--------|------------|--------|--------------|-------|
| Feb 1 | Gen 33 | Mark 4 | Esther 9, 10 | Rom 4 |
| Feb 2 | Gen 34 | Mark 5 | Job 1 | Rom 5 |
| Feb 3 | Gen 35, 36 | Mark 6 | Job 2 | Rom 6 |
| Feb 4 | Gen 37 | Mark 7 | Job 3 | Rom 7 |
| Feb 5 | Gen 38 | Mark 8 | Job 4 | Rom 8 |
| Feb 6 | Gen 39 | Mark 9 | Job 5 | Rom 9 |

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ABRAHAM

PHIL STERR

"After these things ... God tested Abraham."

After what things? In reading the previous chapters it seems you could conclude that the "these things" were more of the same, ie. testings. After God came and spoke to Abraham He tested him. And after He tested him, He tested him again. And is this not a lesson a believer should learn early on in his pilgrimage? In the final scene (Rev.3-4) the promises of God are to over-comers. And what does the over-comer overcome? Are they not testing's of faith?

Can we in any way identify with Abram when he was called to leave the familiar things of life and enter a whole new realm? For him it was home, family, and country. For us it may be the same, or a more subtle calling out from the accepted norms of the day. God is always wanting to bring His children to a new place spiritually. To us He says: "Be not conformed, but be transformed." Don't settle down, but be ready to be changed. God is doing a sanctifying work in each of His and does He not do it primarily through testing's of faith? These trials, according to Peter, are more precious than gold [I Pet. 1:7]. Gold is pretty precious these days. But testing's of faith even more so. Why is that? Because God is personally in it. He ordered it. He oversees it. He provides for it. He is weaning us not just from the ungodly things, but from our self-reliance. He must increase. We must decrease. He is helping us with that by constantly challenging our faith.

Abraham was tested with his insecurities. "They may get me because of my attractive wife." Well, what about her Abraham, have you considered her? Remember God said to Abraham: consider the sand; count the stars. That will be your seed. Was Abraham's vision a bit to low? And do we not spend far too much time with our miserable selves? We need to lift up our eyes and behold the wonders of what God has said to us.

And what of the test of having a child? Was this not a test of patience more than anything? God said something, but it wasn't happening. What do we do with that? The older I get the more frequent the verse come to me:" Wait on the Lord, and be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord" [Ps.27:14]. They that wait on the

Lord shall renew their strength [Is. 40:31]. We can feel for Abraham and Sarah in their long years of waiting. But the warning here for us is not to give in to a carnal response to the things we are waiting for. In our patience we possess our souls [Lk. 21:19]. Always remember the Lord's answer to Abraham: "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?"

Then came the test of Sodom. God seemed to question whether He should even mention the subject to Abraham. But yes He would because Abraham needed to see that the ways of God are righteousness and justice. If Abraham was going to raise his family the right way, this matter of Sodom needed to be clearly understood. Their sin was" exceedingly grave." And yes, God could be supplicated and yes, if He could show mercy He would, but hurry Abraham; the wrath of God can only wait so long. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was asked near the end of his life if he had any word for the present day. Yes, one word: "flee the wrath to come." In our painful tests of endurance we can't coddle the flesh with any unholy indulgences.

"So after these things, God tested Abraham" [Gen.22:1].

It was said of George Mueller that his most severe tests came in his nineties. So for us after a lifetime of testing, we can expect more testing. Again, why is this the case? Because it is more valuable than the most precious thing on earth. It is God's way to make us like His Son, Who learned obedience through the things He suffered [Heb. 5:8]. If our hearts are idol factories constantly producing, then God has to be constantly counteracting with that which makes us dependent on His words. According to James, the testing of our faith produces good things: endurance, maturity, completeness and a lacking of nothing. Are we there yet? So the tests continue.

Genesis 22 gives a beautiful picture of where our help comes from for our tight places. Here is the final test of Abraham with his son Isaac.

An only begotten son of love was sent to a mount outside of Jerusalem [v.2].

Wood was going to be used in the offering, and the son carried it [v6; Jn.19:17].

The father had the instruments of death [v6; Isa.53:4, 10].

The son spoke to the father [v7; Matt.26:39].

The father heard [v7; Ps 22:24] and answered [Isa. 53:6, 10].

So the two of them walked on together [v6; Jn.10:30].

And on the third day, the father raised his eyes and the place of sacrifice was seen [v4; Matt.16:21].

Something else was going on in this testing that Abraham didn't know anything about. How often is that the case with us? We are called to go forth trusting. In so many things we see through a glass darkly. What Abraham knew in the end is what we must learn in our trials. For the first time Abraham came to know Jehovah Jireh [v14] in his testing. "The Lord will Provide." For us, Jehovah Jireh will not allow us to be tempted above that which we are able. But will with the temptation PROVIDE a way of escape that we may be able to bear it [I Cor. 10:13].

February 7 - February 13

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

"Be miserable, and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom."

James 4:9

Book Reading

Roberts, pp. 100-107

QUOTATION FOR MEDITATION

"Repentance ought to be a believer's daily and hourly companion. Brokenness of heart and tenderness of spirit should be the hallmark of our whole character" (p. 103).

| Feb 7 | Gen 40 | Mark 10 | Job 6 | Rom 10 |
|--------|--------|---------|--------|--------|
| Feb 8 | Gen 41 | Mark 11 | Job 7 | Rom 11 |
| Feb 9 | Gen 42 | Mark 12 | Job 8 | Rom 12 |
| Feb 10 | Gen 43 | Mark 13 | Job 9 | Rom 13 |
| Feb 11 | Gen 44 | Mark 14 | Job 10 | Rom 14 |
| Feb 12 | Gen 45 | Mark 15 | Job 11 | Rom 15 |
| Feb 13 | Gen 46 | Mark 16 | Job 12 | Rom 16 |

| PERSONAL REFLECTION | | |
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JOSEPH

RIES BARLOW

A tight place is a God ordained life situation designed to conform the believer into the image of Christ. As a result, a believer should expect these throughout his lifetime. They are, however, not necessarily reserved exclusively for adults. In Genesis 37, the reader is introduced to a teen-ager by the name of Joseph, who will undergo a series of tight places over the next several chapters. The incident for our consideration involves his time as a slave in Potiphar's home. How Joseph became a slave is not so much about jealousy and parental favoritism as it is God taking man's sin and using it for His own purposes. In Genesis 39, Moses records a key phrase that one must keep in mind when experiencing a tight place – *the LORD was with Joseph*. Men, let us not forget that the LORD will never leave us nor forsake us. Furthermore, you have Deity living inside of you. Therefore, the LORD has equipped you for your tight place. The one thing you need to do is to respond rightly by casting your care upon Him and to wait for Him.

For Joseph, what did it mean for him to have the LORD with him? It meant grace and favor from Potiphar for he saw that the LORD made all that he [Joseph] did to prosper in his hand. This led Potiphar to make Joseph the overseer of his house and over all that he had. As a result, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake. Although a slave, life is going very well for Joseph at this point in the narrative. Enter the tight place. Moses' records that Potiphar's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and commands him to lie with her. He is her slave. He must obey her. right? Obedience to one's master, employer or government has limitations. One should obey as long as what is being asked does not violate God's law. When those in authority over us command us to sin, we must choose to obey God rather than man. Although adultery was common in the Egyptian culture, it is a sin that must be completely rejected. Joseph rightly refuses her command and ends his conversation with a question - how then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God? Men, you must remember that our sin is ultimately against God and our relationship with Him is everything. Think about that for a moment. What can you do without God? Can you breathe? Eat? Drink? Travel? Think? All of these daily activities that we take for granted are dependent upon God.

Sin strains our relationship with Him and even though we are under grace and not under the Law, we must choose to do the right thing. We must not entertain sin of any kind.

Potiphar's wife, would not take No for an answer. One particular day she grabbed Joseph by his coat and commanded him to lie with her. Joseph responded by leaving his coat with her and fled. Men, there are some important lessons to learn from this encounter. First of all, as persistent as Potiphar's wife was in doing evil we need to be equally persistent in doing what is right. Purpose in your heart that you will not give in to sin no matter what the cost. These types of decisions are best made when one is alone with a Bible. Ask the LORD to help you stand for what is right in the work place. Pray to the Holy Spirit to enable you in these types of situations. Secondly, the situation may call for you to physically run away. Although that may sound a little juvenile, you must remember what is at stake - your testimony of being a Christian and most importantly, the name of the LORD. Your co-workers need to see genuine Christianity – especially here in the South where the lines between the holy and profane have been greatly blurred. Doing right may cost you your job. For Joseph, he went from being an overseer of Potiphar's house to prison. Keep in mind, however, that the LORD was with Joseph – and He will be with you too, if you honor Him above man.

13

February 14 - February 20

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

"Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted."

Matthew 23:12

BOOK READING

Roberts, pp. 108-113

QUOTATION FOR MEDITATION

"There are, in the nature of things, only two ultimate objects to which a man's soul may incline with proud pleasure. He may turn to God or else to himself" (p. 108).

| Feb 14 | Gen 47 | Lk 1:1-38 | Job 13 | 1 Cor 1 |
|--------|--------|------------|------------|---------|
| Feb 15 | Gen 48 | Lk 1:39-80 | Job 14 | 1 Cor 2 |
| Feb 16 | Gen 49 | Lk 2 | Job 15 | 1 Cor 3 |
| Feb 17 | Gen 50 | Lk 3 | Job 16, 17 | 1 Cor 4 |
| Feb 18 | Ex 1 | Lk 4 | Job 18 | 1 Cor 5 |
| Feb 19 | Ex 2 | Lk 5 | Job 19 | 1 Cor 6 |
| Feb 20 | Ex 3 | Lk 6 | Job 20 | 1 Cor 7 |

| PERSONAL REFLECTION | | |
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MOSES

CHARLES BAIZE

Several parallels come to mind after reading Numbers 14 – between the condition of the nation Israel when they refused to enter the Promised Land, and what we face as a follower of Christ in our quest to fulfill the chief end of man: "to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever."

The first parallel is found in the promises God has made. Caleb, Joshua, and Moses all tried to remind the people of the many ways that God had clearly promised that He had determined to lead them into the land. Perhaps the most recent promise was when God spoke in Numbers 13:2, of sending spies into the land "...which I am going to give to the sons of Israel..." The spies were not sent into a land that they were going to have to conquer by themselves. The promise that God has given to us is expressed in II Corinthians 9:8 "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed"

Secondly, for both Israel and ourselves, these promises are challenged. Coming up against a nation that was "strong"; and "cities that were fortified and very large"; whose people were "men of great size" – "Sons of Anak"; in whose eyes they were but "grasshoppers" (Numbers 13:28-33) caused Israel to recognize their weakness and inability to overcome the land with warfare. In our battle to lead a successful life in Christ we face three main enemies: the world, Christ gave Himself "that He might rescue us from this present evil world" [Gal. 1:4]; our flesh, which we must as commanded by Paul "...make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" [Rom. 13:14]; and our adversary "the devil, [who] prowls around, like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" [I Pet. 5:8].

A third parallel is found in how Israel was to come into the Promised Land. Although many times God spoke of His "giving" the land to Israel, He did not (with a snap of the fingers) teleport Israel in, and the Canaanites out. From our viewpoint, Israel had to march to the land, enter it, and take it by military force with many battles – of very real hand to hand combat. In just the same way, the world is continually in my face. I

do not find my flesh to be instantly sanctified, and the schemes and roars of Satan are all around. However, God clearly did **give** the land to Israel. For though they had to fight, the victory was not from their power (they truly were only as dangerous as a few grasshoppers in the sight of an army of giants). We also may not see a miracle in our physical circumstance, but all through the Bible we see God holding people accountable for the time that they were given on this earth. The master's response to the slave in Matthew 25:26-30 shows us what the Lord thinks of those that do not labor and live for Him. However, there are many miracles to prove that God is indeed living up to His end of the promise. How did I, with my mind of flesh (which according to Romans 8:7-8 can never subject itself to God) come to bow before Him? And where does any good desire in this flesh of mine come from? Surely not out of itself! Philippians 2:13 says that it is "God who is at work in [us] both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

So how do you stand in your conquest of a life for Christ? Frankly I do not feel much like Caleb or Joshua. But I fear the God behind me saying "Go forward" more than the world, my flesh, and the devil, who are out front laughing about stepping on grasshoppers. So where do I turn for strength to "strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble" (Heb. 12:12)? Obviously to Christ, for he died on the cross for me and you and "... is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." (Heb. 7:25). But if I am physically responsible for how I live, what can I do physically to find help? My eyes can turn to the Bible which is God's living Word and is "....profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (II Tim. 3:16-17). I can turn to you as commanded in Hebrews 10:24-25 "...let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as [we] see the day drawing near." My feet can take me to my local Church, Mount Calvary Baptist Church, where my ears can hear exhortation and teaching from God's Word, and where I can see you and others in Christ. Surely with these provisions from the Lord we can joyfully press forward to the victory that is secured for us in Christ.

February 21 - February 27

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

"The tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity;" **James 3:6**

BOOK READING

Roberts, pp. 114-119

QUOTATION FOR MEDITATION

"The tone of a Christian's conversation gives us a fair idea of how sanctified he is" (p. 115).

| Feb 21 | Ex 4 | Lk 7 | Job 21 | 1 Cor 8 |
|--------|-------|-------|------------|----------|
| Feb 22 | Ex 5 | Lk 8 | Job 22 | 1 Cor 9 |
| Feb 23 | Ex 6 | Lk 9 | Job 23 | 1 Cor 10 |
| Feb 24 | Ex 7 | Lk 10 | Job 24 | 1 Cor 11 |
| Feb 25 | Ex 8 | Lk 11 | Job 25, 26 | 1 Cor 12 |
| Feb 26 | Ex 9 | Lk 12 | Job 27 | 1 Cor 13 |
| Feb 27 | Ex 10 | Lk 13 | Job 28 | 1 Cor 14 |

| PERSONAL REFLECTION | | | |
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KING SAUL

TJ CORNELIUS

Saul found himself in a time of great need when his enemy was on the verge of an attack. The Philistines were coming up against him, and he was afraid. When he sought the Lord, the Lord did not answer him. Saul's response was to search for a medium who might be able to give Saul the answers he wanted. We are very familiar with the rest of this story in 1 Samuel 28. The medium brought up Samuel on Saul's request, and Samuel gave Saul the dreaded information that the Philistines would overtake the Israelites the very next day.

This account of Saul reveals a lot about his relationship with the Lord. It was a casual relationship. He was in trouble, and he decided to seek the Lord. When he did not receive the help he wanted, he decided to try something else. He did not have a true, ongoing, personal, and purposeful relationship with God. Saul did not have a desire to walk with God. He merely wanted God to be there when he was in great need. Saul's decision during this situation gives us a window into Saul's view of God. To Saul, the Lord was not his Creator and King. He did not view God with a holy fear. He viewed God as someone who was powerful but not someone who was interested in continual, intimate communion with him. Saul's relationship with God was basically nonexistent. He did not purposefully seek God as part of his day-to-day life. He sought God only when he was in great trouble and needed a lifeline.

As a Christian, maintaining a casual relationship with God is easy, but is spiritually dangerous. We are distracted by so many things that viewing God and walking with Him in a similar way to what we see demonstrated by Saul is disturbingly easy to do. How often do we find ourselves seeking God earnestly when we are in the middle of a great trial, yet when we are comfortable and content our relationship with Him is more casual? We often think that the times during which we most need the Lord are when we experience difficult trials. However, the times we need Him the most are when we are relaxed and comfortable. During those times we forget how powerful sin can be. During those times our communion with the Lord is unconsciously weakened because we are not focused on Him. When everything is going well, we do not feel the urgency to seek God in the same way that we do when

things are not going so well. When we do not think we need the Lord as much is when we can so easily revert to a casual relationship with the Him. With this type of relationship, we will earnestly seek the Lord only when we are in trouble. And we may even find ourselves looking for solutions that are outside God's desire for us. Our hearts are deceitful, and when we have a merely casual relationship with the Lord, we will not naturally choose what is right. As believers who desire a close fellowship with God, guarding ourselves against a casual relationship with Him is an absolute necessity. We need to seek Him with our whole heart at all times and in all circumstances. A right relationship with God cannot be attained and maintained by accident. It must be purposeful and consistent.

February 28 - March 6

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

"Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence."

1 Peter 3:15

BOOK READING

Roberts, pp. 120-123

Quotation for Meditation

"The pulpit's task is to declare the sinfulness of sin and the one divine remedy for its removal" (p. 122).

| Feb 28 | Ex 11-12:21 | Lk 14 | Job 29 | 1 Cor 15 |
|--------|-------------|-------|--------|----------|
| Mar 1 | Ex 12:1-21 | Lk 15 | Job 30 | 1 Cor 16 |
| Mar 2 | Ex 13 | Lk 16 | Job 31 | 2 Cor 1 |
| Mar 3 | Ex 14 | Lk 17 | Job 32 | 2 Cor 2 |
| Mar 4 | Ex 15 | Lk 18 | Job 33 | 2 Cor 3 |
| Mar 5 | Ex 16 | Lk 19 | Job 34 | 2 Cor 4 |
| Mar 6 | Ex 17 | Lk 20 | Job 35 | 2 Cor 5 |

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DAVID

JOSH MOYE

The dirty floor of the outdated post-Soviet hospital wasn't much to stare at as I sat in the hot waiting room. The doctor entered.

"She is still paralyzed and her phosphorus is dangerously low... I don't think she'll make it," the doctor said in a strange accent.

I suddenly remembered what the doctor at home had told my wife and me back in the States: "If this happens again, get her to a hospital as fast as you can and tell them to put her on a phosphorus IV, or she could die."

After several months of good health, and hopeful that the unexplained issue would never return, here we were on a mission trip in Yerevan, Armenia during a hot, dry August day. It was our fourth anniversary.

"Well can't you give her a bag of phosphorus?" I asked urgently.

"We have no phosphorus here," he said simply.

I came back, "Where can we get some?"

"What I mean is, there is no phosphorus in the whole country," he replied.

I felt the icy wave of the death sentence roll over me.

I thought, "Have I brought my dear wife to this place to die?" This was my very tight place.

Perhaps you've had a similar experience, or maybe your fears have brought you to feel that what you were going through was fearfully irremediable. These experiences bring us to share what David experienced in his being pursued by Saul. When David entered the cave at Engedi, he was seeking refuge from his enemy, but what he realized was that the cave became a trap instead, an inescapable and terrifying tight place. Psalm 57 gives us help in how to cling to the Lord when everything is falling apart.

The humble heart pleads for mercy from God alone. We must begin with the understanding that God does not owe deliverance to us. David urgently pleads twice for God to show him grace (v. 1), because he realizes that sinners have no right to demand that God rescue them. Any deliverance will be based upon God's mercy alone. It will be easy for us to cry to God with appropriate humility if we will remember the many ways that we have failed Him and sinned against Him grievously. Are we grieved or distressed? Remember the Lord's grief and pain over our straying hearts in the day of His blessings. A humble heart cries for deliverance based upon mercy. How can we expect God's help, except that our supplication is founded on the One who is the object of our hope? "For my soul takes refuge in You." The Lord Himself is the supplicant's refuge. He is constantly on the search for those who would seek defense under His tender wings. Our cries are directed only to the One who is really in charge ("God Most High"), who is fulfilling His plan for us, just as He has done in the past. John Flavel says, "Saul is high, but God is the most high."

The steadfast heart rests in confidence that God will deliver. Verse 7 is a cry to the Lord that announces David's determination to be steadfast of heart toward the Lord. A steadfast heart is loyal to, or fixed upon, God. If we would feel secure in the Lord, we must declare that our allegiance is securely in Him. It will be the regular practice of a secure believer to say, "I love you, Lord." When God has our hearts, He will certainly have our praise. We, like David, must be prepared to resist any temptation to stray from the path of righteousness, even if it means our apparent ruin. Thomas Brooks says, "He makes but an ill choice, who chooses sin rather than suffering; and yet such an ill choice good men have sometimes made when troubles have compassed them round about. ...He purchases his freedom from affliction at too dear a rate, who buys it with the loss of a good name, or a good conscience." When we cast ourselves and all of our dire cares upon the Lord Himself without departing from His ways, He knows to expect all the praise for Himself.

The clinging heart joins God's great purpose of glorifying Himself. Does it seem odd that twice (vv. 5, 11) David prays for God to be exalted over heaven and earth? Don't we want to keep His attention focused on ourselves and our problems? How does this fit in our times of need? We

may think, "I certainly want God to be glorified by everything in the end, but ... now?!" The incredible truth is that in our deepest times of distress, in our most desperate dead-ends of life, we can come to join God in His most prominent and fulfilling work. Fighter pilots boast in their number of enemy shootdowns, but the Lord boasts of His vast number of rescues; they are His glory. If God is exalted, then all who belong to Him will be delivered. Is God really full of lovingkindness and faithfulness for my benefit? The only way to find out - for anyone to find out - is through our pain and corresponding expectation that God is exactly who He says He is. Our deliverance from trouble and our Shepherd's walking with us through that trouble answers the question of how God will glorify Himself.

I can give abundant thanks to the Lord that my wife didn't spend her last day in Armenia. He delivered us from an encounter with death that we will never forget, and one in which we will never cease to praise Him for.

March 7 - March 13

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

"Most gladly therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

2 Corinthians 12:9

BOOK READING

Roberts, pp. 124-129

Quotation for Meditation

"Proud thoughts cry to God for a humbling and the wise in heart will flee in alarm to Christ, the city of refuge...It is a daily, hourly battle" (p. 126).

| Mar 7 | Ex 18 | Lk 21 | Job 36 | 2 Cor 6 |
|--------|-------|--------|--------|----------|
| Mar 8 | Ex 19 | Lk 22 | Job 37 | 2 Cor 7 |
| Mar 9 | Ex 20 | Lk 23 | Job 38 | 2 Cor 8 |
| Mar 10 | Ex 21 | Lk 24 | Job 39 | 2 Cor 9 |
| Mar 11 | Ex 22 | John 1 | Job 40 | 2 Cor 10 |
| Mar 12 | Ex 23 | John 2 | Job 41 | 2 Cor 11 |
| Mar 13 | Ex 24 | John 3 | Job 42 | 2 Cor 12 |

| PERSONAL REFLECTION | | |
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MIKE JOHNSON

And [Job] said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Just prior to his stating this, Job had fallen to the ground and worshipped. And just after this, it was stated that "through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God." From the beginning of time, God created man to love and fellowship with Him and to bring Him glory. Although God Himself does not tempt any man, He allows temptations to occur in order to try the heart of man to determine his true disposition towards Himself. The devil, of course, has as his goal to destroy and to build up himself. This includes tempting us to sin as we saw him do to our Lord in the wilderness. However, we know that "no temptation has overtaken us but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but will with the temptation provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it". No doubt, Job had been tried many times before this since God is unchanging and is always working to refine us – whether in the Old or New Testament.

But through this trial we see reaffirmed that God is in control and doesn't give us any trial above that we are able to endure and that everything is done to bring Him glory.

First, Satan acknowledges that there is a hedge around Job, and he has to ask permission from God to be able to tempt him. We see this again exemplified when Jesus said to Peter that Satan had desired to sift him like wheat. This gives us the comfort of mind that God is providentially guiding and guarding us. As our catechism states, the benefit of our knowing about God's providence is that it makes us patient in adversity and thankful in prosperity, so that we may place our firm trust in our Heavenly Father concerning everything that befalls us.

We can think of other examples of godly people that have been sorely tested as they are right in the process of doing God's work. In the time of Daniel, it was declared by the Lord God that he was so righteous (although not sinless) that he, along with Job and Noah, would be able to

deliver himself by his own righteousness. And yet, Daniel found himself in a lion's den as well as other close encounters with execution for doing the righteous thing. As Daniel stood in the lion's den, he exemplified Iob's statement that though He slav me, yet will I trust in Him. He did this because he knew that no matter what happened, God would take care of him even if it meant taking him home to be with Him. Another more recent example is found in the life of Hudson Taylor. He was a man that was used mightily by God to address the dire spiritual state of the nation of China. He determined that he would rely on God for all things whether it was his ministry, marriage, safety, resources or anything else for which he could take credit and that would detract from God receiving the glory. Here was a man that, in the eyes of the world, had given up everything but still lost two wives and also children in the course of service to his Master. And yet, both he and Daniel exemplified what David had learned -- that it was good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

Next, James states that, Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. God is a loving Father and a kind Master. He tells us to rest in Him and not to worry.

Finally, this world is temporal and we are stewards even as we see in the parable that Jesus gave with the three servants and the talents entrusted to them. Job had already learned this and had worked faithfully to develop the resources entrusted to him (helping widows and orphans and his own family) but acknowledged that he was a steward of these and that the true owner was God. This allowed him to state that the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. He was able to rest/cling to his Lord and Master and Redeemer and during this trial as well as in the end declare: Blessed be the name of the Lord!

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SATAN'S ADVANTAGES FROM CHRISTIANS' FRAILTIES WEEK 7

March 14 - March 20

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

"But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

Matthew 16:23

BOOK READING

Roberts, pp. 130-136

Quotation for Meditation

"The vices of our virtues are more generally harmful to the cause of Christ than our observed vices" (p. 134).

| Mar 14 | Ex 25 | John 4 | Prov 1 | 2 Cor 13 |
|--------|-------|---------|--------|----------|
| Mar 15 | Ex 26 | John 5 | Prov 2 | Gal 1 |
| Mar 16 | Ex 27 | John 6 | Prov 3 | Gal 2 |
| Mar 17 | Ex 28 | John 7 | Prov 4 | Gal 3 |
| Mar 18 | Ex 29 | John 8 | Prov 5 | Gal 4 |
| Mar 19 | Ex 30 | John 9 | Prov 6 | Gal 5 |
| Mar 20 | Ex 31 | John 10 | Prov 7 | Gal 6 |

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FEEDING THE ENEMY

GREG KUZMIC

How do we feel when we observe evil in the world around us? Our responses can be as varied as our innate personalities; for example, we may tend to respond with frustration, indifference, annoyance, anger, or a strong desire for justice. But what if that evil is directed toward us personally and intentionally? How does that kind of evil make us feel, or how does that make us want to respond? It is possible that we may be somewhat confused by the apparent contradiction of the Biblical principle of "an eye for an eye" when compared to a passage like Romans 12:17-21, which instruct us, "Never pay back evil for evil... Never take your own revenge."

The following verses in that passage actually imply that if we retaliate, we are the one who has been "overcome by evil." Our tendency is to hit back harder, but this only perpetuates the evil. This passage does not let us wiggle our way out by making exceptions based on who the offender is. Note the repeated use of expressions like "anyone" and "all people." We might think that the extent of the Lord's expectation would end with us restraining our response. After all, that would be a significant achievement! But the passage goes further; we are commanded to do good to our enemies—even to the point of feeding them—and the explanation is given that this is the way to conquer that evil.

Is It Right to Seek Justice?

There are a host of Biblical examples of those who not only desired justice, but who pursued it or even prayed earnestly for it.

- Esther pleaded with King Ahasuerus against Haman for his evil plot.
- The apostle Paul sought justice from civil authorities.
- Several psalms call on the Lord to execute extremely severe retribution on enemies.
- Revelation 6 records the cry of martyrs' souls pleading with the Lord to avenge their blood.

Scripture does not condemn or question these efforts; rather the vengeance is sometimes promised by the Lord or the execution of it is considered a victory from His hand. The Bible's answer is that civil authority is tasked with judging offenses and meting out just, measured consequences. But ultimately it is God who will ensure that justice is done. The question is not whether justice should be done, but who should deliver it. Clearly, we are prohibited from exacting our own revenge for the injustices we suffer.

Am I OK with God's Plan for Justice?

Acknowledging the truth that we should let God deliver justice is probably not the difficult thing for us. What we most likely struggle with is how we feel about that—our emotions.

Consider how David responded when Abigail confronted him about his plan to retaliate against Nabal and to murder every male that belonged to him (1 Sam. 25). David did what our culture tells us that "good leaders" should never do: admit fault. He had the God-given wisdom to correct his proudly announced course of action. May we have a humble submission to the working of the Spirit when He brings to our attention that initial fleshly response to an offense!

That encounter with Nabal came on the heels of the event in 1 Sam. 24 where David responded very differently to another offense: Saul's attempt to kill David in the wilderness of Engedi. David responded righteously when it seemed that God had placed Saul in the cave so that he could avenge the murderous intent and step into the calling (as king) that was announced by divine revelation. David's trusted companions even counselled him to take action and claimed that this was God's desire. Can we trust the bare command of Scripture in spite of all of the justifications that our own minds or our advisors may offer?

As a young man of just 17, Joseph experienced the unbearable offense of being sold into slavery by his own brothers. Twenty-two years later, his perspective of that sounds blasphemous to our culture; he said that God did it. Do we have enough confidence in God's sovereignty to leave room for Him to decide the consequences, and can we even entertain the possibility that the hurtful experience may bring about some good that is worth the pain? Also, are we satisfied in our spirit with letting the Lord chose how and when to bring justice? Can we be content even if *we* never get to see it happen?

What if God lets the vengeance for our Christian brother's offense fall on Jesus, and the offender never experiences the consequences? Our Lord's vicarious suffering satisfied the wrath of God for our own awful sin. How can we not be satisfied with His gracious provision for someone else?

Wait! Do what?

These Bible characters provide examples of right reactions to personal wrong-doing and even right emotional responses. But the Lord expects us to take the further step of demonstrating generosity and kindness to the person who has made himself our enemy.

But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink (Rom. 12:20).

Providing support to our enemy is counter-intuitive to our fleshly mind. But God states that this is the way not only to avoid being overcome by evil, but to defeat it. Is there someone who has offended me or even made himself my enemy? What act of benevolence can I show him today in order to overcome that evil and to reflect the character of God?

March 21 - March 27

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

"All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the LORD weighs the motives."

Proverbs 16:2

BOOK READING

Roberts, pp. 137-142

Quotation for Meditation

"Great spiritual movements begin when men take seriously the claims of truth upon themselves and their churches" (p. 142).

| Mar 21 | Ex 32 | John 11 | Prov 8 | Eph 1 |
|--------|-------|---------|---------|--------|
| Mar 22 | Ex 33 | John 12 | Prov 9 | Eph 2 |
| Mar 23 | Ex 34 | John 13 | Prov 10 | Eph 3 |
| Mar 24 | Ex 35 | John 14 | Prov 11 | Eph 4 |
| Mar 25 | Ex 36 | John 15 | Prov 12 | Eph 5 |
| Mar 26 | Ex 37 | John 16 | Prov 13 | Eph 6 |
| Mar 27 | Ex 38 | John 17 | Prov 14 | Phil 1 |

| Personal Reflection | | | | | | | | |
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JESUS IN THE GARDEN

JOHN DETWILER SR.

From the day of His birth Jesus was found to be in "tight places." He was born in a stable, wrapped with swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger (Luke 2). After the arrival of the Wise men, Joseph took Mary and the young Child to Egypt to flee the wrath of Herod (Matt. 2). During His earthly ministry the places got tighter: tempted by the Devil in the wilderness (Matt. 4), tested by the religious leaders of His day (Matt. 9), touched and pressed upon to receive healing (Matt. 9), turned off by His own people (John 1). Then the tight places got even tighter. The Scriptures say that Jesus went "unto a place called Gethsemane" (the olive press), where He "sweat as it were great drops of blood" (Luke 22:44). Then the press tightened until Jesus cried from the Cross "It is finished" (John 19:30).

Now, what can we learn from Matt. 26: 36-56 that will help us as men to do when we are pressed into tight places at home when the money doesn't stretch; at work when the boss or another worker does not treat you properly because of your Christian testimony, or the neighbor won't help when his tree falls on your house? We must do what Jesus did. He prayed! (Matt. 26: 36, 39, 41, 44) He persevered by praying even when His disciples could not watch with Him (26: 40). And He proclaimed the Scriptures by His actions (26: 54-56). What an example!

Do we pray asking for the will of God or do we, like Joshua, group for battle against Ai without asking God for His will about how much of the army we need to use (Joshua 7)? Do we persevere in our Christian lives even when things get tough or are we like John Mark (Acts 13), who departed from Paul and Barnabas when the work of God and travel got hard? Are we proclaiming the Word of God by our daily actions at home, at work, or in our neighborhood? Do you remember Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5? They were Christians whose testimonies were filled with lying and deceit. They did not handle their tight place in the Scriptural manner with truth and sacrifice. But God did! He killed them and allowed their actions to produce "great fear" among the church of Jerusalem.

As we look to the future of 2021, circumstances may look dark and bleak. We may encounter some tight places, and we may feel the press tighten. Remember our Savior in Matthew 26: 36-56. He prayed for the will of the Father; He persevered when the disciples failed to watch for one hour; He proclaimed the truth of Scripture by fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies though all of His disciples "fled" and "forsook" Him.

Thank God our Savior will never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13: 5). The tighter the press, the greater the release – for Jesus said, "I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). Now, that is a promise – a proclamation from the Word! Amen!!

May His testimonies be our delight and our counselors (Psalm 119: 24).

WHERE GODLINESS IS LEAKING [PART A]

WEEK 9

March 28 - April 3

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

"...godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come."

1 Timothy 4:8b

BOOK READING

Roberts, pp. 143-148 [before How Do We Worship]

Quotation for Meditation

"Godliness is the greatest blessing we can wish for our children and for all others over whom God gives us influence" (p. 144).

| Mar 28 | Ex 39 | John 18 | Prov 15 | Phil 2 |
|---------|----------|---------|---------|--------|
| Mar 29 | Ex 40 | John 19 | Prov 16 | Phil 3 |
| Mar 30 | Lev 1 | John 20 | Prov 17 | Phil 4 |
| Mar 31 | Lev 2, 3 | John 21 | Prov 18 | Col 1 |
| April 1 | Lev 4 | Ps 1, 2 | Prov 19 | Col 2 |
| April 2 | Lev 5 | Ps 3, 4 | Prov 20 | Col 3 |
| April 3 | Lev 6 | Ps 5, 6 | Prov 21 | Col 4 |

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JESUS BEFORE CAIAPHAS AND PILATE

DAN DAHLHAUSEN

For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur [Acts 4:27-28].

Have you ever felt unjustly treated? My wife Betty grew up the ninth of ten children in a home with military parents. Her dad, a rule maker, had children who were rule breakers. When one of the kids did wrong, they tried to cover it up. In an effort to locate the guilty party, her parents questioned each of the kids individually, hoping for a confession. Unfortunately, everyone would remain silent, including the guilty one. Her parents would start with the oldest and punish each child down the line until someone confessed. Does this seem just to you?

How can we apply God's truth to the tight place of unjust treatment? How should we respond when we suffer because of the actions of others? Would it be worse if the person or people wronging us knew we were innocent? Scripture indicates it was necessary for Christ to suffer while on earth [Luke 24:26]. Scripture also indicates that as Christians we will suffer for Christ as He suffered [1 Pet. 4:12; 5:10; Phi. 1:29]. Christ's suffering is an example for us [1 Pet. 2:21].

Let's examine Christ's responses to the tight places that He allowed Himself to be put in when He was unjustly tried and convicted before Caiaphas and Pilate [Mat. 26:57-27:26]. His opponents consisted of the Sanhedrin, Pilate, and the Jewish populace. Although the charges hurled by His adversaries were untrue, He responded mercifully to each. According to Jewish law, judges had to conduct and conclude capital trials during daylight hours. This made the first examination by Annas (Caiaphas' son-in-law) illegal because it was called at night. It was also illegal to summon the Sanhedrin on the eve of the Sabbath. Jesus' silence towards the conflicting accusations originally left the judges confused and unable to come to a verdict. Although the all-knowing Son of God acted as though dumb before the lawless court of rebels, Jesus showed patient meekness, "as a sheep before her shearers," by not defending Himself or

destroying them. Finally, Jesus answered the frustrated high priest, proclaiming he was the Messiah. He confronted their unbelief when prudent and necessary.

His second opponent, Pilate, represented the Roman government. When Pilate questioned Jesus regarding His claim to be the king of Israel, rather than remaining silent, Jesus answered Pilate truthfully. It seems obvious in reading and interpreting the narrative that Pilate knew Jesus was innocent; he even tried to persuade the crowd of this, hoping they would choose Jesus over Barabbas. But, because Pilate feared the crowd, he failed to carry out his duty to administer Roman justice properly – does this sound familiar?

The third group of challengers was made up of the Jewish populace. They allowed their opinion of Christ to be swayed by their rulers; just days prior to the trial they were shouting "Hosanna!" but now "Crucify Him!" Christ's response to the crowd was again silence.

Jesus, whose very name is *The Word*, was silent, even though He was abandoned by His disciples, condemned and scorned unjustly by the Jewish leaders, the secular government, and the populace (the world.) Why? Jesus knew this was the only way to the cross. But was Jesus truly silent? Though His words were few, His life spoke volumes. He had already made himself known to those who had the eyes to see and ears to hear.

So how should we respond when as Christians we are scorned by other "religious" leaders, judged unfairly by secular government, or mocked by secular people? As we read in 1 Peter 2:21-23, we must remember Christ's example and be willing to suffer unjustly while submitting to God's will, entrusting ourselves to Him who judges righteously. However, there are limits to such silent endurance of wrong, for Paul defended Himself vigorously before priests and kings. Sometimes Christ's followers are strongest by showing meek and patient endurance while standing strongly for Christ and His will. At other times we must be bold and confront sin and situations scripturally. Every situation is unique requiring discernment and godly council.

A vital truth to keep in mind as we suffer unjustly is the realization that our good God, who is the Sovereign, has the right and power to do whatever He chooses. We need to have this same mindset towards whatever difficulties He brings our way, "to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur" [Acts 4:27-28]. As we've examined



WHERE GODLINESS IS LEAKING [PART B]

WEEK 10

April 4 - April 10

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

"But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness."

1 Timothy 4:7

BOOK READING

Roberts, pp. 148 [How Do We Worship] - 152

Quotation for Meditation

"Nothing which smacks of 'entertainment' is appropriate in the worship of God" (p. 149).

| April 4 | Lev 7 | Ps 7, 8 | Prov 22 | 1 Thes 1 |
|----------|------------|-----------|---------|----------|
| April 5 | Lev 8 | Ps 9 | Prov 23 | 1 Thes 2 |
| April 6 | Lev 9 | Ps 10 | Prov 24 | 1 Thes 3 |
| April 7 | Lev 10 | Ps 11, 12 | Prov 25 | 1 Thes 4 |
| April 8 | Lev 11, 12 | Ps 13, 14 | Prov 26 | 1 Thes 5 |
| April 9 | Lev 13 | Ps 15, 16 | Prov 27 | 2 Thes 1 |
| April 10 | Lev 14 | Ps 17 | Prov 28 | 2 Thes 2 |

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JESUS ON THE CROSS

MICHAEL WINNINGHAM

How do we respond when we find ourselves in the "tight places" of life? When we sense the pressures of adversity approaching seemingly unbearable levels, what do we do? As believers, we naturally desire to respond in ways that please God and publicly testify to the power of his Spirit to calm our anxious souls. Nevertheless, most of us must admit that our responses do not always model exemplary faith, much less a selfless consideration of others and their spiritual needs.

Knowing our weakness in adversity, Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, records the walk of our savior as he struggles up the road to The Skull, the place of his crucifixion. As we read Luke 23:26-46, the Holy Spirit does not ignore Christ's physical suffering but instead highlights Jesus' selfless words of love, forgiveness, salvation, and faith. Christ's words to others, uttered in the midst of tremendous physical suffering and in a contemptuously hostile environment, provide us with three lessons that we can apply during our own difficult circumstances.

Lesson 1: When facing adversity, encourage others to think eternally, rather than temporally.

In verses 27-31, Jesus addresses a crowd following behind him as he nears Golgotha. In spite of his physical pain and fatigue, Jesus delivers an impassioned warning to the crowd of the coming judgment upon Jerusalem and implores the shortsighted crowd to take heed to their own souls and the souls of the ones they love. In doing so, Jesus teaches the crowd that personal repentance and eternal concerns should take precedence over temporary pain, struggles, and loss.

Lesson 2: When facing adversity, forgive those who harm you and pray for them.

As we approach verses 33 and 34, Christ has endured scourging, taunting crowds, a crown of thorns, and a torturous walk to The Skull. Upon reaching Golgotha, Roman centurions complete Jesus' humiliation by nailing him to the cross while soldiers cast lots for his garments and

the hostile crowd mocks him for his seeming inability to save himself. Though few would respond to such conditions with a kindhearted response, Jesus does just that. He defies human reason and asks his Father to forgive the jeering mob for their ignorance and that they might know the glory of his salvation, a salvation made possible only by his death.

Lesson 3: When facing adversity, give the Gospel to those around you.

In verses 39-44, as "the sixth hour" approaches and darkness settles to shroud the Savior's death, Jesus uses his last breaths to grant salvation to the repentant criminal hanging next to him. While some respond to impending death with anger, despondency, or indifference, Jesus underscores his love for and commitment to others by saving one last soul from Hell as he closes his earthly ministry. Jesus' willingness to pour out himself for others meant that this nameless criminal now had his name engraved on the eternal hands of God (Is. 49:16). As a son of God, he would never lack for a name again.

After reading Luke 23:26-46, perhaps you wonder, as I often do, how Jesus could focus on others under such trying circumstances. We might argue, "I'm not perfect like Jesus. I can't respond with the same love as he did." However, an important aspect of Jesus' ability to focus on others during difficult circumstances lies in his understanding of the temporal nature of life on earth. The author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus, "for the joy set before Him, endured the cross" (12:2). Therefore, with the Holy Spirit's enabling power, we can focus our attention on others by meditating on our own blessed hope for the future (Titus 2:13); a future made possible only because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. May our confident hope of glory set us free from temporal fears, doubts, and self-centeredness and prompt us to reach out to others and encourage them to turn their eyes upon Jesus Christ.

