

THE
WISDOM
OF GOD



SEEING LIFE CLEARLY
THROUGH THE LENS
OF SCRIPTURE

EDITORS:

JOHN D. MORRISON, TYLER H. SMILEY, & W. SCOTT SMITH

The Wisdom of God: Seeing Life Clearly Through the Lens of Scripture
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A LETTER FROM THE SENIOR PASTOR

Greetings! Welcome to a new year. Over the course of 2020 we are going to be learning about biblical wisdom. We all want to live wisely and we all want to make wise decisions. We all look back on moments or events in our lives and wish we would have done things differently. At times, we all wish “we knew then what we know now.” But the real question is, “How can I know the wise thing before I do it?”

James 1:5 says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.” God teaches us in his word that we should go to him for true wisdom. The writer of Proverbs says, if you want “to know wisdom and instruction,” then start here: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” In order to live a truly wise life, you and I must look first to God. The wisdom of God is often different than the wisdom of the world. Think about Paul’s message in 1 Corinthians 1:18, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” In other words, the message of the cross of Jesus Christ is foolishness in the world’s eyes, but to Christians the message of the cross is the perfect wisdom of God. Where the world sees the death of a man, the Christian sees the depth of the love of God. Where the world sees the end of life, the Christian sees the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If you want to know what true wisdom is, you must ask God. And if you want to live a truly wise life, you have to live it by God’s standards and not the world’s standards.

To live wisely before God, you must prepare yourself for how the world will push back against you. Remember what God said in 1 Peter 2:15, “For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.” Therefore, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5–6). To be wise in God’s eyes means to worship and honor him first, and it means to look to Jesus Christ who is God’s true wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Over the course of this year we are going to immerse ourselves as a church with God’s wisdom. I’m excited that this year there will be a new “element” in our study. Each week you will have an activity to do or a devotional to read and write your own notes. I write in my journals all the time. I encourage you to write in yours and make this a memorable year. It will be great to look back on what the Lord taught you over the course of this year, or even to pass along to your grandchildren one day. Also, we will be memorizing Scripture together as a church. Check out the book for the verses and follow along.

Will you join me on this journey to live wisely and honor God first? The title of our study is Wisdom 2020. Of course, 2020 is the calendar year of our study, but it is also a reminder that like 20/20 vision, true wisdom means “Seeing Life Clearly through the Lens of Scripture.”

May God bless you as we journey this year through the biblical theme of wisdom.



Dr. Tom Smiley
Senior Pastor



INTRODUCTION

Wisdom is about good judgment. Wisdom is the correct application of knowledge. The wise person makes sound choices. Wisdom helps us live well.

All, more or less, agree with such an understanding of wisdom, but when we start to compare the wisdom of this world with the wisdom of Scripture, we see the two are often opposed. Consider the priorities Jesus gives us. He tells us that the path to true life begins with self-denial, not self-indulgence. He challenges his followers,

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? (Mark 8:34-37).

This is a far cry from the wisdom of this world. Time and again, Jesus opposes our expectations of what a wise life would look like. He commends the widow who gives little out of her poverty rather than those who give much out of their wealth (Mark 12:43-44). He calls on his followers to make their love for family a lower priority than their love for him (Luke 14:26). He calls the poor and the persecuted blessed (Matt. 5:2-12). True life, he states, can only be found by losing your life. “Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt. 10:39).

Biblical wisdom opposes the wisdom of the world. In Scripture, the Lord reveals to us “a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory” (1 Cor. 2:7). This wisdom runs counter to the wisdom of this age. This wisdom of God is not a thing or an idea. This wisdom from God is none other than Jesus Christ himself. Christ is “the wisdom and power of God” (1 Cor. 1:24).

Since Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God, living wisely is intimately connected with him. We can draw three implications from this truth. First, we live wisely by trusting in Christ. We trust in him for life itself, knowing that he is the only way to be made right with God. We also trust him that his Word is the faithful and true guide to living well unto the Lord.

Second, we live wisely by following his example of wise living. We look to his life and seek to follow it. Biblical wisdom reveals that in our own strength, we will always fail to follow Christ. The good news is that the risen and ascended Christ has sent his Spirit to dwell in his people and

to empower us to obey. The same Spirit who empowered Jesus's life on earth strengthens his people today.

Third, Christ as the wisdom of God means we live wisely by exalting him. Biblical wisdom shapes our priorities. It helps us see what truly matters. The wisdom of Scripture points us to the chief end of our lives: we exist to glorify God by exalting Christ through the Holy Spirit.

If we are to live in line with biblical wisdom, we must know Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God. The way we come to know the Word incarnate is through the Word in Scripture. This reading plan and book will guide you through key sections of Scripture to help you better grasp the wisdom of God.

This book has broken down a weekly reading plan into five days. For the first four days, we encourage you to (1) read the designated passage, (2) pray, and (3) memorize the selected verses. For the weeks covered by this first volume, we will memorize the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:1-16.

On the fifth day of the week, you have the opportunity to dig a little deeper. In addition to the three activities above, the fifth day provides a time to focus in on a passage. Some weeks, this focus comes through a devotional. Other weeks you will be encouraged to reflect on the passage and respond to a few key questions. At times, you will also be guided to other passages of Scripture relevant to the topic at hand.

Our encouragement to you is to take time to read and to consider God's Word this year. Challenge yourself to memorize these verses, and work diligently to study Scripture. Our prayer is that through the study of God's Word you will "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen" (2 Pet. 3:18).

In Christ,

John D. Morrison, Tyler H. Smiley, W. Scott Smith



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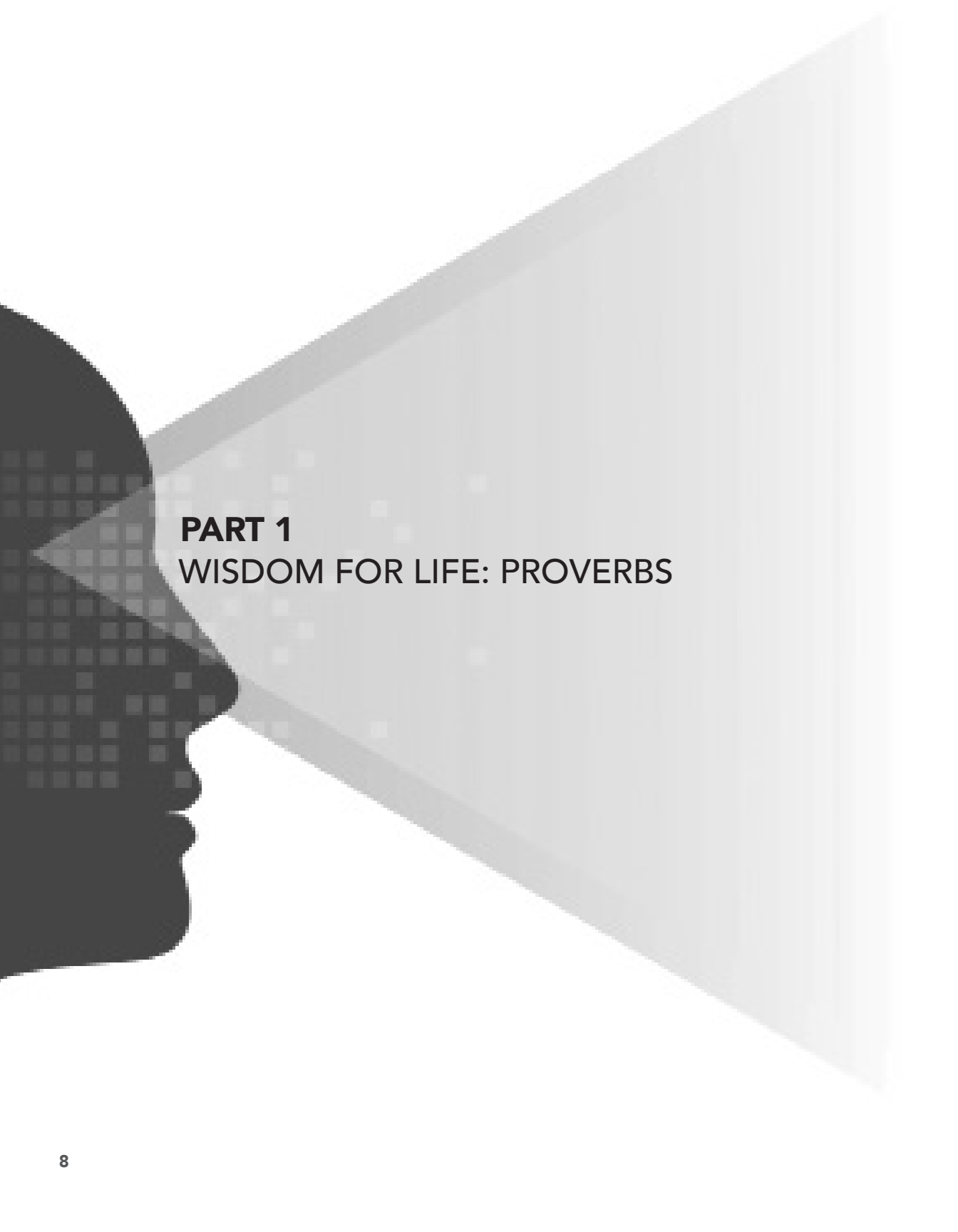
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PART 1
WISDOM FOR LIFE: PROVERBS



TRUE WISDOM

BY W. SCOTT SMITH

True wisdom comes by putting our **T.R.U.S.T.** in God.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight. (Prov. 3:5-6).

TAKE TIME THIS YEAR TO GET TO KNOW GOD BETTER.

Circle the words “time” and “know” above. The first step in trusting God is taking time to get to know him better. To be able to trust God, you first must be secure in your knowledge of him. If you are not secure in your knowledge of God, you will most likely struggle to trust him. Why is that? Because we don’t tend to trust someone we don’t know.

If you were at a local gas station and a complete stranger asked you for directions to your church, what would you do? If you knew how to get to your church from where you were, you’d most likely give them the directions. However, if that same stranger asked you for directions to your house, what would you do? More than likely, you’d refuse to give them directions. Why is that? Because you don’t know them! And you tend not to trust someone you do not know.

- Do you trust God?
- If not, why not?

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
PROVERBS 1

DAY 2
PROVERBS 2

DAY 3
PROVERBS 3

DAY 4
PROVERBS 4

DAY 5
PROVERBS 5





RELINQUISH THE RIGHT TO BE IN CONTROL.

By nature, most of us are control freaks. We love and feel the need to be in control. There's a variety of reasons for that. Dawn and I have observed that a prevailing motivation for this in most people is a fear of being out of control. It's common that if a person has ever felt out of control in a situation, from that point forward they make a declaration to themselves, "I will never be out of control (or controlled) like that again!"

- Is that you?
- Could learning to trust God more this year help you relinquish your need to be in control? If so, how?

UNDERSTAND THE RISKS.

Most anything in life worth having requires risks. Learning to trust God more requires some level of risk as well.

- Would you agree with those two statements?
- If so, what are the implied risks in trusting and following God? (Luke 14:25-33)
- Are you willing to take the risk?

SUBMIT TO GOD.

When we take time to get to know God better, then relinquish the right to be in control of any potential risks, we find it rather natural to then submit to him.

For years Dr. Tom has said, "The wisdom of God knows what's best for you, the love of God wants what's best for you, and the power of God has the ability to provide what's best for you."

- If you believe those three statements by Dr. Tom, wouldn't it seem rather foolish then not to submit to God's will and ways?

TURN ALL ASPECTS OF YOUR LIFE OVER TO GOD.

Let's journey back to World History class. Emperor Charlemagne was the most powerful European ruler of the Middle Ages, leading a people called the Franks to conquer most of Europe. Under his rule, many people were baptized into the church. It was expected of his soldiers. In fact, they would go down to the river en masse and take the plunge. But, one source reports there was something a bit unusual about the baptisms of those soldiers. When they would go under the water, they would hold one hand out of the water with their sword in that hand. They did not want that hand baptized. That was the one they wanted to be free to use to kill whomever they needed to kill.

It's likely a lot of people are entering the New Year with "one hand held out of the water".

By their lives they are saying, "Lord, here I am — except for my _____."

Neil T. Anderson says it best, "People may not always live what they profess, but they will always live what they believe."

- If you were to fill in the blank above, is there anything that matters most to you that you're still unwilling to turn over to God?
- If there is, why is that?
- As we enter 2020, what key area of your life do you need to learn to better T.R.U.S.T. God?

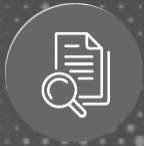
WEEK 1

COMMIT TO MEMORY

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain,
and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

MATTHEW 5:1

WEEK 2



REFLECT & RESPOND

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
PROVERBS 6

DAY 2
PROVERBS 7

DAY 3
PROVERBS 8

DAY 4
PROVERBS 9

DAY 5
PROVERBS 10

Reflect back over the following passages from this week's reading. Beside each passage, paraphrase what it teaches us about God's wisdom regarding work.

Proverbs 6:6-11

Proverbs 10:4-5

Proverbs 10:22

Proverbs 10:26

Wisdom is personified in chapter 8. According to Proverbs 8:22-31, how did God's possession of wisdom influence his work?

COMMIT TO MEMORY

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain,
and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

MATTHEW 5:1



REFLECT & RESPOND

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
PROVERBS 11

DAY 2
PROVERBS 12

DAY 3
PROVERBS 13

DAY 4
PROVERBS 14

DAY 5
PROVERBS 15

What do the following three verses have to say about the planning process?

Proverbs 16:1

Proverbs 16:2

Proverbs 16:3

Summarize the wisdom you have gleaned about planning from these verses:

Memorize Proverbs 16:9

“The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.”

What plans are you presently making?

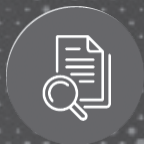
In what way has the wisdom of the LORD guided your planning process?

COMMIT TO MEMORY

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

MATTHEW 5:2

WEEK 4



REFLECT & RESPOND

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
PROVERBS 16

DAY 2
PROVERBS 17

DAY 3
PROVERBS 18

DAY 4
PROVERBS 19

DAY 5
PROVERBS 20

The words of our mouths are powerful. Our words either build others up or tear others down. There are few neutral words. In general, our words are either life-giving or death-dealing to those we know and love the best.

Reflect on your words this week. How would you rate your words? If (1) was pathetic and (10) was excellent, overall how have you done with the use of your words this week?

Review these passages. Which passages are most applicable to you with regard to your words? What will you do this week to display the wisdom of Christ with your words?

Proverbs 16:10

Proverbs 16:13

Proverbs 16:20

Proverbs 16:21

Proverbs 16:23

Proverbs 16:24

Proverbs 16:27

Proverbs 16:28

COMMIT TO MEMORY

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

MATTHEW 5:2

Proverbs 17:7

Proverbs 17:20

Proverbs 17:27

Proverbs 17:28

Proverbs 18:4

Proverbs 18:6

Proverbs 18:7

Proverbs 18:8

Proverbs 18:13

Proverbs 18:21

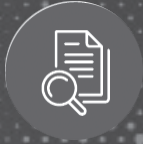
Proverbs 19:1

Proverbs 19:9

Proverbs 20:15

Proverbs 20:19

WEEK 5



REFLECT & RESPOND

Peter Drucker once said, “Show me your calendar and your bank statement, and I’ll show you what you really value.” How we spend our time and money reveals what we truly value in life. In this week’s reading, Solomon speaks rather plainly about money. What does your use of money reveal about what you value in life?

Review the passages below from this week’s reading. Then, reflect on the questions that follow.

Proverbs 21:6

Are you using deception and untruth to acquire material possessions?

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
PROVERBS 21

Proverbs 21:13

Is your heart open to those less fortunate than you?

DAY 2
PROVERBS 22

DAY 3
PROVERBS 23

Proverbs 21:17

Do you use an inordinate amount of your finances on personal pleasure?

DAY 4
PROVERBS 24

DAY 5
PROVERBS 25

Proverbs 22:1

If you had to choose, what would you rather have: a good name or great riches?

Proverbs 22:2

What is the one common denominator between the rich and the poor? What does that say to you?

Proverbs 22:7

Do you have personal debt? If so, do you feel enslaved by it?

Proverbs 22:9

Would those who know and love you best say that you are generous or stingy?

Proverbs 22:16

If you either oppress the poor or give to the rich, what is your motivation for doing so? What does Scripture say will be the outcome of doing so?

Proverbs 22:26-27

Are you a cosigner on someone else's loan? If so, why does Scripture teach this to be an unwise practice?

Proverbs 23:4

Would the people who know you best say that you weary yourself to gain wealth?

Proverbs 24:30-34

What does this passage teach regarding the value of work to meet our material needs?

COMMIT TO MEMORY

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom
of heaven. MATTHEW 5:3

WEEK 6



REFLECT & RESPOND

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
PROVERBS 26

DAY 2
PROVERBS 27

DAY 3
PROVERBS 28

DAY 4
PROVERBS 29

DAY 5
PROVERBS
30-31

Quality friendships are key to walking faithfully as a Christ follower. Generally speaking, our friends either bring out the best in us or bring out the worst. It's been said, "Show me your friends, and I'll show you your future."

REFLECT ON YOUR FRIENDSHIPS.

Do your present friendships bring out the best or worst in you?

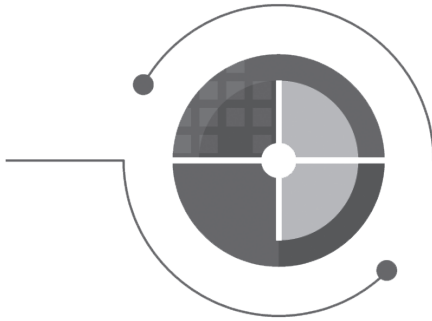
What do you bring out of your friends?

Are your friends better or worse after having been with you?

Dr. Tom says there are two types of people in the world – those you run towards and those you run from. Which one are you?

COMMIT TO MEMORY

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. MATTHEW 5:3



*Proverbs 27:17 declares,
“Iron sharpens iron,
and one man sharpens another.”*

Proverbs 27:6 states, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.”

Do you have a friend who loves you enough to say the thing to you that you may not want to hear? If not, why not?

Do you expect your friends to be “yes men/women” or do you welcome their disagreement with you? Explain your answer

WRITE A NOTE OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO A FRIEND
WHO HAS “SHARPENED” YOU BY THEIR
COURAGEOUS TRUTH TELLING (PROV. 27:5-6),
WISE COUNSEL (PROV. 27:9), OR
FAITHFUL FRIENDSHIP (PROV. 27:10).



PART 2
WISDOM FROM JESUS:
THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

MATTHEW 5:1–16

¹ Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵ “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷ “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸ “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹ “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”



WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
MATTHEW 1

DAY 2
MATTHEW 2

DAY 3
MATTHEW 3

DAY 4
MATTHEW 4

DAY 5
MATTHEW
5:1-11

BIBLICAL MEDITATION

BY STEPHEN JACKSON

On a summer evening in 1858, Charles Spurgeon preached to his church on the importance of biblical meditation: “Let me compare it to a winepress. By reading and research and study, we gather the grapes; but it is by meditation that we press out the juice of those grapes, and obtain the wine. . . . How important, therefore, is meditation as a mental exercise, to have our minds in constant readiness for any service!”

I’ll never forget sitting down with Scott Smith and how he explained to me the process of biblical meditation. We opened our Bibles, and he showed me what God’s Word has to say on this discipline. Unlike ordinary meditation where you empty your mind, biblical meditation is filling your mind with Scripture. Biblical meditation is the process of identifying a verse or passage that resonates with you, then repeating the three M’s: murmur the verse (say the verse over and over), mull over the verse (ponder the verse, thinking it through), and memorize the verse (commit the verse to memory).

As you join the church in memorizing the Beatitudes, take time to work in the other two M’s: murmuring and mulling. Take, for example, Matthew 5:3, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Try repeating this verse several times, and as you repeat it, put the emphasis on a different word or phrase. First, you might emphasize “blessed” and consider what this term means biblically. Next, emphasize “poor in spirit”, and think through how Scripture defines such a term. As you progress through the verse this way, you are meditating on it in a biblical manner.

The Book of Psalms, and particularly Psalm 119, encourages us to meditate on God’s Word. Psalm 119:15-16 declares:

*I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways.
I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your Word.*

Biblical mediation becomes a way that the Lord uses to help us fix our eyes on his path, to delight in his Word, and to keep his Word ever in front of us.

Repeating this process of murmuring, mulling, and memorizing fills our lives with Scripture. Biblical mediation is one of the key ways God works to transform us by the renewal of our minds (Rom. 12:2). It helps us consume and delight in God's Word like Jeremiah (Jer. 15:16). It enables us to feast on every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4). It is not walking in the counsel of the wicked, nor standing in the way of sinners, nor sitting in the seat of scoffers, but delighting in the law of the Lord and meditating on it day and night (Ps. 1:1-3). Through meditation, God works to keep us from departing from his law. (Josh.1:8).

Take time this year to meditate on God's holy and perfect Word. Murmur Scripture to yourself, mull over these passages, and memorize God's Word. In doing so, you will find yourself being renewed by the transforming of your mind.

COMMIT TO MEMORY

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they shall be comforted.

MATTHEW 5:4



WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
MATTHEW 5

DAY 2
MATTHEW 6

DAY 3
MATTHEW 7

DAY 4
MATTHEW 8

DAY 5
MATTHEW
5:13-16

SALT AND LIGHT

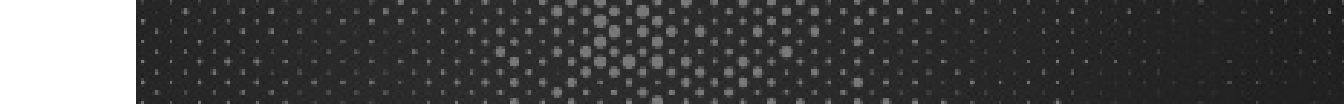
BY BENJI LAVENDER

In twenty-first century America, what does it look like to live wisely? Oftentimes, in our context, a discussion of wise living will involve good financial stewardship, career choices, or when to start a family. There is a plethora of books, podcasts, and conferences centered on these subjects, aiming to help people make “wise” choices. Some of this counsel may be great, and some may not be so great. However, for the Christian, none of these categories should take center stage in our discussion of wise living.

So what does it look like for the Christian to live wisely? To answer that, we simply need to reflect on the greatest news in the history of the world: Jesus is Lord, and God has raised him from the dead.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is alive! All that he taught is true. Jesus has died for the sins of the world and has been raised to life to give those who receive him the right to become the children of God. Jesus has overcome the grave, and death has no hold on him. He stands utterly victorious. All authority in heaven and on earth is his.

As Christians, we do not have to guess about how we are to live wisely in light of this great news. Jesus has told us what to do. The risen, victorious Christ who conquered death and sin gave us our marching orders before he ascended to the right hand of the Father. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). When the Creator of the universe, who has conquered death, freed you from sin, and graced you with eternal life, says, “Go,” wisdom looks like obedience.



For the Christian, wise living looks like following Jesus in every way, including making disciples. We make disciples by pointing others to Jesus in both word and deed. This includes, not only verbally declaring the gospel, but also exemplifying it by the way that we live. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus said that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16).

As salt is a distinct flavor that enhances food, we are to show this lost world the distinctness of Christ and his kingdom for the good of others around us. As light keeps people from stumbling around in the dark, we are to shine in the darkness to illuminate the way of Christ and his kingdom for the good of others around us. As followers of Jesus, we are called to help others follow Jesus by what we say and do. Otherwise, we have become salt that is not salty and a lamp hidden under a basket. Such living is not wise but foolish.

Wisdom is not first and foremost good financial planning or career decision making, but, rather, true wisdom is seeking first the kingdom of God and following the risen Christ in his command: "Go, make disciples."



COMMIT TO MEMORY

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they shall be comforted.

MATTHEW 5:4

WEEK 9



REFLECT & RESPOND

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
MATTHEW 9

DAY 2
MATTHEW 10

DAY 3
MATTHEW 11

DAY 4
MATTHEW 12

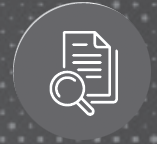
DAY 5
MATTHEW
5:17-37

In Matthew 5:20, Jesus calls for a righteousness that surpasses even that of the Pharisees, the most righteous of people in his day. Then, in 5:21-37, Jesus makes clear that true righteousness is about more than outward actions — true righteousness also involves the heart. How can we truly be righteous in God's sight?

Read and reflect on Philippians 3:8-11. Where does the righteousness Paul writes about come from?

How does one receive that righteousness?

How should we respond to such a gift?



REFLECT & RESPOND

In Matthew 5:43-48, Jesus calls us to love our enemies. Read and reflect on Romans 5:1-11. How did God demonstrate his love for us while we were his enemies?

How does his love for us enable us to love our enemies (especially consider Rom. 5:5)?

Who in your life is difficult to love and yet God has called you to love that person?

What is a realistic and specific step you can take this week to show love toward this person?

Take time to pray for this person and for the Lord to help you love this person well.

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
MATTHEW 13

DAY 2
MATTHEW 14

DAY 3
MATTHEW 15

DAY 4
MATTHEW 16

DAY 5
MATTHEW
5:38-48



COMMIT TO MEMORY

5“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”
MATTHEW 5:5



WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1

EPHESIANS
3:14-21

DAY 2

PHILIPPIANS
1:3-11

DAY 3

1 THESSALONIANS
3:9-13

DAY 4

HEBREWS
13:20-21

DAY 5

MATTHEW
6:1-18

WHY PRAY SCRIPTURE

Beth Everett

Recently, in a moment of anxiety, the Lord brought to my mind some specific Scripture to pray out loud. In that moment as I began speaking the Word of God, my mind started to focus on truth. Praying Scripture is speaking God's Word back to him. It is acknowledging that his Word is powerful, alive, and active. Since the Word of God is his, it has the power through the Holy Spirit to change us and to help our minds to think rightly. Praying Scripture regularly helps us consistently renew our minds with his Word. Such prayers align our minds and hearts with his plans and his purposes, rather than trying to bring him around to our way of thinking.

Not only does praying Scripture change us, it also pleases the Lord. Hebrews 11:6 states that it is impossible to please him without faith. Praying Scripture helps us acknowledge by faith that his Word is true and is what I need in my daily life to guide me, to teach me, to challenge me, and to comfort me.

We also pray Scripture because it gives us confidence that we are praying in a way that will honor God. His Word helps align our prayers with his priorities. We pray for the things that matter most to him. We pray for his will to be done.

Through Jesus we have access to approach the throne of grace boldly through prayer. But there are times when we do not even know what to pray. Our words and thoughts are not lining up with his will at all. In those moments, we can find a Psalm or another prayer in Scripture and ask God to show us his heart through his Word. We can ask him to change our thoughts and ask him to transform us by the renewing of our minds through his truth (Rom. 12:2).

Where I am tempted to bring only a list of complaints to God, he can transform my thinking through his Word to then praise him for salvation, for eternity, and for his grace to me. When I come to God with what I think is best in a situation, he can help me through his Word to be open to what he knows is best for me. He tells us to come to him with all our anxieties because he cares for us. Let him minister to you through his Word.

We are being changed by his Word with the help of the Holy Spirit as we submit to his ways in our daily lives. Pray Scripture over those you love. Pray Scripture to praise him, to confess to him, to petition him, and to intercede for others.

There are three main ways we can pray Scripture. First, we can pray the prayers of Scripture word for word as they are written. Second, we can insert the name of another person in prayer of Scripture and pray that prayer for him or her. Third, we can use a biblical prayer like an outline, letting the key ideas of the prayer provide the basic structure for our prayers. Matthew 6:9-13 is a great passage to use for each of these methods of praying Scripture. I encourage you to take a few minutes and pray this prayer for yourself and others.

As you have time and are looking for other ways to pray, consider praying the other prayers you have read this week and letting them shape your prayer life.

REVIEW MATTHEW 5:1-5

¹ Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn,
for they shall be comforted.

⁵ "Blessed are the meek,
for they shall inherit the earth."

WEEK 12



REFLECT & RESPOND

WEEKLY READINGS

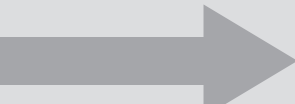
DAY 1
MATTHEW 17

DAY 2
MATTHEW 18

DAY 3
MATTHEW 19

DAY 4
MATTHEW 20

DAY 5
MATTHEW
6:19-34



Where are you tempted to feel anxious? Do your finances and basic provisions worry you?

Consider how God's character proves to be the antidote to anxiety. When we trust who he is, we can live in faith. List two to three worries you have, and then next to those, list the attributes of God that comfort you about that worry. Search for at least one biblical reference that speaks of this characteristic of God and list that next to the attribute.

WORRY	ATTRIBUTE	SCRIPTURE



REFLECT & RESPOND

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
MATTHEW 21

DAY 2
MATTHEW 22

DAY 3
MATTHEW 23

DAY 4
MATTHEW 24

DAY 5
MATTHEW
7:1-12



Jesus reminds us in Matthew 7:7-11 of how our good God honors persistence in prayer. In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Paul reminds us to “pray without ceasing”, and then in Ephesians 1:15-23, he gives us an example of how he does “not cease to give thanks for” the Ephesians and pray for them.

What is the goal of Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 1:15-23?

For whom should you pray like this?

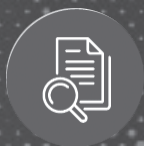
Consider using Ephesians 1:15-23 as a model prayer for someone now.

COMMIT TO MEMORY

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they shall be satisfied.

MATTHEW 5:6

WEEK 14



REFLECT & RESPOND

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
MATTHEW 25

DAY 2
MATTHEW 26

DAY 3
MATTHEW 27

DAY 4
MATTHEW 28

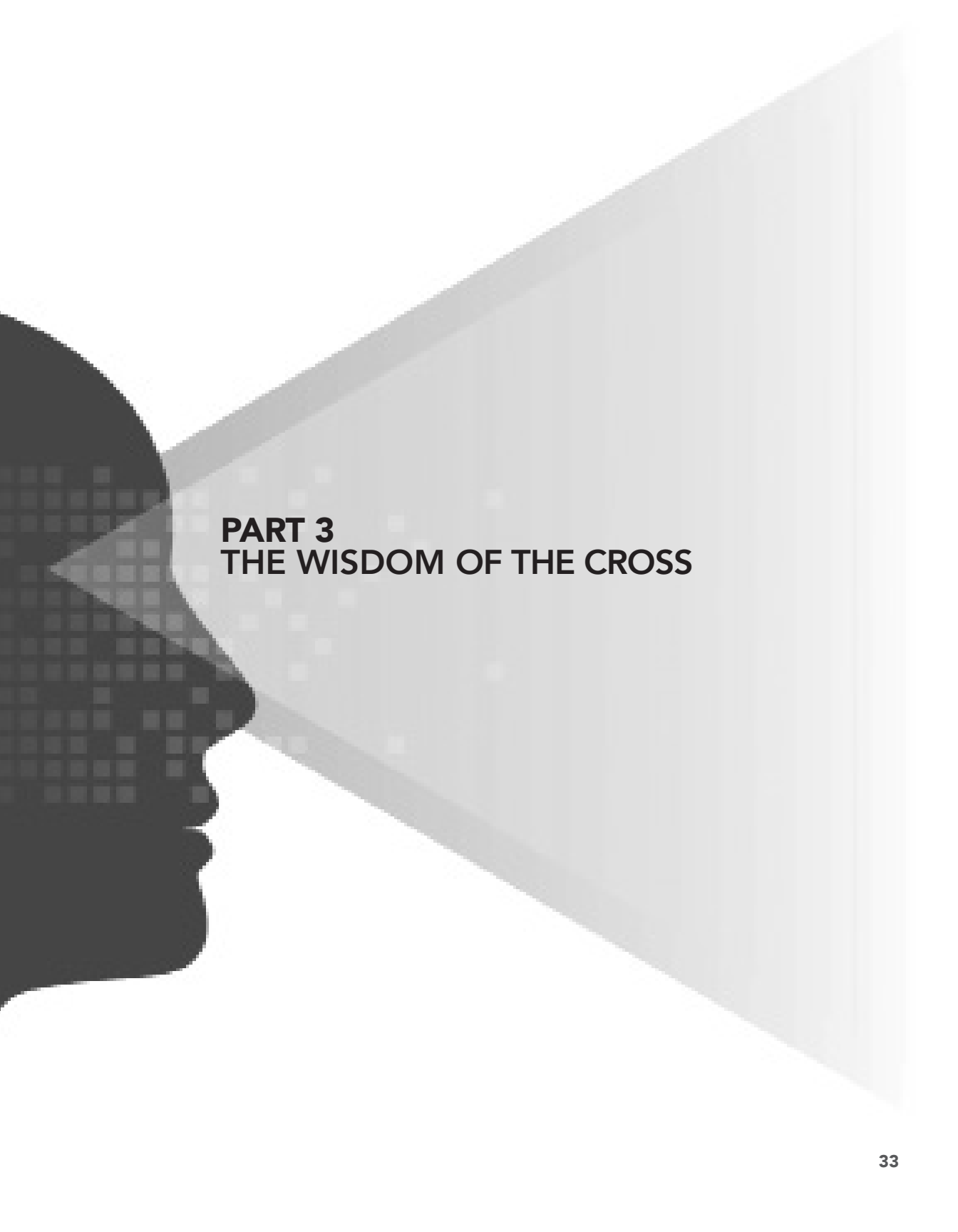
DAY 5
MATTHEW
7:13-28

Jesus calls us to put the Sermon on the Mount into action. If we have truly heard him, then we, by his grace, will live as he has called us to live. James tells us, “Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin” (James 4:17). Review the Sermon on the Mount and pray for insight into how you need to apply it in your life.

List one realistic and specific way you can apply Jesus’s teaching in your life this week.

COMMIT TO MEMORY

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
MATTHEW 5:7



PART 3
THE WISDOM OF THE CROSS



SENT INTO THE WORLD

By John D. Morrison

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
JOHN 13-14

DAY 2
JOHN 15-16

DAY 3
JOHN 17-18

DAY 4
JOHN 18-19


DAY 5
JOHN 20-21

The cross of Christ only became good news at his resurrection. On that first Easter morning, Jesus rose from the dead, his sacrifice was vindicated, and death was defeated. He conquered the grave. He proved to be who he told Martha he was: the resurrection and the life. Jesus declares, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26). Now, through the work of the Holy Spirit, we “may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing [we] may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

The resurrected Christ invites us into true life in his name. He has made a way for us to share in the life of our God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (John 17:20-23). Through his death and resurrection, Jesus offers abundant life, and we receive that life through faith. We receive the true life he offers by believing and trusting in him.

The resurrected Christ also invites us to join him in his mission. He came to earth to bring true life, and he calls us to join him in taking this life into the world. “As the Father has sent me,” Jesus tells us, “even so, I am sending you” (John 20:21). Christ sends us into the world just as his Father sent him. We are joining him in his mission to show and to tell the world about the abundant life he offers in his name.

Christ does not send us alone, but he sends us with his Holy Spirit (John 20:22). The same Spirit who empowered Jesus’s ministry on earth is at work in our lives as we join in Christ’s mission to the world.



If we are believing in Christ and have life in his name, then we have been sent into the world and empowered by the Spirit to join in Jesus's mission. We have a mission and we have the Spirit, and so the question is where has Christ sent you?

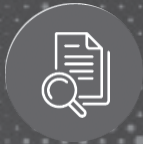
This sending is not reserved for the future or for some far away place. You are now in the world. Christ has already placed you in this world where you can join in his mission. He has sent us all to make him known through our words and our deeds — to show the life he offers by loving our neighbors by showing and telling them about our resurrected Lord.



COMMIT TO MEMORY

Blessed are the merciful,
for they shall receive mercy.

MATTHEW 5:7



REFLECT & RESPOND

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1

1 CORINTHIANS

1

DAY 2

1 CORINTHIANS

2

DAY 3

1 CORINTHIANS

3

DAY 4

1 CORINTHIANS

4

DAY 5

1 CORINTHIANS

1:17-25

“The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing” (1 Cor. 1:18a). Crosses are so pervasive in our world that it is easy to forget how foolish the message of the cross would have been to Paul’s first-century audiences. For us, a cross is a symbol of religious piety. Crosses adorn our churches and our homes, and many wear gilded crosses as jewelry. Yet, in the first century, the cross was a sign of death. It was the means of death for the lowest of the low. A Roman citizen could not be crucified. The cross was reserved for the worst criminals who were not members of Roman society. To try to understand how someone at this time would have heard “cross,” we should think of a hangman’s noose or the image of a concentration camp. A cross did not save; it killed.

Yet, Paul says, “The word of the cross. . . is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). Christ has utterly transformed the meaning of the cross because through his death he brought life. Notice, however, that it is not the cross itself that is the power of God, but it is the word of the cross. That is to say, it is the message of the cross that is God’s power.

Read Romans 1:16-17. What does Paul describe as the power of God in these verses? What elements from these two verses help expound what Paul means by “the word of the cross” in 1 Corinthians?

If the power of God for salvation comes in a word or in good news, how do people come to saving faith? What news of Jesus’s life do we need to tell them?

Read Romans 10:14-15. Whom has God placed in your life who needs to hear the message of the cross? Take time to pray for that person and for the opportunity to share the gospel with him or her.



REFLECT & RESPOND

According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31, why does God tend to choose to save those who are lowly in the world's eyes?

What other examples in Scripture can you think of where God chooses to use the weak and the humble? Consider 1 Samuel 1-2.

How does our salvation in Christ demonstrate our complete and utter dependence on God?

How does such dependence glorify God?

Consider 1 Corinthians 4:7. What does Paul say should be the outcome of recognizing that our salvation is entirely dependent upon God's grace?

How should this knowledge of whom God saves embolden us to share the gospel?

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
1 CORINTHIANS
5

DAY 2
1 CORINTHIANS
6

DAY 3
1 CORINTHIANS
7

DAY 4
1 CORINTHIANS
8

DAY 5
1 CORINTHIANS
1:26-31

COMMIT TO MEMORY

Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they shall see God.

MATTHEW 5:8

WEEK 18



REFLECT & RESPOND

In 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, what does Paul describe as lacking in his proclaiming the gospel to the Corinthians?

How did God actually use what was lacking in Paul's speech for the good of the Corinthians?

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
1 CORINTHIANS
9

How does Paul's testimony here challenge you about some of your fears in proclaiming the gospel?

DAY 2
1 CORINTHIANS
10

Based on this passage, what elements are necessary for a God-honoring proclamation of the gospel?

DAY 3
1 CORINTHIANS
11

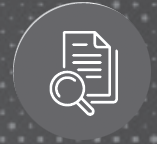
DAY 4
1 CORINTHIANS
12

DAY 5
1 CORINTHIANS
2:1-5

Pray for the opportunity to proclaim the good news of Jesus this week.

COMMIT TO MEMORY

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called sons of God.
MATTHEW 5:9



REFLECT & RESPOND

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1

1 CORINTHIANS

13

DAY 2

1 CORINTHIANS

14

DAY 3

1 CORINTHIANS

15

DAY 4

1 CORINTHIANS

16

DAY 5

1 CORINTHIANS

2:6-16

According to 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, how does a person come to accept the wisdom of God? Who must act?

Read John 3:1-8. What connection does Jesus make between the work of the Spirit and being born again?

Read Titus 3:3-7. What role does Paul explain the Holy Spirit has in people being born again?

Read Ezekiel 36:22-27. What does Ezekiel prophesy that the Holy Spirit will do?

Given all of these passages you have read, how would you summarize the work of the Holy Spirit in saving people? How necessary is his work?

If the Spirit must act for people to come to saving faith in Christ, what is our responsibility as Christ followers who want to see others come to faith?

Prayer for unbelievers is an important response to the necessity of the Spirit's work. Take time today to pray for unbelievers in your life. Pray that God would work by his Spirit to bring them to saving faith in Christ.



PART 4
DISCERNING LIFE'S PURPOSE:
ECCLESIASTES

Read and reflect on Luke 12:13-21. Where have you tried to find meaning in life outside of the gospel of Jesus?



REFLECT & RESPOND

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1

ECCLESIASTES

1

DAY 2

ECCLESIASTES

2

DAY 3

ECCLESIASTES

3

DAY 4

ECCLESIASTES

4

DAY 5

ECCLESIASTES

1:1-11

Consider 1 Corinthians 15:12-19, 32. How does the resurrection reshape the way we view life?

COMMIT TO MEMORY

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

MATTHEW 5:10



FEASTING AND THE KINGDOM

By John D. Morrison

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1

ECCLESIASTES
5

DAY 2

ECCLESIASTES
6

DAY 3

ECCLESIASTES
7

DAY 4

ECCLESIASTES
8

DAY 5

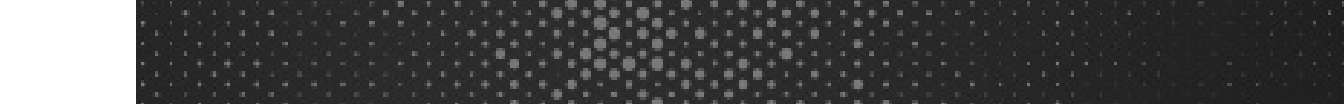
ECCLESIASTES
3:9-15

In Ecclesiastes 3:12, Solomon calls on his readers to be joyful and to do good, and then in verse 13, he encourages, “Everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in his toil — this is God’s gift to man.” Notice that Solomon identifies eating and drinking as good gifts from God.

When Jesus comes, he explains about himself, “The Son of Man came eating and drinking” (Matt. 11:19). Indeed, when you survey the ministry of Jesus in the Gospels, you frequently will find him gathered around a table, enjoying a meal. This aspect of his ministry does not sit well with the religious authorities of his day. They label him “a glutton and a drunkard” (Matt. 11:19). Particularly unsettling for them is the company he chooses to keep at such gatherings: tax collectors and sinners.

Jesus does more than just eat and drink at these gatherings. He often uses these settings to compare the kingdom of God to a great feast. For three straight chapters in the Gospel according to Luke, Jesus uses the image of the feast to teach on the kingdom. He pictures the kingdom as a wedding feast (12:35-48; 14:7-11), as reclining at God’s table (13:29), and as a great banquet (14:12-24). Similarly, Jesus’s first miracle in the Gospel according to John is turning water into wine at the wedding in Canaan in order to keep the feast going (John 2:1-12). Then, in one of the last pictures he gives of the coming kingdom, John describes the marriage banquet of the Lamb, which is the great celebration between Christ and his bride, the church (Rev. 19:6-10).

This image of feasting is employed to convey a number of truths about God’s kingdom, but what seems to stand at the forefront is the sense that we can enjoy the presence of God. We can, as the psalmist declares, “Taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8). In the words of one seventeenth-century catechism, our “chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” We are made to delight in the Lord.



The Lord Jesus ordained that his church regularly celebrate a feast that looks forward to our future banquet with him. The Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20) does not mean supper the way we typically mean supper. *Deipnon*, the word translated as “supper”, arguably could be better translated as “feast” or “banquet”. This meal given by the Lord to his church is no mere afterthought; it is a celebration. When we come together as a church and partake of the bread and the cup, we look back to Jesus's sacrifice and look forward to when we will enjoy the marriage banquet of the Lamb with our Savior.

Like Jesus, we can also use times around the table to invite people to enter into his kingdom through faith in him. Our tables will become our mission fields when we invite people into our homes to show and to tell them how God through Christ graciously invites them into his kingdom — a kingdom where we will one day feast with our King.



COMMIT TO MEMORY

Blessed are those who are persecuted for
righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

MATTHEW 5:10

WEEK 22



REFLECT & RESPOND

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
ECCLESIASTES
9

DAY 2
ECCLESIASTES
10

DAY 3
ECCLESIASTES
11

DAY 4
ECCLESIASTES
12

DAY 5
ECCLESIASTES
12:13-14

What does it mean to fear God?

Consider each of the following passages and note how the Bible describes fearing the Lord:

Psalm 34:8-14

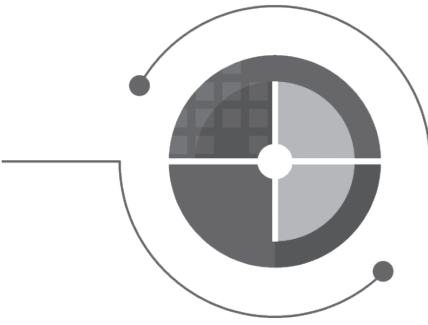
Proverbs 8:13

Proverbs 9:10

Luke 12:4-7

Acts 9:31

1 Corinthians 5:11-21



REVIEW

MATTHEW 5:1-10

¹ Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

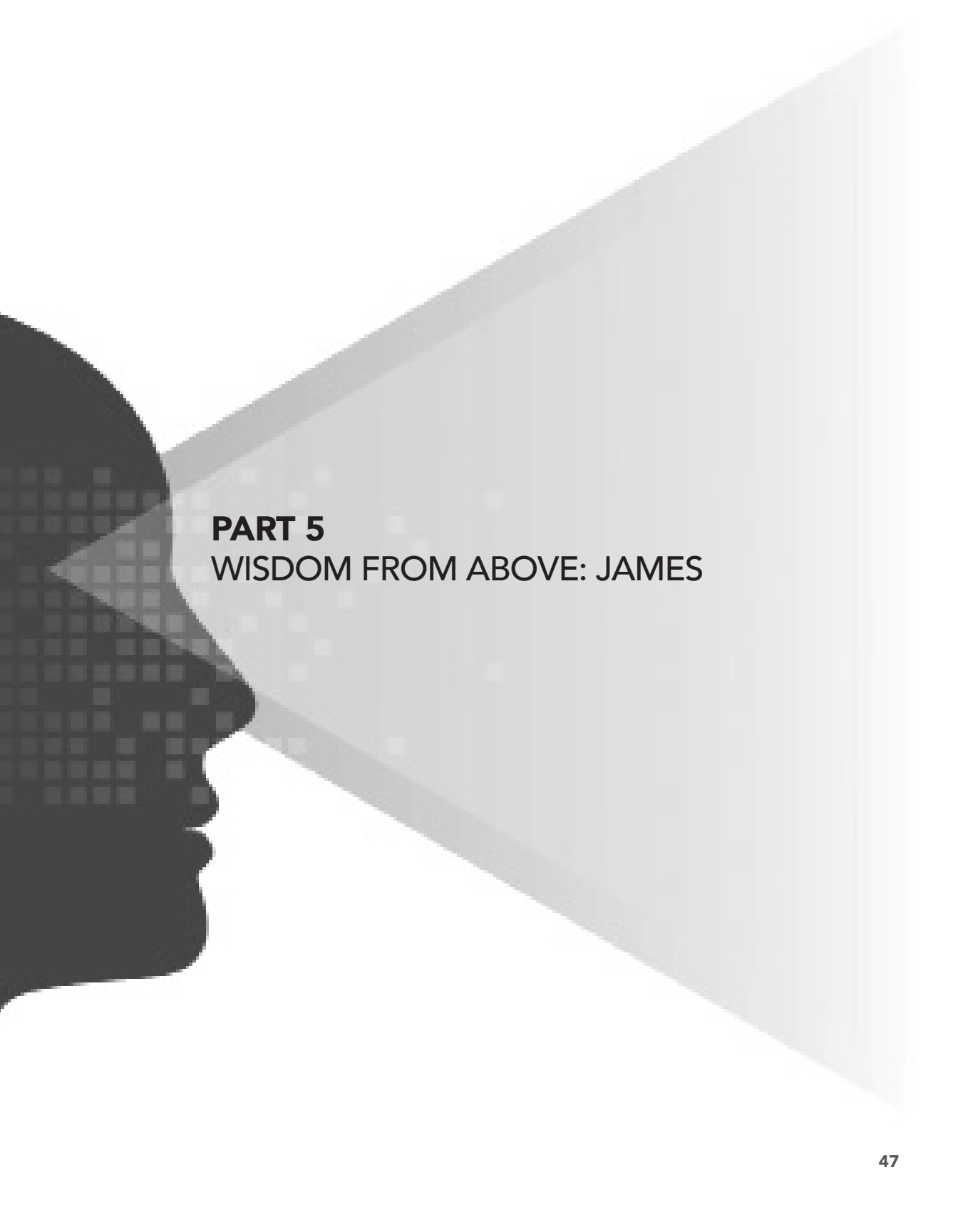
⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.



PART 5
WISDOM FROM ABOVE: JAMES



LEAVE ROOM FOR THE CRUSHING

By Dawn Smith

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

(James 1:2-4)

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
JAMES 1

DAY 2
JAMES 2

DAY 3
JAMES 3

DAY 4
JAMES 4

DAY 5
JAMES 1:1-18

Several years ago, 2009 to be exact, Scott and I attended the Catalyst Conference in Atlanta. This conference is a gathering of emerging church leaders where there is a continuous stream of speakers that blow your mind, and the attire for the event is usually skinny jeans, flannel, and hair product — lots of hair product — and this is just the guys. It’s a lot of fun. We are brain-fried when we leave and have more notes to comb through than we could possibly handle.

Sometimes, a speaker says something so upsetting and disturbing, you wish you had not heard it. Chuck Swindoll made such a statement, and with a trembling hand, I hesitantly wrote it in my journal. He began with a quotation from a British pastor, Alan Redpath: “When God wants to do an impossible task, he takes an impossible person and he crushes him.” And then Dr. Swindoll said it: “Leave room for the crushing. It is part of the curriculum God uses to make us ready to do what he wants us to do.”

Something inside me said, “He’s right.” I remember feeling crushed at one point. Crushed because the marriage I had wanted so badly at one time left me lonely and disillusioned. Crushed because I realized just after the birth of my first child the magnitude of my decision to have an abortion in my teens. Crushed because everything I had built my sense of identity upon was stripped away and I had no idea who I was. Even thinking about it now makes me uneasy. A crushing leaves a tender spot in your soul.

Perhaps, that is the point. That tenderness of soul helps me remember that time — the decisions that got me there and God’s faithfulness to make it all useful somehow. My calling and purpose in helping women and couples grow stems directly from my season of crushing. True to Dr. Swindoll’s comment, it is what God used most to prepare me for my purpose.

It has been said that there is no oil without squeezing the olives, no wine without pressing the grapes, no fragrance without crushing the flower, and no real joy without sorrow. Every man or woman that God has ever used greatly, he first has allowed to be crushed.

Do you feel like you are in your season of crushing? You can know that if God is having anything to do with it, he will not destroy you. That is not his desire. His desire is to conform us into the image of his Son so that we will live like him in this world to bring light to darkness, to be a living demonstration of his faithfulness and goodness.

Is God allowing you to be crushed right now? If so, where?

If you're being crushed, how are you responding to it?

Describe life, as you see it, on the other side of the crushing.

COMMIT TO MEMORY

Blessed are you when others revile you
and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil
against you falsely on my account.

Matthew 5:11



LISTEN WELL

By W. Scott Smith

*“Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.”
(James 1:19)*

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
JAMES 5

DAY 2
PSALM 42

DAY 3
PSALM 43

DAY 4
PSALM 44

DAY 5
JAMES
1:19-27

Dawn is a great listener. As a matter of fact, she should wear a t-shirt that says, “Spill your guts to me.” She’s such a great listener, people seem drawn to share their stories with her.

I, on the other hand, on more than one occasion in a public setting, have heard from Dawn, “Scott, while you were talking to that person, you kept looking away to see who else was in the room.” Unknowingly, my body language was conveying, “I’m not listening to you. You’re not as important to me as someone else in the room.”


Listening is work! It doesn’t come easy for most of us. It requires effort. It demands focused attention. Listening well requires the removal of distractions.

If you want to help a friend or a family member feel loved, listen to them. Give them your undivided attention. Look them in the eyes. Give feedback to what you are hearing.

Many of us want to be heard before we want to listen to someone else. Yet, Scripture seems to imply that we are to first listen, then speak, all while being slow to get angry in our responses.

Why do we get angry while listening to others? Anger is a result of a hurt. Often, the hurt is not even associated with the person with whom we’re conversing, but possibly tied to a relationship from our past. Chances are anger, while listening in a present relationship, is tied to an unresolved hurt from a previous relationship.

We often tell couples in counseling, “Most of the issues you will face in marriage will have little to nothing to do with one another. Often, the issues you will face in marriage will have more to do with unresolved personal and spiritual conflicts from your past.”



In conversations in which you're quick to get angry, ask yourself:
Why am I quick to get angry?

What is being tapped into?

What is this conversation bringing to the surface?

Why am I responding this way?

Is my response in the present tied to a relationship from my past?

If so, what do I need to do to resolve that past conflict?



COMMIT TO MEMORY

Blessed are you when others revile you
and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil
against you falsely on my account.

Matthew 5:11



FAVORITISM

By W. Scott Smith

I have a confession to make. I have shown favoritism toward my children over the years. Hannah is my favorite oldest daughter. Reese is my favorite son. Claire is my favorite youngest daughter.

That's the joke in the Smith household. But, I suspect, if I'm being honest with myself, there probably are certain traits or characteristics about each of my children that I favor above the others.

So, what's the problem with favoritism?

- Favoritism shows that our value system is false (James 2:3).
- Favoritism of one person over another fails to honor a person whom God honors (James 2:5).
- Favoritism elevates a person in our eyes but may lower us in their eyes (James 2:6).
- Favoritism is sin in God's eyes (James 2:9).

Are you prone to show favoritism?

If so, in what circumstances or situations are you prone to do so?

If you do show favoritism at times, what is your motivation for doing so?

Think back to a time when favoritism was shown against you. What effect did it have on you?

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
PSALM 45

DAY 2
PSALM 46

DAY 3
PSALM 47

DAY 4
PSALM 48

DAY 5
JAMES 2:1-13



REFLECT & RESPOND

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
PSALM 49

DAY 2
PSALM 50

DAY 3
PSALM 51

DAY 4
PSALM 52

DAY 5
JAMES 2:14-26

Read the story of Abraham and Isaac from Genesis 22. How was Abraham's faith displayed through his works?

In what ways is Abraham a reflection of God the Father?

In what ways is Isaac a reflection of God the Son?

What did you learn about faith working through love from this story?
Consider Galatians 5:6.

What does this story teach us about God the Father?

What does this story teach us about God the Son?

COMMIT TO MEMORY

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:12



POWER OF THE TONGUE

By W. Scott Smith

James gives three examples of small elements that cause an effect 100 times their own size: bits, rudders, and sparks. A bit in the mouth of a horse can restrain a large beast. A small wooden rudder can direct a massive ship through the water. A small spark can ignite a huge forest fire. We can understand the power of the tongue by taking a closer look at these small but mighty examples.

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1

PSALM 53

DAY 2

PSALM 54

DAY 3

PSALM 55

DAY 4

PSALM 56

DAY 5

JAMES 3:1-12

THE BIT

*“Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life;
he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin” (Proverbs 13:3).*

*“A fool takes no pleasure in understanding,
but only in expressing his opinion” (Proverbs 18:2).*

A bit in a horse’s mouth is used to restrain and guide a large beast; likewise, wise people put guards over their mouths. Conversely, fools either do not know how or do not care to restrain their mouths.

Wise people T.H.I.N.K. before they speak. They ask themselves:

Is what I’m about to say True ?	Philippians 4:8, Ephesians 4:15, 25
Is what I’m about to say Helpful ?	Proverbs 12:18
Is what I’m about to say Inspiring ?	1 Thessalonians 5:11
Is what I’m about to say Necessary ?	Matthew 12:36
Is what I’m about to say Kind ?	Ephesians 4:32

“Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent” (Proverbs 17:27-28).

Sometimes the wise thing to say is to say nothing at all. Abraham Lincoln is attributed to have said, “Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt.”

CONSIDER: Do I display ignorance by impetuous/unrestrained speech?

The right thing spoken at the wrong time or in the wrong way will most likely be heard wrong. Truth not spoken in love is rarely received as the truth. See Ephesians 4:15.

“If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless” (James 1:26).

“Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you” (Psalms 32:9).

A test of our spiritual maturity is our willingness and ability to keep a tight rein on our tongues. An unwillingness or inability to do so says more about us than it does about the person to whom we are speaking.

THE RUDDER

*“Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble”
(Proverbs 21:23).*

CONSIDER: Would you say your mouth has at times gotten you into trouble? If so, why?

Our words cause action. As the movement of the rudder moves the ship, the words we say lead us or others to action. Think of two of the most powerful speeches in American history: “The Gettysburg Address” by Abraham Lincoln and “I Have A Dream” by Martin Luther King, Jr. The words of Lincoln and King stirred people to action. They shaped the trajectory of not only the lives of these two men, but the American landscape at large.

THE SPARK

Commit Proverbs 18:21 to memory: *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits”*

Our words are powerful, and they have consequences. Our words are like sparks. They may start small, but they can ignite a wildfire of destruction and devastation. You and I choose daily whether we will be life-giving or death-dealing with our tongue. This is why we must speak the gospel and pray that the Holy Spirit ignites a love for God in the hearts and minds of men, women and children.

CONSIDER: What have been the consequences of my words lately, for good or for bad?

COMMIT TO MEMORY

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.

(Matthew 5:13)



REFLECT & RESPOND

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
PSALM 57

DAY 2
PSALM 58

DAY 3
PSALM 59

DAY 4
PSALM 60

DAY 5
JAMES 3:13-18

Read James 3:13. Make a list below of the traits of a wise person.

According to James 3:16, what two behaviors indicate a lack of God's wisdom?

Write the characteristics of heavenly wisdom or wisdom from above in James 3:17.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

What qualities above do you most need to develop in your life?

COMMIT TO MEMORY

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. Matthew 5:13



REFLECT & RESPOND

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
PSALM 61

DAY 2
PSALM 62

DAY 3
PSALM 63

DAY 4
PSALM 64

DAY 5
JAMES 4:1-12



According to James 4:1, what is the root of fights and quarrels?

James 4:2-3 says there are two reasons we do not have what we want. What are those two reasons?

What other reasons might there be for not having what we want?

Why would God be opposed to the proud (James 4:6)?

Compare James 4:6 to Luke 18:14, James 4:10, and 1 Peter 5:5-6. What did you learn?

How can you practically apply what God has shown you from your reading this week?

COMMIT TO MEMORY

You are the light of the world.
A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.
Matthew 5:14



DO THE NEXT RIGHT THING

By W. Scott Smith

*“So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it,
for him it is sin” (James 4:17).*

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
PSALM 65

DAY 2
PSALM 66

DAY 3
PSALM 67

DAY 4
PSALM 68

DAY 5
JAMES
4:13-5:6

Life is a series of choices. These choices are linked together over time to form the legacy you leave. Therefore, in order to fulfill the plan God has prepared for you (Eph. 2:10), you must do the next right thing.

What is the next right thing for you? No one can answer that for you. It may be to pay a bill on time. It may be to ask a friend for forgiveness. It may be a sin to confess and repent of. You might need to call a family member and tell them you love them. It may be to walk across the yard and have an intentional conversation with a neighbor. Or, it could simply be writing a “thank you” note. Your next right thing more than likely is totally different from everyone else’s. After all, it is your next right thing.

The key to doing the next right thing is the ability to hear the Father’s voice. What is he saying to you today? Upon discerning that, do what you sense He is saying to you. The writer of Hebrews states, “Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb. 4:7).

Let these key questions be the driving force behind your daily decisions of the “next right thing”:

What is God saying to me?

What am I going to do about it?

Obedience is the key to doing the next right thing. It is about faithfulness. It is about consistency. To borrow a phrase from Eugene Peterson, doing the next right thing is often a “long obedience in the same direction”. The next right thing is rarely flashy. Seldom will it be heralded or applauded. Most people will not even know you did it.

We often are confused about the next right thing because we have not been obedient to the previous right thing. God will rarely lead us beyond our willingness to obey.

If we know the next right thing to do and do not do it, it is sin. Sin is simply disobeying what God says. Remember this: it is never too late to do the next right thing. Regardless of how mundane or boring it may seem, just do the next right thing.

Why is it sometimes so hard to do the next right thing?

What is your next right thing to do?

What are you going to do about it?

COMMIT TO MEMORY

You are the light of the world.
A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.
Matthew 5:14



REFLECT & RESPOND

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
PSALM 69

DAY 2
PSALM 70

DAY 3
PSALM 71

DAY 4
PSALM 72

DAY 5
JAMES 5:7-20

What does James call Christians to wait for patiently?

What are you looking forward to the most about “the Lord’s coming” (James 5:8)?

How are Christians to behave during this waiting time before the Lord’s return?

Where in your life do you need God’s help to patiently persevere (James 5:10-11)?

Who is someone you admire as a person of prayer? What is it that you admire about him or her? What can you learn from his or her prayer life?

How is confession and prayer a part of the healing process (James 5:16)?

Who is the person far from God for whom you are praying?

Who is the person in need of healing for whom you are praying?

Write a prayer below based upon your reflections from today’s reading.

COMMIT TO MEMORY

Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

Matthew 5:15



PART 6
JOB: WISDOM FOR SUFFERING



THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFERER

By John D. Morrison

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
JOB 1

DAY 2
JOB 2

DAY 3
JOB 3

DAY 4
JOB 4

DAY 5
JOB 5

Job, the Bible tells us, was “blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” (Job 1:1). Yet, Job endured some of the most profound suffering of anyone in Scripture. The clarity of these two facts — Job’s righteousness and his suffering — teach us that we must put away simplistic answers about pain and suffering in this world. According to Scripture, we cannot draw a one-to-one correspondence between personal sin and suffering in this life. Conversely, the Bible also teaches us that physical well-being is not a sign of God’s blessing.

Jesus makes this point clear in Luke 13:1-5. Notice how in this passage, Jesus points out not the innocence of those who suffered but their shared guilt with those who did not suffer. When it comes to God’s purpose in suffering, simplistic answers will not do.

The life of Jesus forcefully drives this point home. If anyone did not deserve to suffer, it was he. Yet, he endured the pain and agony of the cross “for the joy that was set before him” (Heb. 12:2). He suffered and died in order to redeem a people for his own possession. He did not deserve his suffering, and yet, he endured it for us and for our salvation.

Job’s life shatters any simplistic answers about prosperity and suffering. In his life, he also shows us how to respond to suffering in faith. Consider how he responds in faith to the death of his children and the loss of all his property: “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (1:21). Similarly, he asks his wife, “Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” (2:10). As Job succinctly puts it, “Though he slay me, I will hope in him” (13:15). Job cries out to God. He questions him. Yet, through all his suffering, he moves from faith to a deeper faith.

We, too, are called to respond to suffering in faith. We have one great advantage over Job: in our suffering, we can look to the cross and see the one who did not deserve to suffer but who suffered willingly for us. We look beyond our pain to the righteous one, Jesus Christ, who suffered for us. We may not understand exactly why we suffer, but at the cross, we are reassured of the loving kindness and goodness of our God who would die for us. Through the cross, we can look beyond suffering to our eternal hope. Through the cross, we can say with Paul, “This light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4:17).

COMMIT TO MEMORY

Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

Matthew 5:15

WEEK 33



REFLECT & RESPOND

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
JOB 6

DAY 2
JOB 7

DAY 3
JOB 8

DAY 4
JOB 9

DAY 5
JOB 10

Read Luke 13:1-5. How does Jesus's warning here relate to the advice Job's friends gave him?

Rather than asking why something happens, Jesus emphasizes the proper response. Where should tragedy drive us?

Is there an area of your life where you have been questioning the Lord rather than running toward him?

Read Romans 8:18-39. How can we have confidence in God's love for us? Where should we look when we doubt his love?

Read 1 Peter 1:3-9. How does Peter describe trials as actually good for our faith?



REFLECT & RESPOND

How have you seen God use great difficulty in your life to grow you in your love for him and faith in him?

In light of these truths, how do you need to respond to present difficulties in your life? How can you encourage someone else to respond to suffering in faith?

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
JOB 31-32

DAY 2
JOB 33

DAY 3
JOB 34

DAY 4
JOB 35

DAY 5
JOB 36-37



COMMIT TO MEMORY

In the same way, let your light shine before others,
so that they may see your good works and
give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 5:16

WEEK 35



REFLECT & RESPOND

WEEKLY READINGS

DAY 1
JOB 38

DAY 2
JOB 39

DAY 3
JOB 40

DAY 4
JOB 41

DAY 5
JOB 42

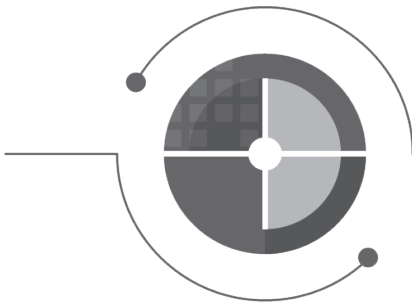
Meditate on Genesis 50:20. For how to meditate, see Week 7.

What does this passage reveal about how God works through evil?

Read Acts 2:22-24, and then meditate on Acts 2:23.

Based on Acts 2:23, was the Father in control during the crucifixion of his Son?

Read Job 42:2 and Philippians 4:12-13. How should God's sovereignty over even the crucifixion of Jesus Christ give us confidence to face all the difficulties of life?



REVIEW

MATTHEW 5:1-16

- ¹ Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.
- ² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:
- ³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- ⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn,
for they shall be comforted.
- ⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
- ⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they shall be satisfied.
- ⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
- ⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
- ⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called sons of God.
- ¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- ¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and
utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.
- ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven,
for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
- ¹³ "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste,
how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything
except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.
- ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.
- ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket,
but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.
- ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they
may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

