

GOD SPEAKS

A 30-Day Challenge to Read Your Bible

Allison & Zach Zehnder



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WHAT'S INSIDE

Personal Study

Expect to spend 20-30 minutes a day in personal study. Each day, you will spend about 15 minutes reading the inspiring devotional content in this book and 5 minutes reading a chapter of God's Word. After you finish reading, 3-4 reflection questions will help you dive deeper into what you just read.

Sermon Notes

These pages were designed as an intentional space for taking sermon notes if you're reading *God Speaks* with your church. If you're tackling this solo – don't worry! All the devotional content can be completed as a standalone exercise. You can use Sermon Note pages to gather thoughts or as a prayer journal.

Bible Translation

We selected the NIV translation for most Scripture references. However, we encourage you to use the translation that you already know and love for your personal reading. If you're wondering where to start, the staff of Lutheran Bible Translators also recommends the English Standard Version and the Christian Standard Version.

CHURCH & GROUP RESOURCES

Video Series Available

With a RightNow media account through your church or other organization, you can access bonus teaching videos by Pastor Zach Zehnder of Red Letter Living. Visit <https://www.rightnowmedia.org> to learn more.

30-Day Churchwide Challenge Resources

God Speaks is designed as a resource for churches to host a 30-day churchwide Scripture reading challenge. Church leaders can access ready-to-use sermons, children's curriculum, small group guides, an implementation guide, and more at <https://www.LBT.org/GodSpeaks>.



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DAY 1: INTRODUCTION

GOD'S GOOD BREATH

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Out Of Breath

“No, no, no,” the African men said stubbornly, shaking their heads furiously at the missionary, looking hot, tired, and ready to give up. “No, that word will not work here.”

Reverend Walter DeMoss, a missionary to the Moba people in Togo, West Africa, raised his hands in defeat, but the three men stubbornly kept their steady gaze.

What am I supposed to do now? Walt thought. *This is impossible! There is no way we are going to understand each other.* Walt turned back to the blackboard, using his sweaty forearm to erase the previous scribbles of translation work. His arm left a black smear, and he began furiously writing out what he had explained over and over.

“Now look,” he began in French, the language everyone understood. “You told me SEIK is the generic word for spirit in the Moba language, correct?” He looked back at the men sitting patiently at their desks.

“Yes, Pasteur,” the taller man, Lambon, said.

“Well, God is a three-in-one God,” Walt continued, ruffling a chalky hand through his hair and starting the discussion about the impossible-to-explain triune God again. “One of the persons of God is the Holy Spirit. And I told you that the word ‘holy’ is like pure, or YENG, in Moba.”

“Yes, Pasteur,” they said in unison.

“Well, it makes sense to me,” he gestured to his chicken scratch on the board.

SEIK – SPIRIT

YENG – PURE

= SEI -YENG – HOLY SPIRIT

“The best name for the Holy Spirit would be SEI-YENG. Pure Spirit.”

The men howled in protest. “SEIK cannot be a god, Pasteur. The mountains have a SEIK, every tree has a SEIK, and every person has a SEIK,” Kombien spoke up. “But SEIK cannot be a deity. SEIK cannot be God.”

Walt put his hands in his pockets, feeling his patience waning. No matter how he tried to explain it, the Moba people struggled to understand the Holy Spirit. Walt wondered why he thought he could translate the Bible into their native language; he couldn’t even translate the Holy Spirit.

“But it is a pure SEIK, a SEI-YENG,” Walt tried to reason. “This would be different than any SEIK you have ever thought to exist.”

Lambon shook his head. “A SEIK cannot be God. The villagers would not understand that. The SEIK can make people afraid. They cannot see it and they cannot trust it. They try to control SEIK to get out of it what they need.”

Walt turned back to the board in defeat. This was a fool’s errand. No progress had been made, and he wanted to cancel the rest of the session and go home, abandoning the whole project entirely. *Lord, I am at the end of my rope, he prayed. How do I make you clear to them?*

He opened his eyes and looked out the window, watching the wind rustle through the trees. Suddenly, he had an idea.

“Let’s try one more time,” he said, putting the chalk down and facing the men. “The Moba word for God is...”

“YENNU,” the men said.

“YENNU. Ok. So, we will have to use YEN, so people will know that this is God.” Walt turned back around and wrote on the board.

YEN – GOD

“For you to be able to translate the word, you must first know about the Holy Spirit,” he said, facing them and pointing out the window. “The Holy Spirit is like the wind. He is everywhere and brings cool and refreshing feelings. He encourages and is powerful. Look outside at the breeze in the trees. We cannot see it, but we see the power it has, and we know it is there.”

“So the Holy Spirit is like God’s breath,” Lambon said.

“Yes!” Walt said, for the first time that afternoon, feeling like he was breaking through.

“Exactly! Like God’s breath. What is the Moba word for breath?”

Walt wrote FO – BREATH under YEN – GOD.

“Ok, but holy or good, that is important,” Walt said. “What is the Moba word for good?”

“NGAM,” responded Lambon, nodding. “God is NGAM.”

“Yes, he is,” Walt said, writing the final words on the board.

YEN – GOD

FO – BREATH

NGAM – GOOD

= YEN-FO-NGAM – THE HOLY SPIRIT

“What about YEN-FO-NGAM, the Holy Spirit?” Walt said, triumphantly turning back to the smiling faces of the men.

“Pasteur, yes! We now see! Our Holy Spirit, our YEN - FO - NGAM. The people will understand!”

Walt sighed in relief, silently thanking the Holy Spirit, God's Good Breath, for breathing life into that session that afternoon. Bible translation would not be easy, but with God's help, he knew it could be accomplished.

We've Got Bibles, Now What?

Walt DeMoss was a Lutheran missionary to the Moba people in Togo, West Africa, from 1979 to 1989. He led the charge of translating the French New Testament into the Moba language in partnership with Lutheran Bible Translators (LBT).

Well, this is really a wonderful story, you might say to yourself. But I'm already sold on Bible translation. I'm in! I support it and will happily donate to it. Just tell me where to give.

You are not alone in your support of access to the Bible. In a divided society like ours, it's surprising when we all agree on something. Access to the Bible is one of those rare, almost unanimous opinions in the US. Nearly all Americans—98%—believe people *should* have access to the Bible if they want it. That's Christians and non-Christians alike. So, this book is not about convincing you that Bible translation is good. You probably already know it is. LBT's mission is not only to help worldwide with Bible translation.

This book is also about you.

Me? You ask. *What can LBT do for me? I've already got a Bible in my language. I have all kinds of Bibles in my house, and my children even have a Bible.*

You're right again! Most Americans (90% to be exact) have a Bible in their homes, and according to Barna's research, those same people have not just one but four to five Bibles per household!¹ So, having the Bible is not a problem. Reading it is.

Only 11% of Americans read their Bible daily.² If I'm doing the math correctly, 90% own a Bible, but only 11% read the Bible, so that means that 79% of Bibles go untouched in a day. The precious Word of God is just sitting on shelves. As a result, fewer Americans know even the very basic parts of the Bible. The *Washington Post* reported that while Americans revere the Bible, they really don't understand anything about it. One Gallup

1. <https://www.barna.com/research/americans-perceptions-of-the-bibles-global-reach/>

2. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/299433/bible-readership-in-the-usa/#statisticContainer>

survey, for example, shows that fewer than half of Americans can name the first book of the Bible (Genesis), only one-third know who delivered the Sermon on the Mount (many name Billy Graham, not Jesus), and one-quarter do not know what is celebrated on Easter (the Resurrection, the foundational event of Christianity).³

Owning a Bible and occasionally reading it is not a guarantee of life change. The Gospel's mission is to work the truth of Scripture down to the deepest parts of your heart, to the most basic essence of who you are, and to change you from the inside out. Lutheran Bible Translators' work begins with making the Bible accessible to people who don't have it in their native language. They desire vibrant Christian communities deeply rooted in God's Word and fully engaged in God's mission for this generation.

The Bible is a living, active thing working in the life of every believer. It's not enough to have a physical copy of the book (which is good!) or even do occasional reading (which is also good!) God's Word must have its way with you, working truth deep into your heart.

Teaching, Rebuking, Correcting, and Training in Righteousness

In the 1520s, Martin Luther, great leader of the Reformation and Bible translator, visited the churches that finally had the Bible in German, their ordinary, everyday language. He was expecting to find incredible faith-filled things happening at those churches. Instead, he was shocked that no one knew anything about the Christian faith! Having the Bible wasn't enough. The Bible needed to be used to train, correct, teach, and build up faith in people.

This is why you are invited to participate in *God Speaks: Translating Scripture into Your Everyday Life*, produced as a partnership between LBT and Pastor Zach and Allison Zehnder from *Red Letter Living*. Over the next 30 days, you'll be challenged to allow the Bible to change you from the inside out.

The key verse for the challenge is in the book of Second Timothy, where the apostle Paul wrote a letter to his protégé Timothy explaining how Scripture can impact someone's life. Read it below,

3. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2000/12/09/we-revere-the-bible-we-dont-read-it/ff4d2cfd-7861-44a0-ae59-d8bcdb4f2809/>

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

In this one sentence Paul packs a punch, emphasizing three things:

1. The source of where Scripture came from,
2. the four different ways it can be used, and
3. the results it creates in the life of a believer.

The enemy seeks to lie and destroy all good in the world, not only overseas but also in your own heart. Scripture is our key to figuring out the truth. The fact that people *can* but still *don't* read the Scriptures, or know so little about them, is the saddest neglect of an incredible gift.

The Bible has transformed my (Allison's) life personally. In June 1990, I watched my father, Roger Buck, Walt's successor and missionary to the Moba people, distribute 100 New Testament Bibles. They were overcome with joy!

As an eight-year-old girl, I was changed forever as I saw my village playmates get baptized. Water ran down their smiling faces. For each person who was baptized, Dad said,

“N WUL'A YENNU WULU BAA, NAN BIJA, NAN **YENFO-NGAM** SANN NI, AMEN.”

(I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.)

I heard the Moba word for the Holy Spirit, translated years before, ring in my ears, forever cemented in my memory. My African friends and I will be reunited someday in heaven because of the work of LBT and Bible translation.

“The church is not a pen house, but a mouth house,” Luther declared. “For since the advent of Christ, the Gospel, which used to be hidden in the Scriptures, has become an oral preaching...Christ himself has not written anything, nor has he ordered anything to be written, but rather to be preached by Word of mouth.”⁴

4. Wood, A.S. (1969). *Captive to the Word: Martin Luther, Doctor of Sacred Scripture*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing.

Luther reminds us that listening to Scripture today is still as if we are hearing directly from the mouth of Jesus. So, although Paul wrote it, think of Jesus himself telling us these four ways of using the Bible:

- TEACHING: The Bible will give you an identity and a purpose.
- REBUKING: It will help you distinguish between Satan's lies and God's sweet promises.
- CORRECTING: It is your compass and true north when things get dark and confusing.
- TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS: It allows you to witness Jesus' saving work in the world.

These things will ensure that you are thoroughly equipped for every good work. *God Speaks* is more than a devotional. It's the story of lives changed by the Word of God. You have the opportunity to read the same life-transforming Scriptures for yourself. It changed my life, and it will also change yours.

For thirty days, you will study Scripture, read daily devotionals, and immerse yourself in God's Word. You will learn more about the four practical uses of Scripture:

- Week 1: Scripture Teaches
- Week 2: Scripture Rebukes
- Week 3: Scripture Corrects
- Week 4: Scripture Trains in Righteousness

Finally, you will conclude the challenge by learning the purpose of the four uses:

- Week 5: To thoroughly equip God's servants for every good work.

What are you waiting for?

LET'S DO THIS!

Zach and Allison Zehnder
Red Letter Living



DAY 2: SERMON #1 – ALL SCRIPTURE ADVENTURE:

USEFUL FOR TEACHING

2 TIMOTHY 3:16

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.



DAY 3: GOD'S TEACHING

WHY AM I HERE?

JEREMIAH 29:11

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

What Am I Here For?

On June 30, 2024, real estate mogul Brandon Miller decided he didn't want to be here. He took his life inside his Porsche Carrera while his wife and daughters were on an Italian vacation. He had \$8,000 in his bank account, precisely the same as the average American savings balance.⁵ However, there was one significant difference between him and the average American: he owed 34 million dollars. The social media comment below gives insight into Miller and his wife's lifestyle.

I used to follow her [Miller's wife] religiously and couldn't believe the amount of wealth she exuded. The huge NYC apartment/home, the Hamptons mansion, the Miami apartment, etc. The vacations, the parties, her wardrobe of endless gowns. I had never seen anything like it before. Even the small things - I remember she would have weekly floral arrangements in her Hamptons home from a Sag Harbor florist that had to be thousands of dollars. I used to think her life was so perfect with the endless

5. <https://www.cnn.com/cnn-underscored/money/average-american-savings>

funds, endless time to exercise and a private chef. Makes you re-evaluate what makes you happy and appreciate the little things in your life.⁶ [emphasis added]

In the quest to figure out life’s purpose, people have tried many things but most often end up disappointed. Brandon Miller aimed to build wealth and live “the good life.” After losing his money, he lost his purpose and will to live. He’s not alone. A 2021 report by Springtide Research Institute found that about 40% of Gen Zers feel their lives lack clear meaning or purpose.⁷ As a nation, we’ve got a purpose problem.

Searching for Purpose in All the Wrong Places

Purpose provides targets to shoot for. In his book *A Life Worth Living*, Miroslav Wolf summarizes what many Americans shoot for today. Their purpose is to live a long, happy, and healthy life. Advertisements confirm this. The Walgreens slogan, “*At the corner of happy and healthy,*” promises us a long and happy life if we are healthy inside and out. In his memoir *Greenlights*, Matthew McConaughey wrote that pursuing happiness, health, and longevity are the central goals in his life. *Blue Zones*, a popular book by Dan Buettner, reiterates the promise that if you are healthy and live a long time, happiness is sure to follow.

What do you think? Rank these three things in order of importance:

_____LONG LIFE _____HAPPINESS _____GOOD HEALTH

With these markers, we begin tracking how we measure up to this magic formula. We track our calories and age. There’s even an attempt to track happiness. [Go.trackyour-happiness.org](https://go.trackyourhappiness.org) claims they are investigating what makes life worth living. Participants are asked to log what they are doing and how they feel about it three times a day, hoping to discover more happiness. But wait! Before you go sign up, read what Jessica Grose from the *New York Times* reported about her experience with the app.

“After I took 100 surveys over about a month...My biggest takeaway is that much of my life consists of things I don’t particularly want to do, like folding laundry and struggling with the wording of a paragraph. Being reminded that most of my life is obligatory does not exactly spark joy.

6. @Humble-Coconut6536 July 9, 2024 https://reddit.com/r/NYCinfluencersnark/comments/1dx-maqy/any_new_update_on_mama_tata/

7. Springtide Research Insitute, *WORK/LIFE Helping Gen Z Flourish & Find Balance* 2021

As the weeks of survey-taking went by, I had another, more paralyzing thought: that this focus on my feelings was instilling a new kind of anxiety. Rather than just walking one of my kids home from school and contentedly listening to her chatter about sedimentary rocks, I was thinking about the survey's infernal happiness toggle and where this experience ranked relative to the other moments I had tracked.”⁸

Obsessing about happiness does not bring purpose. It just gives us another thing to be anxious about! Many of us are searching for a purpose in all the wrong places. Some, like Miller, seek it in material wealth, believing financial success will bring them purpose. Others chase after good health, hoping that feeling good will give them a happy life. Others pour themselves into relationships, believing family and friends are all that matters. But all of these pursuits still leave us without purpose. God's Word has something better.

Better Than Long, Happy, and Healthy

Read the Scripture verse for today below.

*“FOR I KNOW THE PLANS I HAVE FOR YOU,” DECLARES THE LORD,
“PLANS TO PROSPER YOU AND NOT TO HARM YOU, PLANS TO GIVE
YOU HOPE AND A FUTURE.”*

JEREMIAH 29:11:

This verse is among Christian art's top fifteen most popular verses today. It's catchy because people can shape it into something that fits them. They insert their definitions of “hope” and “future” to fit what they want and what God owes them, interpreting the verse like this:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a long, happy, and healthy life.”

But that's not what God means. How do I know this? The Bible tells us so. Also, many examples exist of people living worthwhile lives that haven't been long, happy, or healthy.

8. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/08/opinion/happiness-tracking-america.html>

Purpose Despite Difficulty

Jesus warned that life would not always be long, happy, or healthy.

*"I HAVE SAID THESE THINGS TO YOU, THAT IN ME YOU MAY HAVE PEACE. **IN THE WORLD YOU WILL HAVE TRIBULATION.** BUT TAKE HEART; I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD."*

JOHN 16:33 [EMPHASIS ADDED]

Here are a few influential people who would not have checked the boxes of a long, happy, healthy life.

A LONG LIFE

- Martin Luther King Jr. died at age 39 after fighting for racial equality.
- Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer died at the age of 39 in prison for resisting the Nazis.

HAPPINESS

- Martin Luther experienced feelings of unworthiness and despair.
- Mother Teresa suffered from depression.
- Oswald Chambers was a pastor who served as a Chaplain during WWI. He died at the age of 43 from appendicitis. Although he wrote the famous book *My Utmost for His Highest*, Chambers experienced great sadness and difficulty.

HEALTH

- Harriet Tubman had a life-long struggle with epilepsy due to a head injury as a child.
- After an illness at 19 months old, Helen Keller was blind and deaf for the rest of her life.

These men and women lived a life of great purpose even though it wasn't long, happy, or healthy. Dietrich Bonhoeffer figured out his purpose and said, "*Seek God, not happiness* -

this is the fundamental rule of all meditation. If you seek God alone, you will gain happiness: that is its promise.”

So, does that mean Jesus wants us to have a short, sad, and sick life? Not at all! He wants the opposite. He has something far better.

How God’s Word Shows Us Our Purpose

Jesus came to bring us something way better than a long, happy, and healthy life. Because guess what? Even when we get to the end of a long, happy, and healthy life, death is still waiting. Death is the final blow of Satan: *“For the wages of sin is death....”* But praise God, it’s not the end of God’s plans. Read the second half of this verse.

*...BUT THE FREE GIFT OF GOD IS ETERNAL
LIFE THROUGH CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.”*

ROMANS 6:23

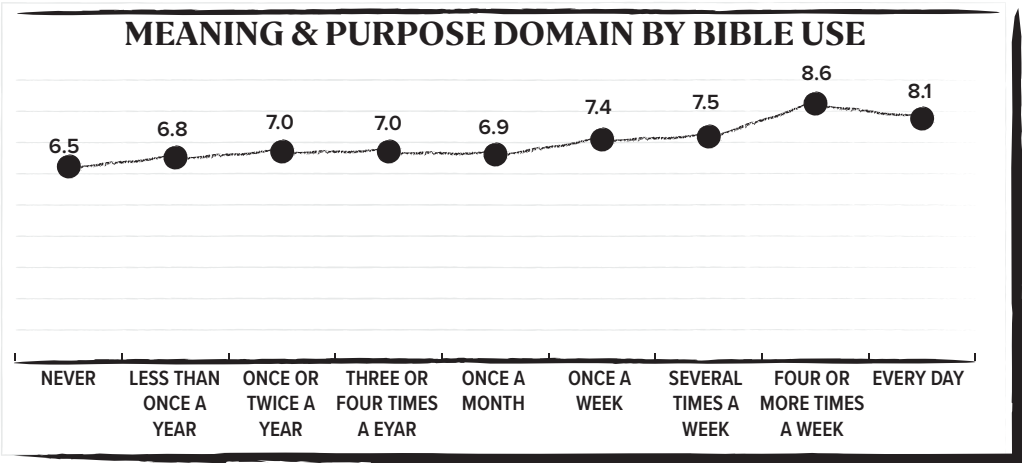
Jesus lived a sinless and perfect life and rose from death to reign eternally so that he could give you an eternal, sinless, and perfect future!

Did Jesus have a long, happy, healthy life while on Earth?

- NOT LONG: Jesus’s life was not long. He died around the age of 34.
- NOT ALWAYS HAPPY: Although Jesus was peaceful and joyful, his life often involved conflict and frustration.
- NOT ALWAYS HEALTHY: He was born to a poor, young couple, which had risks. Fasting for 40 days is not easy on the body. Finally, being beaten and dying on the cross is not the ideal picture of health.

Despite Jesus’s short, hard, and painful life, he defeated death and rose from the dead. That changes everything! **God’s Word provides the answer to your search for purpose.**

The State of the Bible Report from 2024 shows that people who read God’s Word at least four times a week report having more meaning and purpose.



9

In Jeremiah 29:11, God reminds us that his plan for our lives is to prosper us and give us hope. One alternative translation is, “*I will give you the kind of life where you can know that good things will happen to you in the future.*”¹⁰ This plan is not about material success or worldly achievements. Our purpose is found in our relationship with God. Jesus died and rose again, so you have a new life with him as his child. In response, you have an incredible invitation to live according to his Word and follow his will, all while relying on his power and might.

You were made, loved, and saved by God. **As a child of God, you can serve him and reflect his love to the world around you.** One way to do that is through the work of LBT, who is working hard to make sure every single person can read Jeremiah 29:11 in their own language and understand the plans God has for them. This is your purpose, and it brings true fulfillment and lasting joy.

9. https://1s712.americanbible.org/state-of-the-bible/stateofthebible/State_of_the_bible-2024.pdf

10. https://tips.translation.bible/tip_verse/jer-2911/
Quoted with permission from Newman, Barclay M. and Stine, Philip C. A Handbook on Jeremiah. (UBS Helps for Translators). New York: UBS, 2003.

Scripture Challenge

The verse you studied today was Jeremiah 29:11. Zoom out and read all of Jeremiah 29. Jeremiah wrote his book to warn the Israelites that bad things would happen if the people didn't listen. He said that their city, Jerusalem, would be destroyed, and they would be taken away to a foreign land called Babylon. Many people didn't like what Jeremiah had to say. They thought he was making up stories and didn't want to listen. Sure enough, everything Jeremiah predicted happened. The Israelites were taken away in captivity. Even though Jeremiah had to share some tough news, he also gave messages of hope, like the verse for today. Jeremiah shared that God would make a new promise to the people. He would send a Savior to rescue them.

1. What does God tell his people to do, even though they are not in the land and feel far away in a foreign nation? (vs. 5-7)
2. What are all the things God says he will do in verses 10-14?
3. How do these words comfort the Israelites in exile?
4. How do these words bring comfort to you? Does knowing they were breathed out by God change how you hear or read them?



DAY 4: GOD'S TEACHING

DOES GOD EXIST?

ROMANS 1:19-22

¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools.

Wilderness Therapy

For our fifteenth anniversary, Zach and I went on a six-day inn-based hiking trip to the Grand Canyon with a group led by two guides. One of the guides specialized in wilderness therapy. He said, "I have seen people literally change in a couple days out here. The connection between nature and our mental health is crazy. They unwind like a slinky: they have more confidence, heal from trauma, and even manage their feelings better."

Even people who are atheists claim that they feel a divine spirit in nature. Architect Frank Lloyd Wright once said, "I believe in God, only I spell it Nature." National parks conservationist John Muir, who claimed to be "spiritual" but didn't identify with any

organized religion, said, “Oh, these vast, calm, measureless mountain days, days in whose light everything seems equally divine, opening a thousand windows to show us God.” Now, let’s look at what religious people say. A 2016 survey by the *Pew Research Center* found that many religiously affiliated people feel a strong connection between their spirituality and nature. About 53% of Christians report that nature helps them feel closer to God or a higher power.

Both Christian and non-Christian people claim they feel close to God near the ocean, in the woods, or at the top of a mountain. I felt closer to God as we hiked into the Grand Canyon and back out again, marveling at the rock layers and enormous canyon depth. **Nature tells us that God is real.**

The Sky Proclaims His Handiwork

In your Bible reading for today, Romans 1:19-22, Paul supports the idea that God is in nature. Read it again below:

*¹⁹ FOR WHAT CAN BE KNOWN ABOUT GOD IS PLAIN TO THEM,
BECAUSE GOD HAS SHOWN IT TO THEM. ²⁰ FOR HIS INVISIBLE ATTRI-
BUTES, NAMELY, HIS ETERNAL POWER AND DIVINE NATURE, HAVE
BEEN CLEARLY PERCEIVED, EVER SINCE THE CREATION OF THE
WORLD, IN THE THINGS THAT HAVE BEEN MADE.*

King David also describes how nature is connected to God in Psalms 19:1-4.

*THE HEAVENS DECLARE THE GLORY OF GOD,
AND THE SKY ABOVE PROCLAIMS HIS HANDIWORK.
DAY TO DAY POURS OUT SPEECH,
AND NIGHT TO NIGHT REVEALS KNOWLEDGE.
THERE IS NO SPEECH, NOR ARE THERE WORDS,
WHOSE VOICE IS NOT HEARD.
THEIR VOICE GOES OUT THROUGH ALL THE EARTH,
AND THEIR WORDS TO THE END OF THE WORLD.*

IN THEM, HE HAS SET A TENT FOR THE SUN.

Nature reveals God, but can we really know God by hiking or hugging a tree?

What Nature Tells Us

As much as nature testifies about God's majesty, it's still limited. Paul tells us that there are two things we can learn from nature about God.

1. *God is powerful.*

There is a creator of the world, and this creator of the world is mighty, more powerful than we are.

2. *God is divine.*

God has a divine nature and is wiser than we are. The natural world still has many mysteries. Even though we may not understand something, God is still in control and makes everything run smoothly.

The teleological argument, also known as the argument from design, is a philosophical and theological argument for the existence of God based on the perceived order and purpose in the universe. It is the idea that if you can see God in nature, you can assume that there has to be a superior designer. The existence of an intelligent designer is the best explanation for the complexity, order, and purpose we see in nature. Someone's got to be over all of this!

Animism was widespread in the village of Nano, in Togo, West Africa, where I (Allison) grew up. It is the belief that everything has a spirit and that the spiritual realm is very real and powerful. If you make the spirits happy, they will send rain to your crops and keep you safe. If you make them mad, they will send sickness, famine, and hardship.

One day in Nano, my sisters and I came across a tree in the middle of a field. It was an incredible climbing tree with old limbs that hung to the ground, so we played in its branches. It was so much fun! But our village friends would not come close. They believed an evil spirit lived in that tree because someone died there long ago. They feared the evil spirit would get them if they got near, so no one had touched or gone near that tree in decades. It was left standing in the middle of a cleared field.

Nature is powerful, and it was plain to the African people that spiritual beings were real, powerful, and divine. But nature is limited in its ability to show them God.

If nature is all you know about God, you will be crushed by its size and strength because you will feel small and threatened. That is why so many African villagers feared certain land areas. The god they experienced was distant, cruel, and demanding.

God's Mighty Power Vs. Our Delicate Egos

As nature shows us, Jesus has ultimate power and is in charge. That truth pushes against our own strong will. But keep reading our verses for today. They tell us what happens when our ego runs into a powerful and divine God.

*FOR ALTHOUGH THEY KNEW GOD, THEY DID NOT HONOR HIM AS
GOD OR GIVE THANKS TO HIM, BUT THEY BECAME FUTILE IN THEIR
THINKING, AND THEIR FOOLISH HEARTS WERE DARKENED*

ROMANS 1:21

God uses his power, divinity, and wisdom to make this whole world work, and it's overwhelming to a mere human. We want to be like God. But, when we encounter the true God, we must admit that he is great and holy, and we must obey him. But our sinful hearts say, "I don't want to obey."

What Fools Say

Little children who no longer want to be told what to do, such as those who don't want to hold hands in busy parking lots or crowded streets, often show defiance.

"NO!" they scream. They don't want to be confined or helped. As adults, we can act like stubborn kids when we don't want someone greater than us telling us what to do. We don't even realize how foolish and childish we are acting.

CLAIMING TO BE WISE, THEY BECAME FOOLS,

ROMANS 1:22

Paul is not name-calling here. He is saying that intelligent people can still be fools. There is foolishness in all of us. Fools say things like:

“I don’t need anybody’s help.”

“I don’t want anybody to tell me what to do.”

“I can do it myself.”

“Nobody tells me how to live my life.”

Understanding Grace

Pastor Tim Keller explains foolishness like this:

“A fool is someone who doesn’t know they are a fool. Foolishness, the essence of the spirit of foolishness is, I don’t need anybody’s help. I don’t need anybody to tell me what to do. I can do it myself. Nobody tells me how to live my life. Why? Because the assumption there is that people don’t have things for me to learn. I never have to depend on anybody. I never need to be taught. And of course, that is out of touch with reality. That spirit, that proud willfulness that says, I don’t need anybody to tell me what to do. I can do it myself. To the degree that you and I are under the influence of that spirit, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually, we’re fools.”¹¹

Your foolishness and mine keep us from understanding grace. We may learn a lot about the powerful divine God through nature and observing his creation, but in the Bible we learn about God’s love, mercy, and great sacrifice. **Nature testifies to a deity, but the Bible reveals Jesus.** So, the smartest thing we can do is admit our foolishness.

11. From *Timothy Keller Sermons Podcast by Gospel in Life: The Search for Certainty*, May 8, 2024 <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/timothy-keller-sermons-podcast-by-gospel-in-life/id352660924?i=1000654913849>

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The Confession

We can learn so much about God and the world, but no matter how smart we get, we are still fools through our sins. We can act proud and strong-willed. We even create false gods and idols that we love more than God. We don't like feeling like a charity case, but acknowledging our need is the first step in receiving Jesus's grace. When we look to the cross, we see wisdom beyond us. Then, all our wisdom and self-centeredness just becomes foolishness. Confession is very important to our lives as Christians. The Bible says,

*IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS FAITHFUL AND JUST TO FORGIVE US
OUR SINS AND TO CLEANSE US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.*

1 JOHN 1:9

During the church service, we confess our sins together as a church body because this prepares us to receive God's grace and forgiveness. You can also have a time of confession on your own.

New Life Through Jesus's Death

Nature can prove there is a deity, but Scripture shows us who God is. He isn't just a powerful and divine God to appease or control. He is your Father who loves you and wants to remove your sinful parts and give you new life. God's Word will show you that you have been transformed through his death and resurrection, not through your efforts but through Jesus's death on the cross and resurrection!

You can be sure God exists. He made this beautiful world. A 2022 survey by the *American Psychological Association* found that among young people (ages 18-34) who regularly engage in outdoor activities, about 45% reported that these experiences strengthen their sense of spirituality. So, you will see signs that God is real in nature. But to *know* God the Father, read your Bible every day. You will remember his love, kindness, power, and might. Through the Bible, knowing you are his child, you can bask in the beauty of creation without fear.

Now, get out there and take a hike. Don't forget your Bible!

Scripture Challenge

The verses you studied were Romans 1:19-22. Read all of Romans 1. It is the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans in the New Testament. It sets the stage for the rest of Paul's letter. It begins with Paul introducing himself as someone chosen to spread the message of Jesus. He explains that the gospel shows God's power and helps people be saved through faith. Paul says that everyone can see signs of God's power in the world around them, so no one has an excuse not to believe in him. Paul warns that when people reject God, they start making bad choices, worshiping created things instead of the Creator. He points out that ignoring God leads to harmful actions and attitudes, which distances people even more from Him.

1. Among what people group does Paul want to have a fruitful ministry: Jews or Gentiles?
2. Can you discover what Old Testament verse he's quoting when he says, "the righteous will live by faith" in verses 16-17?
3. Paul hits hard at people's rejection of God, especially since nature makes it clear God exists. What are the various sinful behaviors he identifies to show how sin has gotten into all aspects of people's lives?
4. Where do you see God's invisible qualities in the world around you?



DAY 5: GOD'S TEACHING

WHAT IS THE RIGHT WAY TO LIVE?

MATTHEW 22:37-39

And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

What Do I Do?

Have you ever been in a situation where you had to decide between multiple options and weren't sure what the right choice was? Perhaps you were considering what job you should take, what house you should buy, or what dishwasher to purchase. Maybe you even opened your Bible randomly and randomly pointed to a verse with your eyes closed, hoping to get an answer. But it didn't work, and it ended up being a weird verse like this one below,

"YOU MUST NOT COOK A YOUNG GOAT IN ITS MOTHER'S MILK."

EXODUS 23:19

Huh??? Obviously, that is not how we figure out the right way to live from the Bible. We look at the commandments and see what aligns with our choices. That works unless every choice seems to be in line with God's commandments. Deciding what to do when all your options align with God's will can be hard. Ebenezer Boafo, a man from Ghana, West Africa, experienced that very thing. Boafo did so well in school that he became a high school teacher. This is a respected position in his community, and he was proud of his work. But God had other plans for him. Read what he said below.

*"I used to be a teacher in a high school and I was teaching French and sometimes English, but my main subject was French. And I was really hoping to go forward as a teacher and there were French exams to take for me to gain promotion and so on. Once I went to take this exam and I did so well, I was to be offered a scholarship to go to France."*¹²

This was Ebenezer's dream! He was finally going to travel and see the world. But just when all his dreams were about to come true, things changed. He was told that instead of going to France, he would be put on a waiting list.

*"I was so frustrated that these are taking place in my life and I was praying and asking God, what's happening? Then I came to the conclusion that no, I don't need to work for the government anymore, but I need to do ministry and that God must open a door for me to do ministry. So I decided to apply to a theological school in Nairobi, not knowing what I would do, but I just wanted to go and serve the Lord."*¹³

Today, we are going to consider two questions.

1. If God really exists, what does that mean for me?
2. How does he want me to live?

12. From *Essentially Translatable: Multi-Lingual Identity* | Dr. Ebenezer Boafo, Sep 18, 2020
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/essentially-translatable/id1508168069?i=1000491669964>
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More Rules, More Problems

Some people think life would be easier if we had more rules. This is what the Israelites tried to do in the Old Testament. They got so focused on the question, “What should I do?” that by the time Jesus came, instead of ten commandments to memorize, there were 613! And even with all those rules, it still wasn’t clear what following them perfectly meant. The Pharisees, Sadducees, and other Jewish groups loved debating the interpretation and application of the commandments.

In the book of Matthew, these same teachers of the law were trying to get Jesus stuck by asking him about what is right and wrong. They didn’t want to know what Jesus thought; they wanted to ask him a tricky question, stump him, and get him in trouble. They gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked Jesus, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” This was a common debate among religious scholars of the time because the Jewish Law contained many commandments. They wanted him to rank what was most important in this life.

Jesus was not flustered. Rather than just their literal observance, he focused on the heart and intent behind the commandments. Here is what he said:

³⁷ AND HE SAID TO HIM, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND. ³⁸ THIS IS THE GREAT AND FIRST COMMANDMENT. ³⁹ AND A SECOND IS LIKE IT: YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. ‘

MATTHEW 22:37-39

Jesus summarizes the entire Law with two commandments:

1. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind—a reference to Deuteronomy 6:5, known as the Shema, a central prayer in Jewish worship.
2. Love your neighbor as yourself—a reference to Leviticus 19:18.

Jesus explains that these two commandments are the foundation of the entire Law and the Prophets, meaning that all other commandments depend on these two principles. By emphasizing love for God and love for others, Jesus highlights the heart of God’s commandments, which is a relationship built on love.

The Bible teaches us many things, and one of those questions it helps us answer is: “What is the right way to live?” Many people know the Ten Commandments. They see the Bible as a set of rules and God as a strict judge who will punish you when you get it wrong. However, having more and more complicated rules did not lead people to follow them better.

Here is our dilemma: We can’t follow 613 rules, the Ten Commandments, or even the two simple commandments that Jesus gave! Jesus did not come just to be an example of how to live, though he did live a perfect life. **Jesus came to live the life you should have lived and died the death you should have died.** When you rest in him alone for your salvation, he becomes a substitute and representative for you.

On the cross, Jesus received your harsh treatment so that when he rose from the grave, you could receive his privileged treatment: being called a son or daughter of God. So, more rules do not equal less sin.

Ebenezer was disappointed when he could not follow his dream of traveling to France, but he trusted that God was leading and guiding him. Ebenezer applied to the seminary and got accepted to the *Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology* in Nairobi, Kenya. Once again, he felt like things were moving forward for him. He left for theological school and loved it. The next step for him was seminary! But then, something shocking happened.

He was called to take the France exam once again. Ebenezer passed with flying colors for the second time and was selected to go to France. This time, there was no waiting list; he had a round-trip ticket with his name on it!

Ebenezer faced a difficult decision: With the ticket to France in one hand and the admission letter to the seminary in the other, should he go to France first and then return for the seminary? How could he pass up this adventure?

The Gospel gave Ebenezer the confidence he needed to follow God’s call. He left the country and went to Kenya to do his theological studies, rejecting the scholarship given to him to go to France and giving up that dream. The year Ebenezer attended the Pan-Africa Christian College just happened to be when translation principles were introduced into that seminary. God had directed him into Bible translation, and he never looked back.

Reverend Dr. Ebenezer Boafo went on to serve as the First Vice President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana and a translation consultant for the *Africa Area for Biblica*. He received a Master of Arts in translation from the Nairobi Evangelical

Graduate School of Theology in Kenya. Although he said no to France, he traveled to the United States and received his PhD in Missiology from Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

We don't always know what is coming as we follow God's lead. It is not always easy, but the Gospel equips us to follow without fear.

The best way to know the right way to live is to look to Jesus, who wasn't only our example but also our Savior. He followed all the commandments perfectly: the two, the ten, and even the 613.

As a Christian, looking to the cross is the right way for you to live. There, you will see God's amazing and undeserved sacrifice for you. In response to his gift of grace, you, like Ebenezer, can trust God to direct and lead you through every big and little decision.

Scripture Challenge

The verses for today were Matthew 22:37-39. Read the entire chapter of Matthew 22. In Matthew 22, Jesus tells a story about a king who invites people to his son's wedding, but many refuse to come. The king invites others, even people from the streets, to fill the seats. Then, some religious leaders try to trick Jesus by asking tough questions. They asked if people should pay taxes to the Roman emperor, and Jesus replied that they should give Caesar what was his and to God what was God's. Another group asks about the afterlife, but Jesus shows them they don't understand it correctly. Finally, Jesus explains that the most important commandments are to love God and love others.

1. You learned that the religious teachers, the Pharisees and Sadducees, were trying to trick Jesus. What were some of the other questions they were trying to stump Jesus with?
2. Why do you think some people refused the king's invitation to the wedding in Jesus' story?
3. Why do you think Jesus said loving God and loving others are the most important commandments?
4. Can you identify with any of the excuses for not attending the wedding?



DAY 6: GOD'S TEACHING

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LOVE AND BE LOVED?

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

What's Love Got To Do With It?

After the seminary, Zach's first call was to Mt. Dora, FL, thirty minutes from Disney World in Orlando. For a couple of years, we purchased season passes, visited the parks, rode the rides, and saw the shows. No matter what you may feel about Disney, I (Allison) can attest that they have fantastic customer service! Workers will go above and beyond to ensure a wonderful experience, giving you high fives and helping you find where you are going.

One afternoon at the parks, we lost our son's water bottle. A Disney worker helped us look for it, and when it was nowhere to be found, guided us to a store where we

could purchase another even better one, complete with a spray bottle and electric fan attached to it. Our son turned to us and said, “Everyone at Disney loves us!”

While the worker was very friendly and helpful, I couldn’t help seeing that the “love” my son was so impressed with came with a hefty price tag. The season tickets were hundreds of dollars, parking was twenty-five dollars a day, and that neat water bottle with the spray nozzle? That was thirty dollars.

Does Disney love us? Is it love if you have to pay for it? It’s not just Disney’s love that’s transactional. We do the same thing.

- We will stay loyal to that brand as long as it holds up its quality.
- We keep our gym membership as long as it meets our needs.
- We remain friends with that person as long as they make us feel good about ourselves and hanging out is convenient.

As soon as something changes or gets hard, we say, “See ya later, Alligator!” The bottom line is this: **A lot of love today seems transactional.**

Because of that, I often have difficulty understanding the kind of love that Jesus offers me. The Bible shows us a love that is so different from what we are used to. Although I default to transactional “Disney” love, what I long for, deep down, is unconditional love.

An Unconditional Promise

This is the love God has for us. From the very beginning, he intended his relationship with us to be permanent and not transactional. He set up a covenant with Adam, Abraham, and the Israelite people, which has stood through history until you and me today. This covenant is a highly iron-clad promise that we don’t even have a great example of in modern times. But the people of the Bible understood it.

If you lived at the time of Abraham, when you made a covenant with someone, you were promising to do what you say no matter what, even to death. To demonstrate your commitment, you took an animal, cut it in two, and walked between those pieces. You vowed that you would keep that promise even if it killed you. The dead animal symbolized your own demise if you broke your promise.

God's covenant to Abraham was that he would offer protection and land to Abraham and his descendants (God's end of the bargain), but they must follow the path of God (human's end of the bargain). Read what God said below:

*AND I WILL ESTABLISH MY COVENANT BETWEEN ME AND YOU AND
YOUR OFFSPRING AFTER YOU THROUGHOUT THEIR GENERATIONS
FOR AN EVERLASTING COVENANT, TO BE GOD TO YOU AND TO
YOUR OFFSPRING AFTER YOU.*

GENESIS 17:7

That might sound transactional at first. And if that was the case, humans broke this covenant quickly. The Israelites didn't follow the path of God perfectly and failed to keep their end of the deal. No one could keep up their end of the bargain: not Abraham, not the Israelites, and not you and me. According to the covenant, any failure should have resulted in getting cut in two, like the animal in the covenant. YIKES!

Can't Help Falling In Love

God found a way to keep his end of the bargain even when we couldn't. To keep that promise, God had to be "cut in two." **Dying was the only way Jesus could love us and keep us safe.**

Do you want to know what love is? **God the Father loved you so much that he offered himself up as a sacrifice on the cross.** When he rose, he didn't just defeat death; he changed your life forever. You can't help falling in love with a God like that!

The Bible will tell you that God's love:

- Frees you up to try something and fail.
- Spurs you on to have new experiences.
- Encourages you to keep going even when you are not perfect at something.
- Says you're worth it even when others are better.
- Declares that you are valuable and wanted, not because of a transaction, but simply because of the Father's love.

LBT Missionary Susan Kaiser described her relationship with the Bible this way,

“For me, I’d say the Bible is totally your center. It’s where you look when you need guidance. It’s where you look when you want to remember how much God loves you, and where you look when you need promises of his strength and provision.” ¹⁴

Disney may be fun, but it will only love you as much as you pay for it. Jesus is the only one who can love you unconditionally. Read our Scripture for today again below, this time replacing the word “love” with the name of Jesus.

Jesus is patient, Jesus is kind. Jesus does not envy, Jesus does not boast, Jesus is not proud. Jesus does not dishonor others, Jesus is not self-seeking, Jesus is not easily angered, Jesus keeps no record of wrongs. Jesus does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. Jesus always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

What a way to be loved! This is the kind of covenant love you walk in every day. And this love of God changes how you love others. When you are loved unconditionally, you can love others better, too.

14. From *Essentially Translatable*: Great is His Faithfulness | Dr. Jim and Susan Kaiser, Oct 2, 2020
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/essentially-translatable/id1508168069?i=1000493343008>
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Scripture Challenge

Today, you read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Read all of 1 Corinthians 13. This chapter is part of a letter written by Paul to the Corinthians, where he addresses issues within the church related to spiritual gifts, divisions, and moral behavior. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul talks about the various spiritual gifts given to believers and how they should function together within the body of Christ. However, he transitions in chapter 13 to emphasize that these special gifts are meaningless without love first.

1. This chapter is not just about romantic love but is about the love that is from God. How is that kind of love different from the world's kind of love?
2. What does Paul say will result from spiritual gifts like tongues and prophecy if we don't have love?
3. What will last between faith, hope, and love? Why is love the thing that will last beyond faith and hope; aren't those good too?



DAY 7: GOD'S TEACHING

WHAT IS FAIR?

ISAIAH 1:17

Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

The 2024 *State of the Bible* report released by the American Bible Society links people who are engaged with their Bible with a greater interest in and activity in prosocial behaviors. Check out the chart below.

IMPORTANCE OF PRO-SOCIAL BEHAVIORS BY SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

Percent agreeing strongly / and disagreeing at any level

Pro-Social Behaviors	Bible Disengaged	Movable Middle	Scripture Engaged
Welcome immigrants	34% / 25%	17% / 21%	33% / 13%
Befriend those of other races	33% / 13%	31% / 13%	55% / 7%
Befriend those of other religions	41% / 15%	31% / 12%	46% / 8%
Care for those in prison	19% / 40%	18% / 22%	40% / 9%
Advocate for the oppressed	37% / 13%	29% / 11%	53% / 5%

15

15. https://1s712.americanbible.org/state-of-the-bible/stateofthebible/State_of_the_bible-2024.pdf

If we want to show the world a representation of Jesus who cares for others, such as prisoners, immigrants, and those of a different race, it begins with reading our Bibles. In it, you will read God's clear message of how justice is played out in our world. One example is God's message to the people of Israel through the prophet Isaiah. They had gotten themselves into a bad situation, and God made it clear that injustice contributed to their mess.

Going From Bad to Worse

In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah had his hands full of people calling "unfair!" The Israelites were split down the middle, unable to stay united as one kingdom. The Northern and Southern Kingdoms had a series of really bad rulers, but it wasn't just their fault. The people were also selfish, lazy, and greedy. As a nation, Israel was weak and vulnerable, and the surrounding foreign empires eyed them like fresh meat. Even though they ignored God's commands, they still didn't want to be taken over by the enemy.

Unfortunately, that's just what happened. During Isaiah's lifetime, Assyria took over the Northern Kingdom, and the prophet Isaiah could do nothing but watch. It's one thing to warn people of a coming destruction; it's another to sit and watch everything you warned about come true. Being an ancient prophet was not an easy gig!

Back on Track

Isaiah wrote his book to an audience of selfish leaders and lazy and greedy people, warning them there would be severe consequences. One major problem was that the people didn't care about justice; they just grabbed the best for themselves and neglected the needy. A central theme of the book of Isaiah is justice from God's perspective, and we can learn a lot of wisdom from Isaiah's message. The verse for today is Isaiah 1:17. Read it again below.

*LEARN TO DO GOOD; SEEK JUSTICE, CORRECT OPPRESSION;
BRING JUSTICE TO THE FATHERLESS, PLEAD THE WIDOW'S CAUSE.*

Isaiah spoke on behalf of God and gave simple, plain instructions on how people could get things back on track. Grab a pen and go back to the verse above, numbering the five action steps he listed for getting back on track.

For God, justice involves actively protecting and advocating for society's most vulnerable. Avoiding wrongdoing, following daily religious habits, and attending church is not enough. Justice begins with supporting and uplifting those in need.

God is more interested in compassion for others than going-through-the-motion rituals. If you jump a few verses earlier, God details his feelings about religious practices. Read those below,

*YOUR NEW MOONS AND YOUR APPOINTED FEASTS MY SOUL HATES;
THEY HAVE BECOME A BURDEN TO ME; I AM WEARY OF BEARING
THEM. WHEN YOU SPREAD OUT YOUR HANDS, I WILL HIDE MY EYES
FROM YOU; EVEN THOUGH YOU MAKE MANY PRAYERS, I WILL NOT
LISTEN; YOUR HANDS ARE FULL OF BLOOD. WASH YOURSELVES;
MAKE YOURSELVES CLEAN. REMOVE THE EVIL OF YOUR DEEDS FROM
BEFORE MY EYES; CEASE TO DO EVIL,*

ISAIAH 1:14-16

This is hard to read. Is God hiding his eyes and not listening when people pray? Do we have to wash ourselves from sin? Can we make ourselves clean? It's not easy reading verses like this, but God can't just gloss over sin. When we go through the motions at church and say we are Christians but don't show it in our hearts, that kind of action is detestable to God. But God's harsh response to sin is precisely what we deserve.

White As Snow

God's firm message against sin doesn't end with harsh consequences. After some hard-to-swallow truths about how God sees us and our two-faced actions, a comforting verse comes next in the same chapter. Is it familiar? Read Isaiah 1:18 below:

"COME NOW, LET US SETTLE THE MATTER,"

SAYS THE LORD.

"THOUGH YOUR SINS ARE LIKE SCARLET,

*THEY SHALL BE AS WHITE AS SNOW;
THOUGH THEY ARE RED AS CRIMSON,
THEY SHALL BE LIKE WOOL.*

What a striking picture of grace! Although the Israelites messed up and did not act justly, God called them to repentance. Justice doesn't begin with us trying harder, washing ourselves, and doing good to earn salvation. Revelation 7:14b tells us exactly how we have gotten white again after being so stained.

*THEY HAVE WASHED THEIR ROBES AND MADE THEM WHITE IN THE
BLOOD OF THE LAMB.*

Mercy began with God reaching out to you in your mess and making you clean. Jesus died and rose for your sins. In response, you are called to repentance, to turn away from sinful, selfish behavior.

As we saw in the table at the beginning, one act of repentance you can do is read the Bible. Making Bible reading a habit might actually make you a more just person!

Justice + Fairness in Community

You cannot practice fairness and justice by yourself. Justice is all about humans interacting with others. You are not meant to be alone. You are made to be in community with others, bringing God's love in different ways, like working towards justice.

Missionaries and Bible translators do a lot more than just translation work. One way they bring Jesus to a community is to work on behalf of those who are struggling. They will spend much of their time helping people get adequate healthcare, educating them on nutrition, or repairing broken relationships. This is precisely what Jesus did as well.

Jesus committed to communities of people to bring justice. Read about the four communities Jesus had below and think about the communities you are a part of and how you can bring justice right where you are. ¹⁶

16. 15 Zehnder, Zach. Being Challenge. 2020. Red Letter Living, LLC.

The 500: In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul recounts the resurrection story of Jesus, and in verse 6, he says this:

*“HE APPEARED TO MORE THAN FIVE HUNDRED OF THE BROTHERS
AND SISTERS AT THE SAME TIME.”*

There were times in Jesus’ life when he gathered with a large group, a large community, of more than five hundred people.

Sometimes, you will be in a community of hundreds of people, such as your church, work, school or even city.

The 72: Zooming closer, you can see a smaller group for Jesus. Luke 10:1 says, *“The Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two-by-two ahead of him to every town and place where he is about to go.”* This is still a large group of people, but the group of seventy-two got more intentional time with Jesus than the five hundred. For you, this might be a workplace, a neighborhood group, or a volunteer organization.

The 12: Jesus committed to twelve disciples early on in His ministry. The twelve got much more time with Jesus than the 72. Many times in Scripture, it’s recorded that Jesus takes the twelve to the side. He usually did this to explain his sermons or parables in even greater detail. He even gave greater detail to the twelve of how he would suffer and die for the sins of all people in the Last Supper, an event recorded in all 4 of the Gospels. This could be your extended family, your small group, or your _____.

The 3: Finally, the inner three. For Jesus, this was Peter, James, and John. In Matthew’s Gospel, there are three different stories of Jesus taking those three separately. They had even more access to Jesus. He invited them into the room where he raised Jairus’ daughter from death in Matthew 9. They had the experience of being on a mountain to see Jesus transfigured before them in Matthew 17. They were asked to accompany Jesus to pray for strength shortly before he died in Matthew 26. Your three might include your spouse, children, parents, or best friends.

In conclusion, what is justice? Justice is getting what you deserve. The good news is this: God did not act justly towards you. Instead, he showed mercy by dying on the cross for all sins. Since you have received that gift, God’s Word transforms your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, equipping you to live justly. Your community is the best place to put that love into action!

Scripture Challenge

You read Isaiah 1:17. Read the entire first chapter of Isaiah. In Isaiah 1, God's relationship with the people of Israel is broken because they've turned away from him. Even though they still make sacrifices and go through the motions of worship, their hearts aren't in it. God says their actions are sinful, and he is tired of their empty rituals. He wants them to stop doing wrong, seek justice, and care for the poor and needy. God offers them a chance to change and be forgiven, but they'll face punishment for their sins if they refuse. Even though the Israelites could not live up to God's standards, he promised a Savior who would be their substitute. That Savior would be Jesus.

1. Identify some of the problems God has with the Israelites' behavior.
2. Identify the promises God makes to his people. (vs. 26-27)
3. How do the harsher words from God about sin bring comfort to God's people?
4. Isaiah 1:17 gives specific instructions about how to restore justice. Pick one of these and reflect on specific ways you can pursue it.



DAY 8: GOD'S TEACHING

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER DEATH?

JOHN 11:25

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;"

A Tragedy Turned To Testimony

God has a grander idea for our lives than just pursuing a long, happy, and healthy life. Nowhere does this hit home more than in the story below about the founder of LBT.

While serving as a missionary in Nigeria, Rev. Morris Watkins faced the worst tragedy any parent could imagine. His youngest daughter, Mary Jane, fell ill and passed away. This tragedy was awful and seemed horrible and unfair. Why should a family who had dedicated their life to serving God and others lose their little girl? A loss like this is never forgotten, but Rev. Watkins never gave up on Bible translation work. In memory of his daughter, he fought to ensure that others could continue his passionate work: making the Bible accessible to people in their native languages.

Sickness is a real potential threat that all missionary families recognize. As a missionary kid growing up in Africa, I am amazed when I look back at all the danger

that surrounded us. I was oblivious to it as a kid. Disease and death can be so much closer in foreign countries than here in the United States.

While living in Africa, my parents kept a tally sheet for every snake and scorpion we found in the house. After reaching two hundred, they stopped keeping track. They didn't want to know anymore. It filled them with fear. During our time in Africa, both my Dad and sister were stung by scorpions. Miraculously, none of us were ever bitten by a venomous snake. Besides the snakes and scorpions, disease was also a dangerous risk. Village playmates of mine got sick and died. My siblings and I often drank unfiltered water while visiting the village and had to be treated for worms and stomach bacteria. We were exposed to unvaccinated children and had to take anti-malarial medication every week. Did those dangers stop my parents from following God's call? Not at all. God's calling is not always easy or safe, but I promise it's always good.

During a horrible tragedy, the Bible gave Rev. Watkins hope. He could not imagine going through life without it and knew how hard it was for many people in Africa. Almost every person had lost someone they loved. He could not keep people from experiencing loss and sadness, but he could give them the hope of God through the Bible. He wanted people to hear in their language that even if they wouldn't have a long, happy, and healthy life here on earth, an eternal, whole, and perfect life awaited them in heaven!

God Works in Tragedy

Rev. Watkins was one of a group of pastors who established Lutheran Bible Translators (LBT) in 1964. They created the organization to focus specifically on translating the Bible into the heart language, or common language, of people groups who did not have access to it.

His work has inspired many others in the field of Bible translation, and his contributions are remembered as pivotal in the history of modern missionary work and linguistic translation efforts.

God works through the sad and tragic times in our lives. Our verse for today came at a time when all seemed lost for the people Jesus loved. Martha, a follower of Jesus, had lost her brother Lazarus. He had been dead for four days, and although Martha asked Jesus to come and heal him when he was sick, Jesus never came. Lazarus died. When Jesus finally showed up, Martha felt it was too late. To her, death was the final blow.

“JESUS SAID TO HER, ‘I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE. THE ONE WHO BELIEVES IN ME WILL LIVE, EVEN THOUGH THEY DIE;’”

(JOHN 11:25, NIV)

These were hope-filled words, but they didn’t make sense to Martha. Her brother was dead, and hearing that she would see him in heaven someday didn’t make her grief any less. She didn’t understand who Jesus was and his power over death.

Jesus has the authority to say that someone can live even though they died because he died and rose again. Only God can say paradoxical things like this. Jesus has power over death. When he said this to Martha, he was foreshadowing His resurrection.

Because of Jesus, even though a little girl died in Africa over 60 years ago, she’s more alive than ever in heaven today. Jesus’s claim of being the resurrection and the life answers the question of what happens after death. Our physical death is not the end but rather the beginning of a new life through faith in Jesus. Believers in him are promised a new body and eternal life.

- Even when life is short, God will make it eternal.
- Even when life is sad and broken, God will make it whole.
- Even when life is full of sickness and our bodies don’t work as they should, God promises us bodies without suffering and imperfections.

Jesus performed an incredible miracle by raising Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus had been dead for four days. When Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb, he showed the world that He has authority over death and that resurrection is possible through him. This power over death shows that he is the true God, and he offers eternal life for every believer.

A Legacy and Hope

Rev. Watkins’ legacy lives on through the ongoing work of *Lutheran Bible Translators*. His vision and dedication have led to translating the Bible into numerous languages, impacting countless lives by making the Scriptures accessible to people in their native tongues. LBT remains a vital organization in the global effort to bring the Bible to every language group. God promises to work all things for good, even death. This is a promise you can take with you as you experience loss and tragedy. I don’t know

what hard things have happened in your life, but I can promise that God will work all things out for good. It is not something we can understand, but it is something we can trust and believe in. Our faith gives us hope over hard things and even death.

Oxford Academy did a study on religious people vs. those who claim to be non-religious and found that their fear of death was much less. **Individuals who are consistently high in religiousness fear death the least** because they construe death as personally meaningful and derive additional comfort from the prospect of being reunited after death with people who were close to them.¹⁷

Mary Jane Watkin's death was not in vain, just like your suffering is not in vain. The pain and suffering you go through are not wasted because you have hope for eternal life with God in heaven.

Scripture Challenge

Today, you studied John 11:25. Read all of John chapter 11. As you read in the devotional for today, Jesus' friend Lazarus gets very sick, and his sisters, Mary and Martha, sent for Jesus to help. But Jesus waited a few days before going to them, and by the time he arrived, Lazarus had already died. This seemed so tragic and unnecessary! Martha told Jesus that Lazarus wouldn't have died if he had been there. After he entered into her pain by crying himself, Jesus promised her that Lazarus would rise again. Then Jesus rose Lazarus from the dead. This miracle proved that Jesus had power over death and caused many people to believe in him, but it also made the religious leaders want to kill him even more.

Answer the questions below:

1. Why did Jesus purposefully put off going to Lazarus when he was sick?
2. Jesus cried with the two women, even though he knew he was raising Lazarus a few minutes later. Why do you think he did that? What comfort does that give you in hard times?
3. The miracle created a polarizing response to Jesus. Many believed in Jesus, but it caused another wave of feelings. What was the opposite reaction?

17. The Journals of Gerontology: Series B, Volume 60, Issue 4, July 2005, Pages P207-P214, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/60.4.P207>



DAY 9: SERMON #2

REBUKING THE LIES WITH GOD'S TRUTH

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.



DAY 10: REBUKE THE LIE

“YOU WILL NOT SURELY DIE.” (MINIMIZE SIN’S CONSEQUENCES)

GENESIS 3:4

“You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman.

The Denial of Death

I (Allison) remember the first time I realized that I was actually going to die someday. After battling dizziness and vertigo for almost a year, I went to see a hematologist in 2019. Lots and lots of blood work later, I received my diagnosis: I have a condition called MGUS (monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined substance). A malformed protein exists in my blood that should not be there. If too much of it forms, it will crowd out the good proteins that fight off disease. You probably have heard of a pre-diabetic or a precancerous condition. Well, I have a pre-condition too. MGUS is pre-multiple myeloma or pre-leukemia (both of which are blood cancers).

There is nothing I can do to reverse MGUS or eliminate it. Every year, my chances of it progressing and developing into those incurable diseases increase by 1%. I was

thirty-seven at the initial diagnosis, and the doctor was surprised. They don't usually see this in young people. (I was the youngest in the waiting room by thirty years!) I can do nothing except yearly bloodwork to monitor and see how it progresses.

I know we all hear that we are going to die someday, but until then, I guess I lived in denial of it, or at least, it was never something I considered about myself. For the first time, I had to think through my life: the time that I had left, what I wanted to do with it, and what was coming after death.

The denial of death is a universal problem. In the seventies, writer and atheist Ernest Becker won the Pulitzer Prize for writing about it. In his famous book, *The Denial of Death*, Becker wrote that humanity's biggest problem in this world is that we are all terrified of death. So, we deny its existence in order to escape into a feeling of immortality.¹⁸ That denial of death is precisely what Satan was after when Eve told the first lie documented in the Bible. It also is our verse for today.

Spiritual Vs. Physical Death

In Genesis 3, all was going well for Adam and Eve. They had full access to God, a beautiful world, and fulfilling work. So, when the serpent came along, he deceived Eve into eating the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil by telling her a lie.

“YOU WILL NOT CERTAINLY DIE,” THE SERPENT SAID TO THE WOMAN

(GENESIS 3:4)

Satan fooled Eve and claimed that God's warning was all a sham. Eating the fruit would not lead to death. But Satan's words were a twisted half-truth. Eve did not die instantly, like Snow White when she ate the apple. Instead, death and decay quietly entered the world as a direct result of their disobedience, fulfilling God's original warning. Every person would now die as a result of sin.

Now, it is true that neither Adam nor Eve dropped dead when they bit the fruit. But they experienced a spiritual death—a separation from God—that eventually became a physical death reality for them and all humanity.

18. Becker, E. (1973). *The Denial Of Death*. Profile Books Ltd. (Original work published 1973)

It's pretty easy to deny death when it comes slowly. As I was buzzing along in my thirties with two elementary school boys and helping Zach with a busy church plant, I didn't have time to think about my mortality. I was too busy trying to keep my kids alive! But whether you deny it or not, death is coming for all of us. That death is a result of humanity's sin in the world, including yours. Sometimes, death comes so quietly that you don't even think about it until you find yourself in a hospital room in a scratchy paper gown and hear that you have something wrong with you with no cure.

Satan downplays the consequences of sin, making it seem harmless. He wants you to believe that you will not die or, in a spiritual sense, that disobedience to God will not have consequences. Why would he want to do that?

1. To fool you.

Satan wanted Eve to disobey God's command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Today, Satan wants you to get distracted by every shiny new toy, every minor irritation, and every annoying person. By saying she wouldn't die, Satan made the forbidden fruit seem less dangerous and more appealing to Eve. By telling you there are no consequences, sin is much more tempting. Here's a soul-searching question: what sin would you consider doing if you absolutely 100% would not get caught and nobody would get hurt?

2. To plant seeds of doubt in your heart.

Satan questioned God's warning by suggesting that eating the fruit would make Eve wise, like God. This made Eve doubt what God had told her. When we doubt God's goodness, we begin feeling like God's holding out on us. (We will talk more about that on Day Twelve.) When you stop trusting that God has the best plans for you, you try to make the best happen for yourself.

3. To bring disobedience against God.

The serpent's goal was to lead both Eve and Adam into disobedience. By convincing them that the consequences were not as severe as God said, the serpent aimed to break their trust in God. When you disobey, it pulls you further away. That is all Satan wants for you: to separate you from God. Then, you are an easy target to destroy.

*THE THIEF COMES ONLY TO STEAL AND KILL AND DESTROY; I HAVE COME
THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE AND HAVE IT TO THE FULL.*

JOHN 10:10

4. **To get you comfortable with evil and sin.**

The serpent's deception led to the first sin in the Bible by Eve, but each one of us makes the same decision in our lives. No one wakes up one day and decides to be a thief, a child trafficker, or a murderer. Those things result from thousands of tiny actions and decisions like feeding hate in your heart, shoplifting here or there, or viewing things you should not. Once you get comfortable with the little sins, the big sins are easier to commit until, one day, you do something you never, in your wildest dreams, intended to do.

Your Sin Is a Big Deal, But Jesus Is a Bigger Deal

Romans 6:23 says, *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

As Romans says, the wages of sin is death. **Your sin is a big deal, but the cross is a bigger deal.** God sent his son Jesus to die on the cross and pay that debt of sin. When Jesus rose from the dead, God gave you the undeserved, free gift of eternal life. Even though, like me, you will die someday, you have eternal life in Jesus. This truth does three incredible things in our lives:

1. **Reveals our need to be saved.**

When I see that death is the consequence of sin, I am also aware of how much I need to be saved by something outside of myself.

2. **Offers hope through Jesus**

Eternal life is the best you will ever get, and that is what Jesus won for you on the cross. This gift gives us hope and assurance of freedom from accumulating debt.

3. **Encourages faith and gratitude.**

Faith means a lot more to me after my diagnosis. I am so grateful for God's promise that death and sickness are not the end. His promises are the words I cling to when I become afraid or nervous.

My test results have remained steady and unchanged since my diagnosis four years ago. Most days, I feel fine, and life goes on except for a yearly blood test and examination. But the diagnosis has really changed my life for the better. I stress less

about little setbacks in life. I am more thankful for my good days and don't feel guilty about lying on the couch when needed. My diagnosis has brought me closer to God and more hopeful for the future and heaven.

I also joined a Facebook group with other people who also have MGUS. It has allowed me to share some hope when members are nervous or anxious about an upcoming test or the fresh diagnosis of a loved one. Even though it's all online, and some are anonymous, I can share my hope in Jesus and how it has helped me have hope and not be afraid. "We are all pre-something," I wrote to one scared individual. "Some of us just have the privilege of knowing what our 'pre-' is. Knowing that there is more than just this short life makes me excited for heaven."

Sin has consequences, and we will all die someday. But you can count on God's gift of eternal life being yours through Jesus. **The truth you can count on is that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.**

Scripture Challenge

We looked at Satan's lie to Eve in Genesis 3:4. Read all of Genesis 3. Genesis 3 is a pivotal moment of humanity's disobedience to God, often called "The Fall." In the idyllic setting of the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve are given a direct command from God to abstain from eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. However, the serpent persuades Eve that eating the fruit will make them like God. Eve eats the fruit and shares it with Adam, which awakens their awareness of their nakedness and shame. Their disobedience results in God expelling them from Eden.

1. Can you think of a time when you had to really think about your death?
2. Why do you think it is easy for us to forget that our life here on earth is temporary?
3. What tricks did the serpent use to deceive Eve, and how can you recognize and resist similar tricks Satan uses in your life?



DAY 11: REBUKE THE LIE

“YOU CAN BE LIKE GOD” (PRIDE AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY)

ISAIAH 45:5

I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God.

Work Hard, Play Hard

Rest was always something I thought I had to earn. A poster at the gym where I work out confirmed those feelings. It said:

NO REST IS WORTH ANYTHING EXCEPT THE REST TIME THAT IS EARNED.

The poster is intended to have a motivational message. I am not against the message regarding workouts. The problem is that the message didn't stop at the gym doors. It became the slogan of my life.

Americans love self-sufficiency. We also love a job well done and being proud of it. “Work Before Play” or “Work Hard, Play Hard” are popular mantras. This idea of earning your keep and being the master of your world is part of our history, from the

pilgrims to the brave settlers going West. Self-reliance kept our ancestors alive, but self-reliance still permeates our society today. The problem is in all of this can-do attitude of self-reliance, we've forgotten how reliant they (and we!) are on God.

Fancy Car Rewards

A modern example is the Lexus luxury car. Their slogan, "The Pursuit of Perfection," is accompanied by ads highlighting that success is achieved through hard work and that a fancy car rewards that success! In one of their campaigns, the ideal hard-working businessman is shown. He is the picture of dedication: working late nights, relentlessly pursuing his goals. Then, when he finally purchases his Lexus and drives it off the lot, it symbolizes reaching the pinnacle of his personal and professional success. In the ad, the Lexus is no longer about getting from Point A to Point B; it is about earning achievements and the result of hard work. This car symbolizes enjoying the fruits of labor in style and comfort. I'm not coming after Lexus drivers at all! I am highlighting the subtle message we fall for and the message that luxury goods ads send: you get what you earn.

I bought that lie without even knowing it. Many of us go through seasons of self-reliance. Mine was in my late twenties and into my early thirties. I thought it was up to me to work hard for what I wanted. What I really wanted was to be in control of my own life. The lie Satan tells us is that we can be like God, relying on our own wisdom and power. After all, doesn't the Bible tell us that in Luke 12:48?

"FROM EVERYONE WHO HAS BEEN GIVEN MUCH, MUCH WILL BE DEMANDED; AND FROM THE ONE WHO HAS BEEN ENTRUSTED WITH MUCH, MUCH MORE WILL BE ASKED."

But I missed the gospel truth of the Word. I took the blessing that Jesus earned and gave me freely and made it the reward for all my hard work. It was all backward in my head.

Juggling All the Balls

With this mentality, we worked like crazy. Zach poured all his time and energy into the church. As a young mom and pastor's wife, I (Allison) felt guilty relaxing or putting my

feet up until the kitchen was clean and toys were picked up. I had to get into the gym every day and work hard. I wouldn't let my kids use devices until they finished their chores and homework. I had to earn rest, and if I didn't feel I deserved it, I couldn't take it. At our church, I was the Children's Director for five years through our biggest years of growth. All the "juggling balls" came crashing down when I got burned out and was advised by a counselor to step away from my Kids Director role at church. I felt lost and disconnected. I couldn't even go to church on Sunday morning. It felt so awkward. *You mean I just come and sit? What will people say?* For so long, I relied too much on my self-sufficiency and pride. I was buying into Satan's lie.

You Can Be Like God

Satan tempted Eve into believing that she could be like God. Genesis 3:5 says,

*"FOR GOD KNOWS THAT WHEN YOU EAT FROM IT YOUR EYES
WILL BE OPENED, AND YOU WILL BE LIKE GOD, KNOWING GOOD
AND EVIL."*

We are still told this lie today: rely on your wisdom and power and take control of your life. What's super sneaky about this is Satan uses good things: our work, providing for our families, money, volunteering, church, our stuff, etc., to trick us into thinking it's by our own ability we have these things. It took me a long time, but I finally learned it was ok to come to church and just sit and listen. **We all need rest; it doesn't always have to be earned.** We aren't made to go 24/7. You can't serve if you haven't been served by and rested in Jesus first. It's no surprise that God knew this inclination of our hearts from the beginning, so Adam's first day off came after he hadn't done a thing.

If you look back at the story of creation, God worked for six days and then rested on the seventh. But Adam and Eve hadn't. They couldn't have. God had just made them on the sixth day. God's seventh day was their first full day. God may have earned that day of rest through all his creation, but they hadn't. So why should Adam and Eve rest on their first day? Because they are not God, they depend on him first for fuel. He ordered creation to have humanity rest first and then work.

This is the same for us. Most days, we pop out of bed, ready to hit the ground running. Enjoyment and rest get what's left. But that can feel like play and even sleep are based on daily productivity. **Having intentional time with God first supplies you with what you need to get through the rest of your life.** To rebuke Satan's lie that we can be like God, use the following Scripture.

Trusting With All Your Heart

"I AM THE LORD, AND THERE IS NO OTHER; APART FROM ME THERE IS NO GOD."

ISAIAH 45:5

The truth of Scripture is that God alone understands how everything is working. Learning to rest shows an understanding of our limits and positions us to practice reliance on God. Your strength and talent will not get you far; you need God's wisdom and power.

TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND LEAN NOT ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING.

PROVERBS 3:5

One way to practice this reliance is to make Sabbath a regular practice. Rest and Sabbath aren't things we earn; they are gifts God instituted for our good. The Sabbath was a built-in time for us to be filled up with God first and work second.

By resting, you are rebuking Satan's lie that it's all up to you. The Bible teaches us that God is the one true ruler over everything. When God says, "I am the Lord," he means it. There is no one else like God, and he has all the power and control over the world. You can trust God because he is in charge, and no person or thing is above him. **You can count on the truth that you are not God, and thank goodness for that!**

Scripture Challenge

Read all of Isaiah 45. In Isaiah 45, God declares he is the only true God with control over everything. God speaks to Cyrus, a powerful ruler, even though he doesn't worship God. God says He has chosen Cyrus to help Israel, showing that God controls all nations and leaders. He describes Himself as the Creator of the world, who brings both light and darkness and has the power to make things happen as He wants. God promises that Israel will be saved and His plan will lead to good things. God also reminds everyone that He is the only true God, and people everywhere will eventually recognize His power and goodness.

1. How many times does God declare "there is no other" in reference to himself?
2. We do not always realize that we are believing the lie that we can be like God. When did you try to take over God's or someone else's role in your life?
3. What does this tell you about how God can use anyone, even those who don't know him, to accomplish his plans?
4. How do these passages encourage you to recognize God's power daily?



DAY 12: REBUKE THE LIE

“GOD WANTS TO KEEP GOOD THINGS FROM YOU” (DISTRUST GOD’S GOODNESS)

MATTHEW 20:13-16

But he answered one of them, “I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?”

Overcoming Unfairness

Abraham¹⁹ grew up in a large family in Ethiopia. Although Abraham’s parents identified as Christians, they also mixed their traditional African animist beliefs with Christianity. This caused a lot of confusion for Abraham. On top of that, the Bible had not been translated into his language yet, so all the sermons he heard and teachings he got

19. Pseudonym used.

were delivered in a language he did not fully understand. Backed by a weak and shaky faith, when Abraham witnessed horrible suffering and political unrest in his country, he was ready to give up on God. *Why are children suffering*, he thought, and *why is there conflict surrounding me if there was a loving God out there*? Unfairness was everywhere he looked.

At age 15, Abraham met a young girl singing about Jesus. After striking up a conversation with her, they began discussing faith. At first, Abraham felt angry and confused. Who was she to talk down to him? But she didn't give up, and he began understanding the good news of Jesus's message. This conversation started Abraham's spiritual journey. He connected with other Christians and read the Bible for the first time. But while God was working new life into Abraham, the tension with his parents was growing. The final blow was when they disowned him because of his new beliefs. In Africa, family is everything. The rejection from his family was the worst thing that could have happened to him. But God was right there with Abraham. A kind German missionary supported him through high school and later helped him attend seminary.

Abraham's faith caused unfair rejection and pain as a young man, but God guided him through it all by providing strong faith mentors. Abraham eventually attended seminary and dedicated many years of his life to Bible translation. What if the thing you think is unfair is actually God working to bring good instead?

“No Fair!”

Adults want things fair, and we do everything possible to make it so. Abraham Lincoln said, *“These men ask for just the same thing: fairness and fairness only. This, so far as in my power, they, and all others, shall have.”*

We believe good things should go to those who earn them; and we blame God when life doesn't work out. Maybe you have said one of these things in a prayer:

“Why are you keeping this promotion from me?”

“What have I done to deserve this sickness?”

“They were so faithful; how could they lose their home?”

The lie Satan tells us is that God wants to keep good things from you. And when we say, “That’s not fair!” we are really saying, “God, you are keeping something good from me!”

What’s interesting is humans don’t start this way.

From Egalitarianism to Meritocratic

Research shows that what we think is fair shifts as we age. Here’s one example demonstrating that. Five hundred schoolchildren worked on a project together as part of a study. After the project was complete, they decided how to divide the earnings. Scientists found that before 5th grade, the kids divided their earnings equally. Everyone got the same amount—the job you did or the length of time you did it really didn’t factor in. Everything was split right down the middle.

However, as children passed 5th grade and older, they became less and less concerned about equality and more focused on fairness or merit. How they divided the earnings changed. They gave more to those who worked harder or longer and less to the smaller jobs. After all, it just made sense. This was the consensus across the board. It wasn’t just the kids working harder or earning more that agreed to this. Those with easier jobs were just as likely to suggest that they should get less.²⁰

It seems as if the idea of fairness—that each gets what they earn—is something we learn. It isn’t instinctive or inherent. As children grew, they changed from egalitarianism (meaning all things are divided equally no matter what) to meritocracy (meaning inequalities regarding differences in achievement are OK). They gave more weight to observable achievements and less to equality when deciding how to divide the money.

The bottom line is this: the older we get, the more we want to decide who deserves what good things. Or the older we get, the less we trust that God always gives what is best. We want to deserve what we earn. Satan uses that mistrust to trick us into thinking that God is keeping from us the good things that we deserve. John Wooden, UCLA basketball coach, was quoted saying, “*Fairness gives all people the treatment they earn and deserve. It doesn’t mean treating everyone alike.*”

20. Rettner, R. (May 2010). Live Science. Retrieved from No Fair! Kids and Adults View Fairness Differently: www.livescience.com/8304-fair-kids-adults-view-fairness-differently.html

So, with everyone thinking that we should decide who gets what, does the Bible agree? What would Jesus say about who gets good things?

Workers in the Vineyard

To help people understand the kingdom of heaven and to demonstrate his view of who deserves what, Jesus told a parable. A landowner offered hired workers one denarius for a day of work and continued to hire people throughout the workday, still offering each worker the same amount of pay. By the end of the day, the workers who had initially agreed to their pay began to grumble. They thought it was unfair that the people working an hour got the same amount they had agreed upon that morning. Read below what Jesus said.

“BUT HE ANSWERED ONE OF THEM, ‘I AM NOT BEING UNFAIR TO YOU, FRIEND. DIDN’T YOU AGREE TO WORK FOR A DENARIUS? TAKE YOUR PAY AND GO. I WANT TO GIVE THE ONE WHO WAS HIRED LAST THE SAME AS I GAVE YOU. DON’T I HAVE THE RIGHT TO DO WHAT I WANT WITH MY OWN MONEY? OR ARE YOU ENVIOUS BECAUSE I AM GENEROUS?’

MATTHEW 20:13-16

Jesus used a parable to teach a truth about the ways of God. The landowner represents God, the vineyard is his world, the denarius is the good things he gives, and the workers in the vineyard are people. Let’s break down the response of the landowner [God] to the workers [people] who called him unfair. We are going to break down his answer into seven parts:

<i>Friend,</i>	Even when confronted, Jesus calls us friends. Any accusation of unfairness is always met with patience, kindness, and love; Jesus welcomes our difficult questions.
<i>I am not being unfair to you.</i>	Jesus does not see egalitarianism (all things divided equally no matter what) as unfairness. In the kingdom of heaven, long, hard work will result in blessing, not excess.

<i>Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go.</i>	Jesus is honest from the beginning about what he has promised us. He will never hide or manipulate. From the beginning, he tells us what it means to be a follower of Jesus and what awaits us. Jesus always comes through on his promises.
<i>I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you.</i>	Jesus reserves the right to give good things as he sees fit. God's blessing is not always directly correlated with our actions. (Praise God!)
<i>Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money?</i>	We don't always have the right to understand why things happen. Because God is sovereign and all-powerful, he can see things you and I cannot. His reasoning is bigger than ours. Because of this, we may not always understand why God gives the way he does.
<i>Or are you envious...?</i>	The root of unfairness has less to do with our actual needs and more with the standard we set when compared to others. Jesus mentioned envy, a feeling aroused by looking at someone else's possessions, qualities, or circumstances and then wanting it or feeling like we are owed that. We can't be envious alone; it always involves looking at others and wanting what they have.
<i>...because I am generous?</i>	The landowner (God) is generous. Throughout the Bible, he demonstrates a readiness to give more than was necessary. He always outgives, pouring out a larger, more plentiful amount than expected. We like this when it works in our favor but get offended by it when it blesses others.

Many unfair things happen in life, and Satan uses those moments to deceive us into thinking that God wants to keep good things from us. It may not be fair that you were overlooked for a promotion, your spouse decided to leave, or your body gained triple

the recommended weight. It's not right that you have to live with that disease, that you have to watch your sister struggle with long-term illness, or that you lost your savings on an unlucky investment. Whatever your "That's not fair!" thing is, you can rebuke Satan's lies using God's Word. It gives us the truth to rebuke Satan's lies.

*"EVERY GOOD AND PERFECT GIFT IS FROM ABOVE, COMING DOWN
FROM THE FATHER OF THE HEAVENLY LIGHTS, WHO DOES NOT
CHANGE LIKE SHIFTING SHADOWS."*

JAMES 1:17

You have been given many wonderful things. When life feels unfair, remember this: **No one knows about unfairness more than Jesus.** When I go to God about an injustice, my prayers can sound like this:

"Jesus, it's not fair! I worked so hard and tried my best. You are so powerful, I know you could work this out so I could get what I want. I want it done my way. I don't trust your way. I tried that and look where it got me. Look what you allowed to happen!"

But then, as I read God's Word, I remember all that happened to Jesus while he was on earth and his comforting promises to me.

"My child, I know what it is to be treated unfairly. I was accused of things I didn't do. I had to endure pain that I didn't deserve. I had to wait for people who hated me. I had to listen to people who lied about me. I healed people who only used me to get better. I forgave people who wanted me dead. I came to people who had forgotten all about me. I died so you could have every good thing of mine: the Father's love, forgiveness, and eternal life."

The truth you can count on is that God gives good gifts to everyone he loves.

Scripture Challenge

You read part of Jesus's parable in Matthew 20:13-16. Read all of Matthew 20. This chapter begins with the parable of the workers in the vineyard. A landowner hires laborers at different times throughout the day but pays them all the same wage. Following this parable, Jesus predicts his own death and resurrection for the third time, emphasizing his mission. It ends with the mother of James and John asking Jesus to grant her sons positions of honor in his kingdom.

1. Why do the workers who started earlier in the day feel it is unfair that everyone gets paid the same?
2. In what ways might God's idea of fairness differ from ours?
3. Have there been times when you felt like something was unfair but later realized it was a gift from God?



DAY 13: REBUKE THE LIE

“YOU ARE NOT GOOD ENOUGH” (ACCUSATION AND GUILT)

ROMANS 8:1

*Therefore, there is now no condemnation
for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

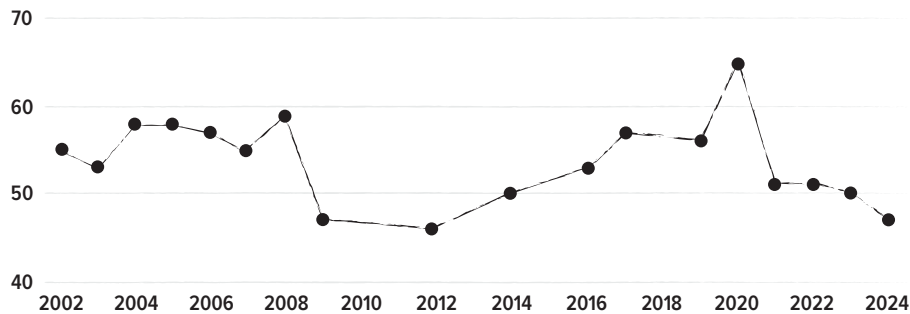
You’re Not Enough

If Satan is trying to tell us we are not good enough, we are evidently believing it. Gallup studies show that at the time this book is being written, Americans are less satisfied with their personal lives than they have been since 2011.

AMERICANS' SATISFACTION WITH PERSONAL LIFE NEAR RECORD LOW

In general, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in your personal life at this time?
Are you very [satisfied/dissatisfied], or just somewhat [satisfied/dissatisfied]?

— % Very satisfied



Percentages in years with multiple readings represent annual averages.

GALLUP

21

If you live with a constant voice saying you are not good enough, you might want to consider whose voice that is and if you really want to listen to it. The Bible tells us that Satan accuses believers, making them feel unworthy of God's love and grace. Read the verse of the day, *Revelation 12:10*, below.

"THEN I HEARD A LOUD VOICE IN HEAVEN SAY: 'NOW HAVE COME THE SALVATION AND THE POWER AND THE KINGDOM OF OUR GOD, AND THE AUTHORITY OF HIS MESSIAH. FOR THE ACCUSER OF OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WHO ACCUSES THEM BEFORE OUR GOD DAY AND NIGHT, HAS BEEN HURLED DOWN.'"

When we feel our life is not measuring up, we can start to feel that we are the problem. Our sense of worth is foundational to our identity and how we live out our purpose. So, if that is attacked, we search for other ways to feel worthy. Three ways our society tells us to do that are:

1. love ourselves,

21. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/610133/less-half-americans-satisfied-own-lives.aspx>

2. improve ourselves,
3. accept ourselves.

But none of these will ever make us feel good enough.

The Myth of Self-Love

One way people try to deal with the feeling that they aren't good enough is to embrace self-love. They think, *If I just love myself enough, then who cares what others think?*

Here are some popular self-love quotes:

"To fall in love with yourself is the first secret to happiness." **Robert Morley**

"You are enough just as you are." **Meghan Markle**

"You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection." **Buddha**

Instagram influencers, bloggers, self-help gurus, and even Christian teachers promise that if we learn to love ourselves, we'll be successful, secure, and complete. But the promise doesn't deliver. Instead of feeling fulfilled, pursuing self-love traps us in an exhausting cycle. But we can't just self-talk the dissatisfaction out of our hearts. It doesn't work. No matter how much you tell yourself that there is nothing wrong with you, even you aren't buying it. You know that something is not right.

The Myth of Self-Reliance

If telling ourselves we are good just the way we are doesn't work, the next step we often attempt is by earning it. In her book *The Mountain Inside You*, Brianna Wiest compares the feeling of unworthiness with a mountain. It's made up of fear, self-doubt, and unresolved pain. She assures her readers that if they can overcome these obstacles, they will discover personal freedom, inner peace, and the fulfillment of their true potential. On the other side is their best self and the life they were meant to live. This lie tells us if we just work hard enough, we can become the person we were always meant to be.

“Dreams don’t work unless you do.” **John C. Maxwell**

“Without hard work, nothing grows but weeds.” **Gordon B. Hinckley**

“The only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary.” **Vidal Sassoon**

As we strive for self-acceptance, we become addicted to self-improvement. Yet in this mindset, people often work hard their whole lives and never feel like they’ve made it.

The Myth of Self-Acceptance

Finally, when working ourselves to death doesn’t help us feel like enough, often the pendulum swings the other way. We stop trying to earn self-worth and let nature take its course. We do nothing at all.

James Norbury is a British author and artist best known for his popular illustrated books featuring *Big Panda and Tiny Dragon*. His work promotes kindness, self-care, and emotional healing - all good things! But at the core of his teaching, all those good things must be earned. He openly shared that studying Buddhism and Eastern philosophy influenced his work. One of his drawings depicts the following scene: In a quiet forest clearing, a large panda sits peacefully between a blossoming cherry tree and a patch of tall grass. Beside the panda, a small dragon looks up with a thoughtful expression.

“Sometimes I think I’m not good enough,” says the tiny dragon.

The panda gently replies, “A cherry tree doesn’t compare itself to other trees—it just blossoms.”

Norbury’s answer to the suspicion that we are not good enough is to look at nature. What will be shall be, and we shouldn’t work against it. Remove all attachments. Don’t feel guilty. Let go. We will never be sad or disappointed if we never want or need anything. But just existing and never needing anything will not do it. That nagging thought that we are not good enough is still around.

What Is God's "Good Enough?"

Satan targets your worth to erode your relationship with God. It's easy to believe you are not good enough when you compare yourself to others. So, how do we answer Satan's accusations that we are not good enough? First, remember what Jesus declared about you. In Christ, you are forgiven and made righteous.

*"THEREFORE, THERE IS NOW NO CONDEMNATION FOR THOSE WHO
ARE IN CHRIST JESUS."*

ROMANS 8:1

Second, you think about yourself less. In his book *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, Tim Keller shares a new way of thinking about self-esteem. He says people fall into two camps: thinking too well about themselves and thinking too poorly about themselves. He says in both extremes, the problem isn't **what, but how much** we think about ourselves.

1. Pride is when I think too highly of myself, believing I am better than others. It's all about me and centers on my accomplishments, abilities, and importance, putting myself above others and, ultimately, God.
2. Self-loathing happens when I think too little of myself, believing I am not good enough or deserving of love and value. It keeps the focus on myself—my flaws, failures, and inadequacies—making me the center of my own negative thoughts and emotions.

In both cases, the focus is all about self. Keller explains how both ways miss the point, saying we spend our lives trying to prove we are important and valuable, like we're in a courtroom trying to win a case. But in Christianity, Jesus has already won the case for us. **Because of what Jesus did, we are loved and accepted before we even try to prove anything.**

Both pride and self-loathing are forms of self-centeredness because they both keep the focus entirely on us. God gives us a humility that shifts the focus away from ourselves. In his Word, he breathes out over and over that our worth comes from God, not from our own achievements or failures. **We find ourselves thinking less about us and more about others.**

The Bible: Our Perfect Center

God's Word is the best teacher. It shows us how sinful we are when we look at God's standards. But it also shows how saved you are when you look at Jesus on the cross. Reading your Bible is the best way to stay balanced in life. LBT missionary Dr. Jim Kaiser describes the Bible as his grounding point. No matter how off-base he gets, it returns him to solid ground.

"You know, the Bible is, for me, is the reference point to what is true and how to evaluate and build other things on in my life. It's what I can come back to and rely on in a world that doubts truth and doubts anything being absolutely true. To me, that's what the Bible is. It's what I can know to be true and know what to be true about God and my relationship with him." ²²

The truth you can count on is that, in Jesus, you aren't just good enough. You are perfect!

Scripture Challenge

You read Romans 8:1 in the devotional today. Now, read all of Romans 8. Romans 8 is a powerful chapter in the Bible that talks about the hope we have as Christians. It begins by saying there is no condemnation for those who follow Christ, meaning believers are not judged for their sins because of Jesus' sacrifice. The chapter explains how the Holy Spirit helps and guides us, giving us strength and comfort. It also reassures us that nothing can separate us from God's love, not troubles, hardships, or even death.

1. The very first verse you read, Romans 8:1, says, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." How does this verse challenge the feeling of not being good enough?
2. How does understanding ourselves as God's children impact our view of our worth?
3. How can the promise that "all things work together for good for those who love God" help us trust God when we feel inadequate or unworthy?

22. From *Essentially Translatable*: Great is His Faithfulness | Dr. Jim and Susan Kaiser, Oct 2, 2020 <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/essentially-translatable/id1508168069?i=1000493343008>
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DAY 14: REBUKE THE LIE

“YOU CAN’T TRUST GOD TO TAKE CARE OF YOU” (FEAR AND WORRY)

MATTHEW 4:4

It is written: “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Living in Fear

Missionaries have an interesting perspective of American culture because they’ve lived in other countries and have other cultures to which they can compare. Dr. Jim and Susan Kaiser, who serve in Ethiopia and Sierra Leone, share how living overseas has helped them see how materialistic we are in the West and how that mindset leads us to count on our “stuff” to rescue us. Read what they said below:

“I think we in the West here tend to be pretty materialistic in our view of life. And people in Africa do have a very real knowledge of Satan’s activity in the

*world. And that's something I think we can learn from. I think another thing is their persistence in the face of adversity. That they often have to live very difficult lives just because they're Christians. They can be outcast from their village or their family and learning how to still hold on to their faith and persevere through that. That's something that we really have not had to face here in the West."*²³

In other words, American churches and members might be rich in material things and knowledge, but we are pretty poor in our understanding of the spiritual world. That lack of understanding makes us a pretty anxious and fearful nation.

A Bundle of Nerves

According to Gallup, many Americans experience worry and fear, especially regarding crime and personal safety.²⁴ As of 2022, 53% of Americans reported being greatly concerned about crime, a rise from prior years, placing it alongside inflation and the economy as top concerns. This increased anxiety comes as cities face rising crime rates, with some locations reporting a significant uptick in homicides since 2020. Concerns about cybercrime, such as identity theft, are even higher, with over 70% of Americans worrying about these issues.²⁵

23. From *Essentially Translatable*: Great is His Faithfulness | Dr. Jim and Susan Kaiser, Oct 2, 2020 <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/essentially-translatable/id1508168069?i=1000493343008>
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24. <https://news.gallup.com/topic/crime.aspx>

25. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/04/24/what-the-data-says-about-crime-in-the-us/>

Category	Percentage of Americans Reporting Fear or Worry
Health (e.g., pandemics, disease, personal health)	60%
Economic Security (e.g., unemployment, inflation, poverty)	55%
Crime and Violence (e.g., shootings, terrorism, domestic violence)	50%
Environmental Issues (e.g., climate change, natural disasters)	45%
Political Instability (e.g., government dysfunction, election concerns)	40%
Social Unrest (e.g., racism, inequality, protests)	35%
Technology and Privacy (e.g., data breaches, AI, cyberattacks)	30%
Relationships and Family (e.g., marital problems, family health)	25%
Personal Safety (e.g., accidents, travel risks)	20%
Future Uncertainty (e.g., general anxiety about the future)	60%

Americans also report high levels of general stress and anxiety. For instance, 65% of people between ages 15 and 49 say they experience stress. Younger people (particularly those under 50) also show higher levels of worry and anger. This trend is partly due to the ongoing media saturation of bad news and increasing societal pressures.

What is sad is that many of the people polled identify as Christians. When we are fearful and worry about the future, we are believing the lies of Satan. The lie we want to rebuke today is the lie that says, “You can’t trust God to take care of you.” Satan uses fear and anxiety to make us doubt God’s goodness. He suggests that God cannot or will not protect us or provide for us. And he often comes to us in our weakest moments the way he tempted Jesus in the desert.

Stones to Bread

In the Scripture reading today, Jesus has been fasting for forty days. The Bible tells us he was led into the wilderness by the Spirit. Forty days is near the limit of how long the human body can go without food, and Jesus was physically very weak. Satan came to Jesus while he was in this feeble state with several temptations. One of these temptations plays explicitly on the idea that God won't provide everything we need. Read what Satan tempts Jesus to do below:

“THE TEMPTER CAME TO HIM AND SAID, ‘IF YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD, TELL THESE STONES TO BECOME BREAD.’”

MATTHEW 4:3

When Satan tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread in the wilderness, Jesus responded by quoting Scripture. He said:

“IT IS WRITTEN: ‘MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT COMES FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD.’”

MATTHEW 4:4

Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, where God taught the Israelites that dependence on him was more important than what they ate.

“HE HUMBLLED YOU, CAUSING YOU TO HUNGER AND THEN FEEDING YOU WITH MANNA, WHICH NEITHER YOU NOR YOUR ANCESTORS HAD KNOWN, TO TEACH YOU THAT MAN DOES NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT COMES FROM THE MOUTH OF THE LORD.

DEUTERONOMY 8:3

Obedience to God's will and spiritual nourishment were far more important to Jesus than satisfying his hunger. We often hear someone saying they are “dying of hunger.” This time, Jesus actually was! But even in this weak state, Jesus rebuked Satan with Scripture, showing that he trusted God's provision. Even though he could make his own bread, he refused.

Our Refuge and Strength

Bread isn't bad! Both being hungry and eating are natural. Jesus knows how important food is to our bodies. God created us to need food and other good things like relationships, beauty, vacations, rest, home, clothing, family, and safety. Needing those things isn't sinful. It's normal to need and want those things. But they have a place. Jesus showed us that trusting God's promises is even more foundational than caring for our physical needs.

We can combat fear and worry about what will happen to us by remembering that spiritual nourishment through God's Word is more lasting than material needs. Jesus memorized Scripture ahead of time so that when the time came to be tempted, all he had to say was what was inside of him. (You'll learn more about this on Day 29.) This was Jesus's response:

"IT IS WRITTEN, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT COMES FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD.'"

When Jesus said, "Man shall not live on bread alone," he relied on God rather than worldly solutions. The same God we trust to care for your spiritual needs can also care for our physical needs. Trusting in God means *all* our spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional needs are handled.

But knowing something and acting on it are two different things. And no matter how hard we try, sometimes sin will get the better of us. In God's Word we read about why Jesus came to earth. He wasn't just trying to give us an example of avoiding temptation, Jesus stepped into our place and faced temptation for us. Jesus said "no" to using his power for himself and instead used it to heal the sick, preach, teach, and ultimately go to the cross for our sins.

Death on the cross should have been Satan's final blow, but on the third day, Jesus rose again! Because of Jesus's death and resurrection, we can trust God's promises when fear arises. God's Word provides wisdom, comfort, and guidance in those times when our physical needs are overwhelming.

Like the Kaisers said, people in other cultures have no problem believing in the spiritual realm. They know it's real and powerful. But they, too, need to understand that Jesus is stronger than any demonic or spiritual oppression. **Jesus replaces fear with faith.**

Here's an exercise to help you handle your anxieties or worries. Write down three things that you feared or worried about as a kid:

Write down three things you feared or worried about as a teen:

Looking back at God's provision helps when we fear or worry about our current situation. Think about how God was in control of these things and how he took care of you. Do you still have those same worries today? I doubt it! Now, write down three things you are currently fearful about:

You can be sure that God is taking care of those things as well.

Invisible Shields

Missionary Alvina Federwitz learned firsthand what happens when you trust God with your life. When war in Liberia exploded, where she and her husband were serving, they were among the few missionaries who remained. Although they often felt uncertain about their future and even fearful for their lives, they stayed committed to their mission.

During Operation Octopus, a particularly dangerous period, they began helping other missionaries evacuate safely. Alvina shared how they moved into an embassy apartment closer to the airport. But the rebels got closer and closer. *Would they even survive this war?* she wondered.

Alvina remembered several occasions when they experienced divine protection, but one in particular is stuck in her mind forever. One day, while walking home from the office, Alvina and her husband encountered rebels armed with heavy machinery—the same rebels who had been involved in the coup. The Federwitzes knew they would not survive a confrontation with the rebels. They were known to kill anyone, any time, for no reason at all. Their time had come. As they continued their walk, knowing their lives could be taken any moment, Alvina and her husband suddenly felt invisible. For

some reason, the rebels walked past them without even noticing they were there. It was a miracle.

Alvina knew without any doubt that God was watching over them and protecting them, even during dangerous times. The challenges they faced ultimately became a catalyst for their work in sustainable Bible ministry.

The verse of the day, Matthew 4:4, reminds us that as strong as our fears or anxieties may be, we can trust God that he knows best and is working everything out for our good. He can even make you invisible to your enemies!

The truth you can count on is God always cares and provides for his children.

Scripture Challenge

You read Matthew 4:4. Now, read all of Matthew 4. This chapter describes the beginning of Jesus' ministry after his baptism. The chapter starts with Jesus being led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit, where he fasts for 40 days and nights. During this time, the devil tempts him three times, trying to make Jesus use his power for selfish reasons, such as turning stones into bread to satisfy his hunger, jumping off the temple to prove his divinity, and worshiping Satan in exchange for worldly kingdoms.

1. How does Jesus respond to the temptations?
2. What can we learn from his responses about handling our own fears and worries?
3. Why do you think we sometimes get more caught up in physical threats when there are a lot of spiritual threats around us?



DAY 15: REBUKE THE LIE

“THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO GOD” (RELATIVISM AND FALSE RELIGION)

JOHN 14:6

*Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

Rain or No Rain?

Dr. Berhanu Ofgaa, the recently retired Lutheran Bible Translators’ Programs Director in Ethiopia, grew up in a home that worshiped and believed in multiple gods, including the God of the Bible. Although his parents attended a Christian church and baptized their children, they still practiced the traditional African religion. Read as he describes what his family grew up believing.

“They worshipped different kinds of spirits. They believed that there are spirits in trees, rivers, and when something beyond their control happens, like the rain,

when the rain stops or natural disasters happen, they prayed to that spirit. The ladies in the village got together and carried the branch of tree, and sang and went to the river, and gave homage to appease that deity.”²⁶

As a child, Ofgaa remembers his parents, along with the entire village, killing animals and shedding blood to spiritual rain deities. They believed that if they could appease the gods, they would, in turn, get what they wanted. So, if they needed rain, they sacrificed to the rain god. Then, when the rains did come, they believed it was a direct result of what they had done. When no rain came, they were convinced they had done something wrong. The control of evil spirits was not limited to nature. Ofgaa recalls what would happen when a spirit would grip his mother.

“They would make a feast, call the village elders and the ladies used to drum and sing in honor of the spirit. Then, while in the midst of that, my mother gets possessed with the evil spirit and loses her mind and acts angry with the spirit. So, at that time, my father called the elders of the village, and they begged and the spirit expressed anger saying that ‘I did this, and I did that, and I killed this person in the family,’ and tells about the misfortune in the family. Then, they begged the spirit and appeased it to slow its anger. Then, the spirit on my mother would say, if you do this or that or kill this animal for him, he would stop doing that. So, that was my pre-Christian practice.”²⁷

Satan deceived Dr. Ofgaa’s village and parents, causing them to think that they could believe in a Christian God and also practice the local African religion. This thinking doesn’t just exist overseas. It’s a belief that’s growing rapidly right in your backyard.

All Roads Lead to Heaven

In the United States, many people also believe there are many ways to get to God.

26. From *Essentially Translatable: Reaching the Unreached* | Dr. Berhanu Ofgaa, Aug 20, 2021
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/essentially-translatable/id1508168069?i=1000532479424>
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27. From *Essentially Translatable: Reaching the Unreached* | Dr. Berhanu Ofgaa, Aug 20, 2021
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/essentially-translatable/id1508168069?i=1000532479424>
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- According to a 2021 Pew Research Center survey, about 72% of Americans believe many religions can lead to eternal life.²⁸
- In a 2018 Gallup poll, 56% of Americans believed that different religions can lead to salvation.²⁹

72% is a shockingly high amount! Sadly, these percentages indicate that a significant portion of the population believes multiple paths can lead to God. The lie that Satan promotes is the idea that all religions lead to God or that there are multiple paths to salvation. As nice as it might seem to tell everyone that they are going to heaven no matter what they believe, it's simply not true.

I Am the Way

The disciples sat with Jesus at the Last Supper, thinking they were having the regular Passover meal with him. They had no clue this would be the last meal they ever shared with him, but Jesus knew. There would be a lot of difficulty ahead, and no one knew that better than Jesus. In the book of John, we have some of Jesus's most comforting and beautiful promises in the middle of a fearful and anxious time. He wanted to comfort and instruct his followers and promise that the Holy Spirit would come and be with them after he died.

Jesus promised that there would be a place for them in heaven and that he would return. Then, the disciple Thomas asked Jesus how to get to where he was going. Thomas wanted to follow wherever Jesus went. The verse for today that you will use to rebuke the lies of Satan was Jesus's response to Thomas's question.

*“JESUS ANSWERED, ‘I AM THE WAY AND THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE.
NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER EXCEPT THROUGH ME.’”*

JOHN 14:6

Jesus reminded the disciples that to know Jesus was to know God the Father because they are the same. When he said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” he declared that there are no other ways to God or heaven except through Jesus.

28. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/11/23/views-on-the-afterlife/>

29. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2008/12/18/many-americans-say-other-faiths-can-lead-to-eternal-life/>

When Jesus came and died on the cross for your sins and rose again, he provided the only way to God. We cannot get to God without his blood. His act of salvation and gift of grace are the only ways we can approach the throne of God and be assured of the place in heaven that Jesus described earlier in John 14.

Salvation is found only in Jesus Christ. God's Word is the weapon against the enemy's lies. Acts 4:12 is another verse you can use to combat Satan's lies. Read it below:

"SALVATION IS FOUND IN NO ONE ELSE, FOR THERE IS NO OTHER NAME UNDER HEAVEN GIVEN TO MANKIND BY WHICH WE MUST BE SAVED."

A Miraculous Healing

Through the Bible, mentors, teachers, and his school, Dr. Berhanu Ofgaa came to believe the truth of Acts 4:12: salvation is found in no one else but Jesus. But what about his family? Read the miraculous story of how his father learned about the love of Jesus.

"One day our father went to farm place and was bitten by a snake. And they carried him home and they asked him for help. And our eldest brother who wouldn't join us, I tried to help them by giving him injection and other medical help he could do. Then they were about to collapse. And at last they said, could you call those children who talk about Jesus? Let me try Jesus or die. Then they called us to pray for him. We didn't know about healing camps or even if this could work. We knelt down under his bed and started praying. Then while people were praying, the whole poison went. And he said, 'Oh, I'm now healed. From today on, no more worship of idol, no more spirit cult or practice.'" [emphasis added]³⁰

God provided physical healing for Dr. Ofgaa's father through praying in the Scriptures. Prayer and the Word also helped his mother learn that Jesus was the true God. Read about her conversion below:

"Our mom didn't join us early when our dad declared that he changed his faith to confess Jesus. She was not happy because the spirit in her didn't let her do

30. From *Essentially Translatable: Reaching the Unreached* | Dr. Berhanu Ofgaa, Aug 20, 2021
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/essentially-translatable/id1508168069?i=1000532479424>
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that. Usually, when we make family prayers, she hides somewhere. She used to hide somewhere, but one day, she accidentally forgot and sat in the middle of us while we were praying. Then, while we were praying and singing, the spirit on her started behaving. And then she fall down from her chair and we prayed for her. The spirit was cast out from her, telling her all about the practices she was doing and how we were forcing her to do them. After she was delivered from the spirit, she also joined us after her days.”³¹

The truth you can count on is that salvation is found only in Jesus Christ alone!

Scripture Challenge

Today, you studied John 14:6. Read all of John 14. This chapter is comforting. It’s Jesus’s last words to his disciples during the Last Supper. He reassures them not to be troubled, telling them that he will prepare a place for them in his Father’s house with many rooms. Jesus emphasizes that he is the way, the truth, and the life and that no one can come to the Father except through him. He encourages them to believe, promising anyone who believes in him will do even greater work.

1. What does it mean to believe in the promise of a special place for us in heaven, especially when other people think there are many ways to find happiness?
2. In John 14:6, Jesus says, “I am the way and the truth and the life.” How does this idea help us understand our faith and how we talk to people who believe in different things?
3. How does having the Holy Spirit with us make us feel more confident about Jesus being the only path to eternal life?

31. From *Essentially Translatable*: Reaching the Unreached | Dr. Berhanu Ofgaa, Aug 20, 2021
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/essentially-translatable/id1508168069?i=1000532479424>
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DAY 16: SERMON #3

ALL SCRIPTURE CORRECTS

1 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.



DAY 17: A CORRECTING COMPASS

THE WORLD IS BROKEN, BUT JESUS IS PUTTING IT BACK TOGETHER

ROMANS 8:20-21

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

Things Fall Apart

In 2021, Zach and I (Allison) moved to Omaha, NE, and bought a house. For the first time in our 17-year marriage, we could afford new furniture, so we allowed our boys to pick out brand-new bed sets and purchased new mattresses, tables, chairs, and couches. Once we arranged everything in the home, it looked pristine, like a magazine.

But then reality hit in the form of a 15-year-old, a 12-year-old, and a new cockapoo puppy. It didn't happen all at once—a pet accident here or a soda spill there. At first,

we could buff out scratches and dings and shampoo the stains. But like the inevitable tide approaching the sandcastle, things began to fall apart. A wrestling match resulted in a permanently broken armrest on our couch, scratch marks showed up on the leather ottoman, and sections of drywall are now indented in the stairwell. How? No one claims to know. (It must be that invisible, destructive houseguest that every home with teenagers has.)

But the truth is, no matter how hard we try, it is bound to happen. Things fall apart. We see this in the world around us, filled with signs of brokenness and decay. We see it in natural disasters, diseases, and relationships. It can feel overwhelming, like everything is crumbling, and we just can't plug all the leaks.

Terrible Times

In this challenge, we will be looking at four different uses of Scripture. So far, we have studied how in 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul tells us that all Scripture is useful for:

- **Teaching**, which gives us an identity and a purpose.
- **Rebuking**, which helps us distinguish between Satan's lies and God's promises.

2 Timothy 3:16 also tells us that all Scripture corrects. In Week 3, we will study six correcting promises of God. How is correcting different from rebuking? The Greek word for correction had a two-fold purpose:

1. It refers to fixing people's wrong beliefs and behaviors
2. It shows what is right.

So, each day, we will look at both our society's wrong beliefs and actions and God's right teaching. To start, let's look at some of our problems. Based on what you see in the media, news, shows, or even your own life, what issues do you notice below? Grab a pen and circle all you recognize.

1. "Me first" mentality
2. Materialism (money is the #1 concern)
3. Believing that enough time, money, and science, can solve all the world's problems

4. Mocking and ridiculing anything to do with faith or religion (God's Word, church, hymns and church music, or religious practices)
5. Disrespecting and disobeying parents
6. "Life owes me something" (ungratefulness)
7. Believing nothing is special, sacred, or holy
8. "Cancel culture" (unwillingness to offer forgiveness for offenses)
9. Complete lack of restraint emotionally, physically, and mentally (alcohol, sex, food, etc...)
10. Rejecting something simply because it's boring, unexciting, or uninteresting
11. Acting brutal, even towards people we care about
12. Betraying someone for personal gain
13. Making quick decisions without any thought to anyone else
14. Inflated self-esteem
15. Eroticism or hedonism (pleasure rules)
16. Pretending to be religious, but not giving God control.
17. Atheism (complete denial of God's existence)

This list is a modern take on Paul's warnings about what Timothy and the church were about to encounter. What he warned about sounds eerily similar to the trouble we see today. Read his list below. Do you see any similarities? (They are even listed in order.)

"BUT MARK THIS: THERE WILL BE TERRIBLE TIMES IN THE LAST DAYS. PEOPLE WILL BE LOVERS OF THEMSELVES, LOVERS OF MONEY, BOASTFUL, PROUD, ABUSIVE, DISOBEDIENT TO THEIR PARENTS, UNGRATEFUL, UNHOLY, WITHOUT LOVE, UNFORGIVING, SLANDEROUS, WITHOUT SELF-CONTROL, BRUTAL, NOT LOVERS OF THE GOOD, TREACHEROUS, RASH, CONCEITED, LOVERS OF PLEASURE RATHER THAN LOVERS OF GOD."

2 TIMOTHY 3:1-4

Yikes! That's quite a lot of destruction rattled off in one sentence. Despite our claim to have it all figured out, Americans are desperate for direction. Even if you were born into a Christian home, you do not live in a bubble. Over time, sin can influence us and permeate our lives. What do we do with this?

God has given us an answer: we turn to his breathed-out Word. **Scripture is a correcting compass.** Like a compass, the Bible shows true north when things fall apart. And I don't know about you, but I need a reorientation when my carefully laid plans, budget, or home fall apart.

Paul's Promise

In a difficult season of things falling apart, it can be hard to listen when people say cliché phrases or pat you on the head and tell you that "this too shall pass."

Oh, really? Would you mind telling me when? Stick a fork in me, I am just about done!

Paul might have painted a rather bleak scene when he listed out the things that would happen in the last times. Difficult things will happen, but they do not have to consume us. Instead, Jesus offers freedom. Read about the liberty that Paul assured the Roman church was coming.

"FOR THE CREATION WAS SUBJECTED TO FRUSTRATION, NOT BY ITS OWN CHOICE, BUT BY THE WILL OF THE ONE WHO SUBJECTED IT, IN HOPE THAT THE CREATION ITSELF WILL BE LIBERATED FROM ITS BONDAGE TO DECAY AND BROUGHT INTO THE FREEDOM AND GLORY OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD."

ROMANS 8:20-21

Creation is in a bondage of decay. That's why new things fall apart, bodies age, and some relationships disintegrate. While there is suffering, God promises that he has a different future for the world, including you. He wants us to trust that what we do is not wasted. Your work, the beauty you create, and the attempts at goodness you do are not lost. Yes, there is hope for a future in heaven. But we can also have hope on earth in the here and now.

N.T. Wright explained it like this:

“What you do in the present –by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, preaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for the justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbor as yourself—will last in God’s future. These activities are not simply ways of making the present life a little less beastly, a little more bearable, until the day when we leave it behind altogether. They are a part of what we may call building for God’s kingdom.”

The good you do during terrible times is not a lost cause. Your work isn’t a waste of time. You might feel like you are stuck right now, but keep going. It’s not all in vain. Paul reminds us that creation will be set free from its bondage of decay. What did he know about bondage? Oh, quite a lot. Paul was beaten severely and put in chains. He suffered for the gospel, and yet he did not give up. (It makes my complaint about scuffs and stains on furniture seem insignificant.)

Hope for the Future

Like our home, the world is currently in a state of brokenness due to sin, but it is not without hope. **Things fall apart, but Jesus is putting it back together.** This truth gives us hope even when life feels challenging. Your struggles, the world’s pain, and the chaos you see around you are temporary. God is in control, and he plans to restore everything to its original beauty and purpose. So, keep painting, praying, walking, baking, singing, dancing, and buffing out those dinks in the furniture! You can trust that God always works for your good, even when things fall apart.

Jesus is your true north. None of your efforts are wasted. He’s guiding you towards his good purpose.

Scripture Challenge

Read the entire chapter of Romans 8. The chapter explains that everyone who believes in Jesus is a child of God and will share in his glory one day. The world is broken because of sin, but God promises to make everything right in the future. No matter what happens, nothing can separate you from God's love.

1. Which person of the Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) leads, intercedes, and helps us according to Paul?
2. What's falling apart in your life right now? How does knowing God has a plan for restoring the world give you hope in tough times?
3. Are there areas in your life where you need to trust that God is working, even in the brokenness?
4. What can you do today to live in hope and share that hope with others around you?



DAY 18: A CORRECTING PROMISE

THE WORLD REFLECTS GOD'S GLORY

PSALM 19:1

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*

God's Beautiful Creation

Have you ever seen a sunset and been overwhelmed by the beauty? Every time you look up at the sky, whether it's a bright sunny day at the beach or a starry night, it's a reminder of God's majesty. **Creation reflects God's majesty and power.** Today, you will continue to study how all Scripture corrects; it adjusts where actions and beliefs have been wrong and shows the right way.

Many nations and tribes have never heard about Jesus, but they still believe in the existence of a god. Why? The incredible nature around us testifies that God is real. **God's correcting promise is that the whole world reflects his glory.**

The Eleventh Sacrifice

Psalm 19:1, the scripture for today, tells us that the skies and the heavens are constantly proclaiming God's glory, showing off the work of his hands. On Day Four, you read what Paul wrote about God's evident power and divine nature on earth. Nature shows us God is real. While a powerful God may be observable through a giant Sequoia tree, truly knowing God as our Father and Savior comes through reading the Bible, which reveals the gospel truth of Jesus's death and resurrection for the sin of the world.

LBT's mission is to make the Bible accessible to those who do not yet have it in the language they understand best. As missionaries have gone out into the world, they have discovered that people already have a seed of the gospel planted in their hearts. This means that while they may believe in a different god, their hearts yearn for the truth of the *real* God. Read what Rev. David Federwitz, a former missionary in Ghana, said below:

*"I believe that every culture and language has what's called redemptive analogies, where there's some things that God in his creation has imprinted, like DNA, into that culture, into that language that allows people to understand the Gospel message in a way that you can't really teach."*³²

God prepares people's hearts long before any missionary ever arrives. Many tribes have stories in their culture that reflect their need for Jesus. Rev. Federwitz gave an example from the Kuwaa people, with whom he grew up as a missionary's kid.

The Kuwaa people have a traditional religious system with ten known sacrifices. However, they always talked about a mysterious eleventh sacrifice they didn't know how to perform. They didn't even know what it required. It was a confusing sacrifice no one understood, yet no one forgot. After LBT completed the New Testament with the Kuwaa people, one of the translators who worked with Rev. Federwitz's dad wrote a paper explaining that this mysterious eleventh sacrifice is Jesus's sacrifice on the cross.

He wrote that unlike the other ten sacrifices that the elders could understand and perform, the eleventh was not something anyone in the community could do. The

32. From Essentially Translatable : Eternity in Their Hearts | Rev. David Federwitz, May 27, 2022
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/eternity-in-their-hearts-rev-david-federwitz/id1508168069?i1000564165384>

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gospel had been planted in their hearts; they knew someone had to sacrifice for them. But who?

We know that this sacrifice was Jesus dying on the cross. In the Kuwaa belief system, this eleventh sacrifice went beyond the people, pointing to a power greater than anything they could ever do. Generations passed down the story of the mysterious eleventh sacrifice for thousands of years. Each generation was told that a sacrifice had to be made for them, but they had no idea what that was or who could do it. The Bible solved the mystery of the eleventh sacrifice for them. Suddenly, it all made sense.

The Breathtaking Sky

Don Richardson's book *Eternity in Their Hearts* contains other stories about people whose cultures had stories that matched the stories of the Bible. One of my favorites is about the Gedeo people of Ethiopia and their belief in Magano, the Creator God.

The Gedeo people lived in a lush, fertile region surrounded by the wonders of nature: green hills, abundant crops, and flowing rivers. They were deeply spiritual, believing that the beauty and order of the natural world were the work of Magano, the "Sky God" who created everything. According to their tradition, Magano was the true God who provided for the needs of all creation. However, the Gedeo also believed they had strayed from Magano and were separated from him. (Does this sound familiar?)

One particular Gedeo man, Warasa Wange, longed to know this god. He would climb a hill to pray to Magano, seeking a deeper connection. During one of these prayer sessions, he had a vision. In his vision, a voice told him that a messenger would soon come to teach him how to worship Magano properly. Warasa went back to prepare the people to receive this new teaching.

Not long after, Christian missionaries arrived in the region. Warasa was eager to meet them, believing they were the messengers he had been waiting for. When the missionaries shared the story of Jesus, Warasa and the Gedeo people were amazed. They recognized the missionaries' teachings as fulfilling their beliefs about Magano. They learned that the Creator had made himself known through Jesus and offered a way to restore the lost relationship.

To the Gedeo people, nature had always testified to the reality of Magano's power and goodness. The beauty of the hills, the land's fertility, and the seasons' order reflected God's care. Hearing the missionaries' messages confirmed their long-held belief that a Creator-God existed and that nature was a constant reminder of his presence. This revelation led many of the Gedeo people to embrace Christianity, seeing it as a completion of their ancient understanding of the divine.

So, if God is evident in nature and each carries a longing for Jesus and a desire for eternity in our hearts, why does the trouble around us so quickly sway us?

God Is Still in Control

A significant number of people today report experiencing high levels of anxiety. According to Barna's research, about 35% of adults in the U.S. have experienced heightened anxiety over the past year. But, research also found that individuals who engage regularly in spiritual practices, such as prayer or reading their Bible, tend to report lower levels of anxiety compared to those who do not. **30% of regular churchgoers feel their faith helps them manage stress and anxiety effectively.**³³

More and more young people, those 25 and under, report struggling with anxiety and depression. 45% of Gen Z adults (ages 18-24) report struggling with mental health challenges, including anxiety. Although being involved in church can help, only 25% of individuals who struggle with anxiety seek support from their church community. The others just don't feel comfortable doing that.

As a church, we need to do a better job of welcoming people and supporting them through challenging times. Our mental health crisis here in the US reminds me of tribes that know there's a real and powerful spiritual force out there, but do not realize that it's Jesus.

Rev. Federwitz shares that listening to people's stories is often the easiest way to learn where the gospel can mean the most to them. Read what he said below.

"If you take time to listen to someone's story, to just take them at face value, I believe that as a Christian, you will be able to find redemptive analogies in someone's life that will help point them to Jesus. And it's not that you have to be like, Oh, I found it, but in the course of just interacting with people and taking

33. <https://www.barna.com/>

*the time to love them for who they are as created beings by God. And if we look at people and not say, Okay, well, they're a non-Christian...No, they're a future Christian. They are God's created beings who He loves as much as He loves us. And we get the chance to be a part of their life, to interact with them, and to be a witness to them of God's love."*³⁴

God Will Show Up for You

When life feels like it's spinning out of control or you wonder what's going on, creation can be a gentle nudge to your heart that God is near. It's a correcting promise—no matter what we go through, our world continually reflects God's power. The same God who breathed out "let there be" breathes out daily promises for us in his Word and cares for us in every situation we face.

Take some time today to listen to someone's story. Where do you see a longing for the gospel love in their life? Then, look around at the world's beauty, and remember that it reflects the greatness and glory of your Creator, Jesus.

Jesus is your true north. He reflects his glory all over the earth and makes his presence evident!

34. From Essentially Translatable : Eternity in Their Hearts | Rev. David Federwitz, May 27, 2022
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/eternity-in-their-hearts-rev-david-federwitz/id1508168069?i1000564165384>

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Scripture Challenge

Read Psalm 19 and answer the questions below. Psalm 19 talks about how the world around us shows how amazing God is. The skies, sun, and all of nature show his glory and power without any words. The psalm talks about how God's laws and instructions are perfect, making us wise and showing us a better way to live. Following God's ways brings joy and is part of God's plan. The psalm ends with a prayer, asking God to forgive our mistakes and help us.

1. How does creation remind you of God's power and presence?
2. Are there moments when you feel overwhelmed by life and need to refocus on God's glory seen in nature?
3. What part of creation most helps you connect with God and his majesty?



DAY 19: A CORRECTING COMPASS

GOD CREATED THE WORLD

GENESIS 1:1

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

The First Compass

This week, we are comparing the Bible to a correcting compass. To understand this analogy, read how we got the compass. Around 2,000 years ago in China, some people discovered a special rock called a lodestone. This rock could attract iron just like a magnet. When the lodestone was carved into a spoon shape and set on a smooth surface, it would spin to point in one direction—south. The Chinese were amazed by this and called it the “south-pointing spoon” because it helped them navigate.

As time passed, people learned that if you made a needle out of metal and rubbed it with lodestone, the needle would also become magnetic. But instead of pointing south like the lodestone, it would point north. The needle could then be placed on a small piece of wood and float on water. This discovery was the beginning of the compass we know now.

By the 1100s, Chinese sailors were using the compass to navigate in boats. Before the compass, sailors had to rely on the stars to guide them, which was difficult on cloudy days or stormy nights. With the compass, they could explore farther than ever before. Soon, other parts of the world, including Europe and the Middle East, began using the compass. Explorers and traders everywhere traveled across oceans and discovered new lands. These include Christopher Columbus and Ferdinand Magellan, who were famous world explorers.

A compass was a powerful tool for many in history; much discovery came out of one little tool with one little arrow. Although there are four total directions, there is only one arrow on a compass; and it always points north. You don't need three more arrows showing where the east, south, and west are. **Once you know where north is, you know all the other directions.**

Back to the Beginning

Don't you wish there was a little compass for your life? That when you have to decide something big or small, like, "Do I take this job?" "Do I marry this woman?" "Do I buy this house?" "Do I finalize this deal?" or "Do I pick chocolate or vanilla?" the arrow would show you the right choice? All you would have to do is look down and follow a little needle.

Believe it or not, **you do have a compass for life: the Bible.** All Scripture is useful for correcting our lives. As we have said before, the Greek word for corrections refers to adjusting people's wrong beliefs and behaviors and then showing them what is right.

Like a compass that shows you north, once you know God's direction, you get your bearings. The law shows you where you ought to be going. But despite *knowing* the direction we should go; it often isn't enough to keep us pointing in the right direction.

A Mid-Life Crisis

As Zach and I have entered into our forties, we are surprised and saddened to discover how many of our peers are struggling with mental health. It seems like everyone is having a mid-life crisis. David Almeida, a professor of human development and family studies at Penn State, recently studied stress in different generations of midlife adults. He found middle-aged people in the 2010s were more stressed than middle-aged

people in the 1990s.³⁵ It used to be that as we aged through each decade, our overall well-being would go up. But that is no longer the case. Why have things gotten worse? Is there anything we can do about that?

Some people, like *New York Times* writer Jessica Grose, think all our problems are material. Read what she wrote below:

Millennials are, hopefully, making the world realize that the midlife crisis, for all its clichés, was never really about the tawdry affair or the red Corvette. (Why is it always red?) The stressors of midlife for so many Americans are not existential; they're material — economic, familial, and political. They're about the seemingly decent paycheck that is spent almost entirely on child care, student loan repayment, and medical debt, leaving nothing to build a nest egg or save for their children's futures. They're about the median home price increasing 50 percent since January 2020, and grocery prices that are 10 percent higher than they were in January 2022. They're about a sandwich generation caring for boomers and babies, being squeezed until there's nothing left.

That millennials are poised to be hit particularly hard by these forces is not good news, but there is an upside. If we are forced to reckon with the fact that the real problems of midlife are material, that may also help us realize something else: These are the sort of problems we as a society have it in our power to fix.³⁶

The last sentence of the article caught my eye. Notice her solution to the problem; read it again below.

"If we are forced to reckon with the fact that the real problems of midlife are material, that may also help us realize something else: These are the sort of problems we as a society have it in our power to fix."

She believes we can fix our problems if we just try. She says all of the issues stem from not having enough money. But more money will not fix everything. It's way more complicated than that. By the way, this "crisis" is not just a middle-age one. All people are in a crisis because of sin. A fat savings account, a paid-off house, and an unlimited travel budget will not fix all your problems. I know people who have all these things and are still miserable. Our problems are deeper than that.

35. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32378946/>

36. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/03/14/opinion/middle-age-millennials.html>

Back to the Beginning

The Bible teaches a clear and powerful truth: God created everything. This simple statement in Genesis 1:1 lays the foundation for how we understand our world. It isn't random or meaningless—God shaped it with purpose and intention.

Knowing that God is the Creator helps us see the world differently. If God designed the world, he also designed humanity to have a purpose because we are part of his creation. But knowing your purpose doesn't always solve all your problems. Why? **Your purpose will not always make you comfortable.** Yet, in seasons where you feel lost or uncertain, like a health crisis or inflation, you can remember your membership in God's family. He made you with purpose. Your life is not an accident. You are loved and designed by the same God who created the universe. He will provide for you.

Think about your future goals. Some of these might ring a bell:

- I want my kids to grow and be successful
- I want my house paid off
- I want my retirement secure
- I want every repair in my home to be done
- I want to be in excellent health
- I want to be able to work less and even retire early
- I want a safe circle of friends that have common interests to hang out with
- I want more time to pursue my hobbies

These are not bad goals, but do any put you in a position of discomfort or do they make you more comfortable and less reliant on God? If all these things come true, what do you need God for? A ticket into heaven, maybe. But not much else.

Instead, when things go wrong, you can find solace in the truth that God is deeply involved in creation. Nothing happens without his permission. He is working through every difficulty for your ultimate good and his glory. **You can be ok with discomfort in your life.**

The Correcting Compass

We said earlier that *knowing* the correct way isn't enough. God gave us the Ten Commandments, a very clear set of directions. But knowing the right direction isn't enough to keep us from veering off and missing the mark.

The Bible isn't a compass you use to solve all your problems on your own. **The Bible is the story of Jesus, your true north.** He kept the course, stayed faithful, and never veered off. Because of Jesus's faithful life and death, you can be confident that he is pulling you along in the right direction, whether you are just starting out, in the middle, or in the golden years of life.

His love and care for you remain steadfast even when circumstances are bleak. Rev. Dr. Rich Rudowske, CEO of Lutheran Bible Translators, said it this way,

*"God's hand is always at work...whether we do something that looks like success or not."*³⁷

Conclude today by reading this hopeful message from Abraham.³⁸ You read his story on Day 12, now read what he has to say about our powerful Creator God.

*"GOD'S WORD ENDURES FOREVER. AND I SAY TO MY AUDIENCE TODAY, WHEREVER THEY ARE, IN AFRICA OR ASIA OR HERE IN THE UNITED STATES, SOMETIMES WE PUT ALL OUR EFFORT AND ENERGY IN A THING THAT IS GOING TO WITHER, THAT IS GOING TO PASS LIKE THE FLOWERS, LIKE THE MEADOW IN THE MORNING. BUT THE WORD OF GOD IS WHAT WE NEED TO CLING ON BECAUSE IT IS ETERNAL. I WANT EVERY CHRISTIAN ON PLANET EARTH JUST TO OPEN THE BIBLE AND READ A VERSE AND SAY, THANK YOU, LORD, BECAUSE YOU ARE SPEAKING TO ME THROUGH THY WORD."*⁴

Jesus is your true north. I challenge you to make one uncomfortable goal. Set out to do something in this world that will not result in your goodwill but someone else's. Since God created this world, including you, he will be your guiding compass, even when things get uncomfortable.

37. From *Essentially Translatable: Co-Creative Process* | Rev. Dr. Rich Rudowske, Jun 10, 2022
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/co-creative-process-rev-dr-rich-rudowske/id1508168069?i1565952800>

38. Pseudonym used.

Scripture Challenge

Read all of Genesis 1, even if you feel like you have already read it a million times! The foundational truth that God is the creator of the world changes everything! Take time today to reflect on the beauty of creation and the purpose behind it. Let it remind you that God also created you with a unique and meaningful purpose.

1. How does knowing that God created everything change how you see the world?
2. When you feel uncertain, how can remembering God's purpose in creation give you peace?
3. How does understanding that God created you with intention change how you view your life and choices?



DAY 20: A CORRECTING COMPASS

GOD SUSTAINS THE WORLD

COLOSSIANS 1:17

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

“All Good Here”

On June 18, 2023, a submarine carrying five passengers was headed to the Titanic wreck, 3,800 meters below sea level. The Polar Prince, the support ship above water, communicated with the Titan submarine.

Polar Prince: *“Status? Do you see the Polar Prince on your display?”*

The Titan: *“Yes. All good here.”*

This would be the last communication Titan sent. At 10:47, 3,350 meters below sea level and with a pressure of 4,900 pounds per square inch, contact was lost. Four days later, the wreck of the Titan was found around 500 meters from the Titanic’s destination. The Titan had imploded under the pressure. All five of its passengers died. Everything was not “all good here.”

The submarine was under enormous pressure, and when it reached a point where it could no longer withstand it, it imploded. When something is created for a specific environment, removing it can result in catastrophe.

Under the Sea

Most living things cannot survive deep in the ocean, but some deep-sea organisms wouldn't last anywhere else. They live at the bottom of the sea, and not only do they survive, but they thrive. Biologists can only observe them deep on the ocean floor. If we brought them up to the surface, they would "blow apart" because their bodies are not designed to handle the rapid change in pressure.

Yesterday, the devotion focused on how God created the world and designed and placed everything with purpose. So, like deep-sea organisms or submarines, problems come when we find ourselves in environments that we were not made for. God is the creator and designed the world to operate under his authority. He carries the pressure. When you try to determine your meaning and purpose in life apart from God, you start to take on a pressure you were never supposed to carry.

Have you ever heard the phrase, "They are carrying the weight of the world?" Well, this is literally true if God is not the Lord of your life. The further away you move from the will of God, the more pressure you will come under.

It is our sinful nature to want to be in control. We want to decide what's best for us, what God should do, and how things should happen. At first, when we do things on our own, we may think that everything is "all good here," like the message from Titan. Everything seemed to be holding the pressure intact.

But, like deep-sea creatures being brought to the surface, when we move away from the place we were designed to be, which is total dependence on God, the pressure becomes heavier until it is finally unbearable. We will fall apart physically, socially, and mentally when we begin operating on our own strength outside of God's dominion.

God didn't create the world to step back and let it run on its own. Colossians 1:17 reminds us God continues to sustain everything. **God holds all creation together at every moment, keeping it in order and ensuring everything works according to his plan.**

Before The World

David Hume was a famous atheist philosopher. He denied the existence of God, but when he looked at nature, he was troubled by the order, complexity, and design. He wrote,

“The order of the universe proves an omnipotent mind.”

It’s a real problem for atheists that the universe is so orderly. As we have said, nature shows that something with ultimate power and ability, beyond you or me, made all of this. David Hume recognized the problem but still refused to believe in God.

Atheists run into the same problem when they try to say what is right and wrong. Moral decisions are only relative unless a God is over everything. Christians have no problem calling out something as “bad” or “good,” or seeing the order of the universe because he breathed out his Word, providing a correcting compass.

A Stiff Upper Lip

When Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians, the Romans had developed a popular belief system called stoicism. Stoicism taught that true happiness came from controlling one’s emotions and accepting everything, both good and bad. Stoics liked to use the popular phrase “hold it together,” which is the exact phrase Paul used here in Colossians.

“...AND IN HIM ALL THINGS HOLD TOGETHER.”

Stoics believed they had to be strong and hold themselves together. The people reading Paul’s letter would have absolutely been familiar with this phrase. Paul took a popular, well-known phrase and flipped it. He wanted to take the pressure off the Colossi church and show the holes in Stoic thinking. This truth is still encouraging today: you don’t have to carry the pressure of holding everything together. God is already doing that!

The Blue Print

Previous verses in Colossians 1 show us exactly how God holds everything together. Colossians 1:9-13 shows us how we are brought under the lordship of Christ and how he takes the pressure off. Read it below:

⁹ AND SO, FROM THE DAY WE HEARD, WE HAVE NOT CEASED TO PRAY FOR YOU, ASKING THAT YOU MAY BE FILLED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS WILL IN ALL SPIRITUAL WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING, SO AS TO WALK IN A MANNER WORTHY OF THE LORD, FULLY PLEASING TO HIM: BEARING FRUIT IN EVERY GOOD WORK AND INCREASING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD; BEING STRENGTHENED WITH ALL POWER, ACCORDING TO HIS GLORIOUS MIGHT, FOR ALL ENDURANCE AND PATIENCE WITH JOY; GIVING THANKS TO THE FATHER, WHO HAS QUALIFIED YOU TO SHARE IN THE INHERITANCE OF THE SAINTS IN LIGHT. HE HAS DELIVERED US FROM THE DOMAIN OF DARKNESS AND TRANSFERRED US TO THE KINGDOM OF HIS BELOVED SON,

COLOSSIANS 1:9-13.

Let's break down this verse a little. There's a lot in there! Find each phrase in the verses listed above and highlight or underline them. First, consider what Paul says God has done according to these verses. (they are not in sequential order!)

God:

- Qualified you
- Shared the inheritance with you
- Delivered you from the domain of darkness
- Transferred you to the Kingdom of his beloved Son:

When Jesus took on your unworthiness, he became your worthiness. In Jesus, you are qualified. You have an inheritance waiting for you. God said he moved you from one environment, the domain of darkness (where the pressure would have crushed you), to another, the kingdom of his beloved Son, where you thrive.

Now, look at what you can do in response to God's actions. Because of what God did, you can:

- Be filled with knowledge of his will
- Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord
- Be fully pleasing to him
- Bear fruit in every good work
- Be strengthened with all power
- Endure

- Have patience with joy
- Give thanks

From what I see, we got the better deal!

Cosmos or Chaos?

God is the king of the cosmos, so he should also be your personal king. When you get away from Christ's kingship, things implode under pressure. Here's the good news: you don't always have to hold it together. **You can fall apart in Jesus's arms.** When life feels like it's falling apart or things around you seem chaotic, you can remember that God is still in control. He holds everything together, from the smallest atom to the largest galaxy. His presence ensures that the world keeps going. There's a reason for order instead of chaos. The LCMS church body's recent global youth gathering theme was "In All Things." I remember every night we ended with this phrase:

This heart,

This life,

This story,

Every story,

Is held by the one who holds all things.

Jesus is your true north. The same God who sustains the world also sustains you. Just as he holds the universe together, he can hold you together, too, no matter how messy or uncertain things get. Trust me. He can handle the pressure.

Scripture Challenge

Read all of Colossians 1. Paul talks about how thankful he is for the faith and love of the Christians in Colossae. He prays they will grow in wisdom and live in ways that please God. Paul then explains that Jesus is the image of the invisible God and that everything was created through him and for him. Jesus is above all things, and he holds everything together. Paul also says that Jesus rescued us from sin and brought us into his kingdom by dying on the cross. Through Jesus, we are forgiven and made right with God.

God is both the Creator and the Sustainer. He is always present, holding all things together, including your life.

1. What are some of the blessings Paul prays for the Colossians?
2. How does knowing that God sustains the world comfort you when life feels out of control?
3. In what areas of your life do you need to trust God's ability to hold things together?
4. How can you remind yourself daily that God is not distant but actively involved in sustaining the world and your life?



DAY 21: A CORRECTING COMPASS

THE WORLD IS UNDER GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

PSALM 24:1

*The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it.*

“Great Scott!”

People have strong opinions on whether we have free will here on earth or if God controls everything. I don't completely understand God's ways, nor do I think I ever will in this lifetime, but I believe we find truth in God-breathed Scripture. But first, let's look at some of the world's messages about who is in control.

In the movie *Back to the Future*, Doc Brown sums up the message of the three films in one sentence to Marty McFly:

“Your future is whatever you make it, so make it a good one.”

We buy into this message hook, line, and sinker! We fall for the lie that we are in charge of our destiny. If we make bad choices, bad things will happen. If we make good

choices, good things will happen. We own our lives and make our own decisions. With this view, the world takes God out of the picture altogether.

However, some religious circles, Buddhist trends, and even many Christian believers push the opposite message. Instead of our choices making a difference, many believe that destiny is completely fixed, and it doesn't matter what we do. Fate is the great controller of all things. What happens happens, and we must accept it. There is no free will; God ordains it all, and the best thing to do is to get in line and accept it passively.

Pastor Tim Keller preached that, fortunately for us, neither view holds up when we look at the Bible. Two examples of this are found in Proverbs. Look for the paradoxes in these two verses:

"THE HEART OF MAN PLANS HIS WAY, BUT THE LORD ESTABLISHES HIS STEPS."

PROVERBS 16:9

Did you catch it? God tells us we are free (we plan our way), but at the same time, He is absolutely in control of what happens (the Lord establishes man's steps).

"THE LOT IS CAST INTO THE LAP, BUT EVERY DECISION BELONGS TO THE LORD."

PROVERBS 16:33

Here, we read God decides what happens, but we still cast your lot.

God's control over all things is tough for us to understand, especially in our "don't tell me what to do" culture. As much as we hate to be told what to do, this fence-straddling take on the free will paradox is the only way to walk through this life and make sense of things. If we don't, both alternatives will drive us to an extreme. For example, if you believe there is a direct connection between what happens and your choices, you will always live terrified. Every bad thing that happens will be our fault. If we believe it doesn't matter what we do, we will be apathetic. We might as well just give up. I don't like either one of these choices.

The Paradox

While still complicated, the Biblical understanding of God's sovereignty is the easiest to live by. **Your choices matter, but God orchestrates everything.** So, you can still be at peace if things go wrong. It also means you can work hard, do your best, and make a difference because your choices matter. They really do make a difference.

One final real-life example of this paradox is Acts 27:21-32. Pastor Keller describes how Paul was in a boat with soldiers during a horrible storm. God told him that no one would die even though the storm was terrible, and he would lose the ship. But when the fearful soldiers tried to jump ship, Paul said, "Unless you stay on the ship, we will all perish." Huh? So which is it? Will God save everyone or not? Why did the soldiers jumping the ship matter? Because it's both.

We are simultaneously free *and* in God's hands, who has complete control. This is the best position to be in! We don't have to freeze up and do nothing because God's got a handle on everything. But we also can't go through life thinking it's all up to us and try to carry that immense burden. **The best thing to do is have unconditional trust in God for everything that happens in life.**

This is how you can be calm in storms and how your plans align with God's plans. You can trust him enough to say, "Give me or keep from me whatever you want, God. I trust you." After all, he's got the whole world in his hands.

Jesus is your true north. So let him be in charge. You'll not just be in good hands. You'll be in the best hands of all!

Scripture Challenge

Read all of Psalm 24, a song that tells us about how everything in the world belongs to God. It says God made the earth, the sky, and all the people in them. He is the ruler of everything and deserves our respect and trust.

1. What does it mean to you personally that “the earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it”?
2. Can you think of a time when you felt like things were out of control? How did the promise of God’s sovereignty in Psalm 24:1 help you cope with that situation?
3. What specific practices or habits in your daily life can help reinforce the belief that God is in charge?



DAY 22: A CORRECTING PROMISE

THE WORLD WILL BE RENEWED

REVELATION 21:1

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

The Lego Set

One Christmas, our son got a giant Lego set. It came with hundreds of little pieces sorted into cellophane bags and a large instruction manual. He followed the manual and did not miss a single step. After many hours the set was complete. It looked perfect, just like the picture on the box. Every piece or figurine was exactly where it should be.

I wanted to put the set up on a shelf where it could stay neat and shiny, but my son wanted it on his desk, where he could look at it and touch it. So, I let him put it on his desk. For the first few days, everything stayed relatively where it should be. The little action figures moved around, the doors swung open and shut, but in the end, everything looked like before. But after a few weeks, I noticed that things were changing. Pieces of it had been broken off, and blocks from other sets were added.

Action figures, trinkets, and non-Lego toys were integrated into the set. After a while, the set no longer looked like the picture on the box. The basic framework was still there, the base and a corner here or there, but you could not tell what it had once looked like.

With so many pieces out of place, our son lost interest in playing with it. So, I rescued the damaged set from his desk. After carefully removing the foreign objects, I scraped off the remnants of Play-Doh and scrubbed away marker and crayon marks. Then I scoured his room, searching every nook for lost pieces, and even ordered a few replacements from the Lego website. Finally, using the manual, step by step, I reassembled the Lego set. When it was finished, my son couldn't believe his eyes.

"Mom! Did you buy a new Lego set?" he exclaimed.

"No, this is the set you built. I put it back together," I replied.

"I didn't even recognize it! How did you do that? Thank you!" he beamed.

"You're welcome! With the manual, I was able to restore it to the way it used to be."

A Mess into a Masterpiece

Our world is like a Lego set with intricate pieces all made to fit a particular place. When God made the world, he called it good. Everything was as it should be and every piece of the universe was in place, working together. When sin happened everything began to fall apart. Things were added that never should have been there, such as divorce, greed, and jealousy. And the original pieces got vandalized until they were no longer recognizable. Sin created a giant mess.

We have a manual for repair, the Bible, in our possession. But we are human. Just like the Lego set couldn't fix itself but needed something outside to repair it, we cannot fix ourselves. We can improve here or there and move a piece into place, but we do that only through God's power. Left to ourselves, we are as useless as a mixed-up pile of Legos.

The Bible promises that God will renew and restore the world, creating a new heaven and earth where righteousness dwells. Read about it below in Revelation 21:1:

*“THEN I SAW A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH, FOR THE FIRST
HEAVEN AND THE FIRST EARTH HAD PASSED AWAY, AND THERE WAS
NO LONGER ANY SEA.”*

John is writing about the visions God has given to him. He saw a new heaven and earth where the first heaven and earth had been. He also saw that there was no sea anymore. This is figurative. To the authors of Revelation, the sea often represented chaos, danger, and evil. For example, in Revelation 13:1, the beast rises out of the sea. “The sea was no more,” doesn’t mean all bodies of water on earth disappear. The author is trying to say that everything threatening, chaotic, and evil will be removed, just like I removed all the extra stuff from the Lego set. The new creation will be peaceful, secure, and harmonious.

You may not have played with Legos as a kid, but imagine your favorite old toy that’s seen better days. It’s worn out and not as fun to play with anymore. Then, one day, you get a brand-new version of that toy, shiny and perfect, just like when it was first made. It’s comforting to think about. In recent years, vintage toys have been making a remarkable comeback. People in their 60s and 70s have been buying Easy-Bake Ovens, Rubik’s Cubes, Barbies, and G.I. Joes. Holding their old favorite toys gives them a sense of nostalgia and peace. As adults seek to relive their childhood and introduce these treasures to the next generation, they long for the way things used to be. So, in all our longing for things to work right, can the mess in the world be removed? That seems like an impossible job.

Three Promises

There are three promises we can count on in Revelation 21:1.

The first is God’s restoration. God plans to restore creation to its original perfect state, like the Lego set, free from corruption. He plans to make all things new, including you and me.

The second is that we have hope. The “new heaven and new earth,” or God’s kingdom, gives believers hope that their future is secure and glorious, a life without pain and suffering. That is why we pray, “*Thy kingdom come...*”

Finally, we can be confident in God’s sovereignty. Only someone outside the Lego set who had the manual and knew how every piece went together could put it back. Since God is the world’s creator, we can be sure he knows how everything should

work, from the deepest sea creatures to the farthest galaxies. Not only does he know how they work, but he will one day bring about the ultimate renewal of all things.

Communion of Saints. When we gather for communion, it's a glimpse of the worldwide fellowship of believers across time and nations united in Christ. Every believer from different places and languages who has received the bread and wine is part of this eternal kingdom. This is like a preview of God's plan for all people, especially seen in the mission of Bible translation, which brings His Word to every language and nation. Read the verse printed below from the hymn, *For All The Saints*.

*O blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine.*

Alleluia, Alleluia!

This passage captures the unity of believers from every nation in God's kingdom, echoing the fellowship we experience in communion and the vision for Bible translation that reaches every language and people. One way LBT does that is by joining forces with the illumiNations movement.

Eliminating Biblical Poverty

illumiNations is a collective of Bible translation organizations with an ambitious and inspiring vision: that every person on earth would have access to Scripture in their own language.³⁹

This movement believes the Word of God is a powerful gift that touches all people, no matter their cultural or linguistic background. illumiNations works to eliminate "Bible poverty," recognizing that millions of people still don't have a single verse of Scripture in their native language. Working together as a group accelerates the process of Bible translation because all the organizations in the illumiNations collective share resources. They have a Goliath goal: to provide 95% of the global population a complete Bible, 99.96% at least a New Testament, and 100% some form of Scripture, *by 2033*.

Can you imagine the impact that kind of reach will have? Reading Scripture in the language they understand best creates an opportunity for people to have a deeply

39. <https://illuminations.bible/12vc/>

personal relationship with God. He can be their best friend instead of just a strong and powerful deity they fear.

LBT partners with Christians from different nations and cultures around this incredible vision. Think about this: you may be alive on a day when believers everywhere can worship, learn, and grow in faith through the Bible in their language! The illumiNations vision comes straight from Scripture. John shared his vision of unity for all nations in Revelation. Read the following verses in Revelation 7:9-10.

“AFTER THIS I LOOKED, AND THERE BEFORE ME WAS A GREAT MULTITUDE THAT NO ONE COULD COUNT, FROM EVERY NATION, TRIBE, PEOPLE AND LANGUAGE, STANDING BEFORE THE THRONE AND BEFORE THE LAMB. THEY WERE WEARING WHITE ROBES AND WERE HOLDING PALM BRANCHES IN THEIR HANDS. AND THEY CRIED OUT IN A LOUD VOICE: ‘SALVATION BELONGS TO OUR GOD, WHO SITS ON THE THRONE, AND TO THE LAMB!’”

Just like I restored the crumbled Lego set to its former glory, God will renew the world to be just as he intended from the beginning.

Jesus is your true north. There is hope even when things are tough or don’t seem right. God is planning a future in which everything will be put back together again.

Scripture Challenge

Read Revelation 21 and answer the questions below. Revelation 21 talks about a time when God will create a new, perfect world. It describes how the old world, with its problems and sadness, will be gone. Instead, there will be a beautiful new heaven and earth where everything is perfect. There will be no more pain, tears, or problems in this new world. God will live with His people, and everything will be as he intended. This chapter gives us hope that everything will be made new and better one day.

1. What might the “new heaven and a new earth” look like and how do you imagine it will be different from how things are now?
2. Think about a painful divorce. How can God preserve the good from that relationship while removing the bad? Can that happen here on earth, or only in heaven? Why is it comforting to know that God will make everything new one day?
3. What are some actions you can take now to live in a way that shows you’re looking forward to the new world that God promises?



DAY 23: SERMON #4

ALL SCRIPTURE TRAINS IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

1 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for *teaching, rebuking, correcting* and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Sermon Notes:



DAY 24: TRUTH TRAINING

PRAY

EPHESIANS 6:18

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

The Six Training Techniques

You have been reading God's Word for three weeks now. The theme verse for this challenge, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, shows that the Bible is God-breathed and can be used to **teach** you, to **rebuke** Satan's lies, and to **correct** false thinking with the gospel truth. The last use is training in righteousness. That's what happens when biblical truths are worked deep into your heart to change you from the inside out. That is your training in righteousness.

If you ask any athlete, they will tell you that training is not a straight path. There are good days and bad. But in every training, there is a goal to be achieved. Training isn't about being perfect or nailing it the first time. It takes days, months, or even years of practice and work. This week, you will learn six training techniques:

1. Pray
2. Advocate

3. Give
4. Volunteer
5. Participate
6. Join the Mission

You may have already been training in some of these areas for years or even decades of your life. Does that mean you've got them down perfectly? Nope! Learning to do these things is an incremental process. And it is not by your own power. God's Holy Spirit and his Holy Word equip you for training in righteousness.

To train, you have to have an end goal in mind. So, what exactly are you training to be? Are you training to be right all the time? Is that what 'righteousness' is? No. The Bible defines righteousness as living in the right relationship with God, other people, and all creation. Jesus's death and resurrection put you in a right relationship with God. You were an empty shell, and he gave you a new life. As you grow, you live out that faith one training at a time. The first training you will be studying is prayer.

The Power of Prayer

Corrie ten Boom was a brave woman from the Netherlands who lived during World War II. You may have heard about or read her story through her famous book, *The Hiding Place*. In it, she tells the story of how her family helped hide Jews and others in their home to protect them from being arrested by the Nazis. Not only did her family hide them, but they also helped them escape to freedom in other countries. Although it was very dangerous, Corrie believed it was the right thing to do because of her faith. Although they helped save around 800 Jews, eventually, Corrie and her family were caught and sent to the prison camps. Her father and sister died in the camps, but Corrie survived. After the war, she traveled worldwide to share her story and give a message of forgiveness and hope. She even forgave the Nazis who had hurt her and her family to their faces. I cannot read the book without being moved to tears.

But what is less known about Ms. ten Boom is that her family's journey to helping the Jews began one hundred years before that, long before Corrie was even born. Corrie's grandfather, Willem, decided that their dining room table would be where prayers were offered on behalf of the Jewish people and "for the peace of Jerusalem." Nothing terrible was happening to the Jews at that time; they were a little nation

scattered around the world. So why was Willem moved to pray? God was preparing the way. Willem's family began praying in 1844, one hundred years before 1944, when the Nazis started taking the Jewish families away. Read what Corrie said about this below,

"This [praying for Jews] was an unusual idea among Christians at that time. The Jews were scattered throughout the world, without a country or a national identity. Jerusalem was a city torn by centuries of conflict. The attention of the world was not upon the Middle East, and yet a small group of Dutch believers met in a little Haarlem house to read the Scriptures and pray for the Jews (and) pray for the peace of Jerusalem."

Corrie saw the connection between the faithful prayers of the generations before and her family's role in World War II. Read what she said below.

"In a divine way which is beyond our understanding, God answered those prayers. One hundred years after Willem began his prayer meetings, his son, four grandchildren, and a great-grandchild were arrested in the same house where the prayer meetings started, because they had saved Jewish people from Adolph Hitler's plans to kill them."⁴⁰

Prayer is a powerful tool. Willem and his prayers made a difference when oppression came. Corrie was equipped and ready to serve because of the faithful prayers of generations before her. It didn't cost Willem anything to do that. He would have said he had the easy part. But the sad thing is most of us don't even do the easy part. We don't understand our access to God through prayer, so we are missing out.

A Tool in Your Toolbelt

Everyone who has a phone needs to charge it. Most phones have the remaining % of power displayed right on the phone face, to show exactly how much energy is left. You know you cannot use it when it is dead and must be charged. Can you imagine if someone insisted on using their phone without charging its battery? It wouldn't last much longer than a day. What if that person with a dead battery went into the phone store and demanded the phone be fixed but still refused to charge it? We would think they were crazy.

40. <https://www.godreports.com/2024/08/ten-boom-family-prayed-100-years-for-the-jews/>

Yet, this is what most of us are doing. We have a spiritual battery, and we forget to charge it with God's Word and prayer. We try to operate and go about our lives with a very low battery and wonder why we are not getting far. Prayer is just like recharging your battery. You don't have to do much; just quiet your heart and focus your mind in a conversation with God. But we get so busy getting everything done we don't pause for five minutes.

Praying for Lutheran Bible Translators

The missionaries and staff at Lutheran Bible Translators count on the prayers of people like you and me. They have seen the results of what happens when people pray. One example is from missionary emeritus Alvina Federwitz. On Day 14, you read about how God miraculously saved her by making her invisible to the rebels in Liberia during an awful civil war. Today, you will read another story about how her life was spared due to a simple, obedient prayer in someone's garden. Read what she said below.

"Prayer has brought us through so many challenges. It's brought us through a civil war. It's brought us through learning language. It's brought us through just the challenges of ministry. But there's one example that stands out in my mind. My appendix ruptured in the village. We were a 12-hour drive from Monrovia, the capital city. But just a month before this happened, we got our first small airplane, and that airplane flew into an airstrip about 15 miles from our home and took me down to Monrovia... I hung between life and death because by that time, peritonitis had set in. I was probably close to death. I did pull through that, and a month later, I got this letter. This lady wrote, 'I was working in my garden, and suddenly it hit me. 'You have to pray for Alvina.'"

Then she wrote, 'I want to know what I was praying for.'

So I answered her. 'You were praying for my life.'"⁴¹

41. From *Essentially Translatable: Together in Mission* | Alvina Federwitz, Jul 8, 2022
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/essentially-translatable/id1508168069?i=1000569251816>
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Where Do I Start?

One easy place to start is praying for Lutheran Bible Translators. Alyssa Petty, LBT's Chief Development Officer, asks everyone to pray for what's happening in Bible translation and people's hearts worldwide. Read what she said to pray for below.

"People can join us by prayer. That is the biggest thing that they can do first and foremost. Praying for all the language communities that are still waiting for God's Word. Praying for the language communities that are right now in the work. Praying for God to open doors for new partnerships here in the United States, but also elsewhere."⁴²

Since we said training techniques happen gradually, prayer training is also incremental. You can start with just a minute and then work up to longer. Why wouldn't you do that if it gave you the needed battery charge and the power to help others, even save a life?

Prayer is an active participation in the work of God in this world. Your prayers make a difference in people's lives. It's an honor, not a burden, to pray for others. **That's a truth training you can get behind!**

42. From *Essentially Translatable*: Sharing God's Gifts | Alyssa Petty, Mar 17, 2023
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/essentially-translatable/id1508168069?i=1000604623855>

Scripture Challenge

You read Ephesians 6:18 in the devotional for today. Read all of Ephesians 6. This chapter teaches us how to live as redeemed and saved people of God. It starts by telling children to obey and honor their parents and reminds parents to be loving and patient. Paul also talks about how we should do our work with a good attitude, as if we are doing it for God. Then, he explains that we need to put on the “armor of God” to protect ourselves from evil. This armor includes truth, faith, and the word of God, which keep our spiritual batteries full. Finally, Paul encourages everyone to pray and stay connected to God.

1. Why do you think Paul compares faith to armor? How can “putting on the armor of God” help us in our training in righteousness?
2. How can prayer, as Paul talks about in verses 18-20, help us and others stay strong in difficult times?
3. Why do you think Paul encourages us to “pray at all times”? How can we make prayer a regular part of our daily lives?

Bonus Challenge Training Technique #1: Pray

Become a prayer partner and support the work of Bible translation by regularly praying. Pray right now for the translators’ work, the communities they serve, and the impact of their work. To learn more about prayer opportunities with LBT visit www.LBT.org/pray.



DAY 25: TRUTH TRAINING

ADVOCATE

ROMANS 10:14

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

If God's Got It All Under Control, What Do I Have to Do with It?

One of the correcting promises you learned on Day 21 of *God Speaks* was that the whole world is under God's sovereignty. So, why do we need Bible translation if God controls everything? Can't God just come to those people somehow? If everything is under God's control, why do we even need to tell others about Jesus?

God's work will happen with or without us, but he wants to use us to spread the gospel. Today, you will read about the Kalanga people in Botswana, Africa, who God sheltered and protected as they waited for someone to come and bring them the good news. Even when no missionaries had yet come, God was active and working among this little people group in Africa. When missionaries from Europe finally came in the 1800s, because of God's mercy and faithfulness, the people's hearts were ready.

So, would the Kalanga people say God came to them directly? Or was it the work of the missionaries? It was both. God is in charge of all things, but at the same time, we are free to make decisions that matter and make a difference.

A Public Advocate

This week, you are studying how Scripture is useful for training in righteousness. Yesterday, you studied prayer. Today, you will read about the second training technique, which is to be an advocate. An advocate publicly supports or speaks up for another person, group, or cause. They work hard to make sure people get what they need and are treated fairly. The focus here is the word “publicly.” You cannot secretly be an advocate. If you advocate something, people will know. **There was no better advocate for the lost than Jesus.**

Jesus As Our Advocate

Satan is constantly accusing us, like in a courtroom. And the sobering truth is, a lot of what he’s saying is true. His accusations are not always lies. Sometimes, what he is accusing us of is sadly accurate. We are sinful people.

Imagine if every single word you ever said was recorded, and you were only held to the standard you spoke. So, if you had ever told someone not to lie, gossip, or be lazy, you had to live up to the same perfectly. How would you do? I would be unanimously guilty. The evidence is right there. If I can’t even stand up to my own standards, how can I live up to God’s? The answer is I can’t, and neither can you.

Thankfully, we have an advocate, Jesus, who defends us. He became our advocate when he came, lived a perfect life, died, and rose again. The accusations of Satan may be true, but Jesus took care of them. There are no outstanding sin debts against us. So, we walk out of that courtroom scot-free! We don’t have to be afraid of what Satan might bring up about our past. Nothing is a surprise to God because he erased every single sin. As a completely forgiven person, a natural response is to become an advocate for the amazing things God has done.

In today’s Scripture verse, Paul emphasizes how critical it is that people hear God’s Word.

“HOW, THEN, CAN THEY CALL ON THE ONE THEY HAVE NOT BELIEVED IN? AND HOW CAN THEY BELIEVE IN THE ONE OF WHOM THEY HAVE NOT HEARD? AND HOW CAN THEY HEAR WITHOUT SOMEONE PREACHING TO THEM?”

ROMANS 10:14

God’s plan has always been to use people—preachers, missionaries, and everyday believers like you and me—to spread his message to the world.

The Lost Book

The Lutheran Bible Translators’ purpose is to empower local leaders working to provide God’s Word to their people in the language they understand best. These remote groups are quite different from us here in the United States. The Kalanga people in Botswana, South Africa, are one such group. In the *Lost Book* video from *Lutheran Bible Translators*, you can watch the fascinating journey of the Kalanga people as they received the Bible in their native language. You can find this video on the LBT website here: <https://LBT.org/lost-book-returns/>. Although it is relatively recent that these people first heard about Jesus, they had been praying and waiting for the gospel centuries before.

The Kalanga people believed in a spiritual power named “Nzumi,” the creator of the world, similar to God the Father in the Bible. They also believed in “Moali,” who was a closer, more protective deity. For generations, they passed down oral traditions taken from a sacred “book of skin” that was lost over time. This book likely contained ancient scriptures, possibly linked to the Jewish Torah. After losing the book, they held onto the promise that someone would come and tell them the truth.

Through his research, Dr. Mike Rodewald discovered that there may be a possible link between the worship of Moali and Yahweh. Could God have been preparing the Kalanga people for Christianity long before missionaries arrived? Read what Dr. Rodewald said below.

“As best I can tell in my research in Botswana Notes and Records...the Kalanga-speaking people group are descendants from a group of Jewish traders. 2500 years ago they came from Yemen and crossed over into Africa, came down the coast, went to Mozambique, went across into Zimbabwe, and there they established the Great Zimbabwe Complex.

They once had a scroll, which the priests read from on the hills. But then the Arabs stole the scroll, and the people no longer had priests who could read from it. Instead, they had a voice from the mountains, usually from a cave, and that voice informed them of what they should do.

As I asked the questions, other oral traditions started coming forth. There was one oral tradition about a man named Newe who hit the sea, and people crossed over the sea to get to the other side of this body of water. I thought, well, that's kind of interesting. In the institutions themselves, in the days of old, they used to circumcise youth on the eighth day. They had to take their shoes off when they went to Moali's places as a way of respecting.

They sacrificed to Moali.

Was Moali the Hebrew god Yahweh that was maintained? Was the worship of Yahweh maintained through these many years, through all these travels, and kept the people that spoke Kalanga and worshiped Kalanga safe in that way? That was their belief, as seen through the oral traditions. I have to ask the question, was God preparing the way?"⁴³

Translating the Bible had a profound cultural and spiritual impact when people received it in their language. They saw it as the return of their "lost book," bringing back their spiritual heritage through God's Word. God was working through the scroll, the high priests, and a voice from the cave. God came himself to a people who had no one, but he was also preparing to send missionaries who would bring the Bible and the good news of Jesus.

Dr. Rodewald found parallels between Kalanga oral traditions and Hebrew Scriptures, including stories resembling Moses parting the sea and practices similar to ancient Jewish customs. His research suggested a possible link between the worship of Moali and Yahweh.

43. From *Essentially Translatable: The Lost Book* | Dr. Mike Rodewald, Oct 28, 2022
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/essentially-translatable/id1508168069?i=1000584220483>
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Advocating With the Pressure Off

The Lutheran Bible Translators' goal is to reduce the barriers to the gospel so people can understand what God has to say to them. Lutheran Bible Translators' approach is to work with people in the community so that God's Word meets the community's felt needs in a way they understand. That doesn't mean changing God's Word. **The message and power will always be God's.** Do you see what a perfect plan that is?

God has a plan for everyone and is in charge of salvation. However, you and I are responsible for sharing the good news about Jesus. You are free to advocate for Jesus and what he's done in your life with the pressure off. It's not up to you to make things happen. God is the one doing the work; you can't mess up his plan. And yet, you can actually make a difference in someone's life. You can be a part of this life-changing work.

God's control over everything relates to sharing the Christian message. God will use your efforts to fulfill his purpose. You can advocate for others and LBT, sharing your faith while trusting God's power. It is ultimately God who changes hearts through the Holy Spirit. **That's a truth training you can get behind!**

Scripture Challenge

Romans 10:14 was unpacked today in our devotion. Read all of Romans 10. This amazing chapter talks about how important it is to have faith in Jesus to be saved. Paul explains that following the law alone isn't enough to be right with God. Instead, we need to believe in our hearts that Jesus rose from the dead and say with our mouths that he is Lord. Anyone who believes in Jesus will be saved, no matter who they are. Paul also says that people need to hear about Jesus to believe in him, so others need to share the good news.

1. Why do you think Paul says it's important to speak about your faith, not just believe in your heart? How can we share Jesus with others?
2. In Romans 10:14, Paul asks how people can believe in Jesus without hearing about him. How does this challenge us to tell others about Jesus?
3. How can we help others understand who Jesus is, especially if they've never heard about him?

Bonus Challenge Training Technique #2: Advocate

Actively share the mission of Bible translation within your community, raising awareness and encouraging others to support the cause. Follow Lutheran Bible Translators' social media channels on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter, or visit LBT.org to learn how to get involved in the Bible Translation Movement and put God's Word in the hands of those who don't yet know Jesus.



DAY 26: TRUTH TRAINING

GIVE

2 CORINTHIANS 9:7

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

A Cheerful Giver

A poet named Mary Oliver, who won a Pulitzer Prize for her work, was often looked down upon by other critics as being too “happy and simple.” But what many didn’t realize was that it was a deliberate choice. She gave that positivity on purpose. In an interview with Maria Shriver, she said,

“I may be wrong, but it seems like they [other poets] felt they could heal themselves through writing, and it didn’t work. I don’t usually mess around with what makes me unhappy when I’m writing. I want to write poems that will comfort, maybe amuse, enliven other people. I don’t mean that the world is all great and wonderful. But I’m careful to— I try to keep the emphasis on the good and the hopeful.”

Oliver didn’t see her work as a place to heal herself or solve her problems. She wanted to give comfort and amusement and enliven others. She knew life is not like Hallmark movies, where there is always a happy ending. Oliver’s poetry about nature and the beautiful things she saw in the world focused on the good and moved on

from her painful past. Sexual abuse and parental neglect filled her childhood and left her soul in tatters. Many other troubled or abused artists tried to capture their pain and heal themselves, but not Oliver. Although she had a sad, hard life, she wanted to make someone else's life better by writing about happy things. She did not give out of abundance. Generosity is not accidental. **Giving is always a deliberate choice.**

Choosing to Give

Mary Oliver's life as a poet was not always successful. Sometimes, she was so poor that she had to scrounge what she could find in nature to eat. But this didn't stop her. Read her poem, *The Summer Day*, below.

Who made the world?

Who made the swan, and the black bear?

Who made the grasshopper?

This grasshopper, I mean-

the one who has flung herself out of the grass,

the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,

who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-

who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.

Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.

Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down

into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,

how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,

which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done?

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

with your one wild and precious life?

You have a daily choice on what you will do with your, as Oliver says, one wild, precious life. You can live for yourself, focusing on all the times life was unfair to you or didn't get what you deserved. You can see how much you can get from others and live as if you are owed something. Or you can live with your hands open, generously giving your money and talents, recognizing that it's all from God. Paul never intended for giving to be a mandatory thing. Read what he wrote to the church in Corinth about how they should give to the church.

"EACH OF YOU SHOULD GIVE WHAT YOU HAVE DECIDED IN YOUR HEART TO GIVE, NOT RELUCTANTLY OR UNDER COMPULSION, FOR GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER."

2 CORINTHIANS 9:7

Truths that Transform Your Heart

A biblical theology of generosity starts with understanding who God is.

1. He is your Father,
2. he wants good things for you, and
3. he is working out a good plan you can choose to join.

You have been studying many truths from Scripture in previous weeks. When these truths are worked deep into your heart, they will begin to change you. Read below about how understanding these three fundamental truths about God changes how you give.

1. God is our father.

God is a good father who has welcomed you into a family. He gives you good things and takes care of you. If you miss God as a father, your giving becomes about just doing good deeds. Instead, when you know you have a family behind you who will care for you, generosity becomes second nature.

2. God wants good things for you.

God doesn't just want your Sunday mornings, money, or moralism. He is after your heart. **God will always outgive you.** If you truly believe God wants good things from you, you will not struggle to give because you know you can't out-give him. You will live with an open hand, not grasping and hanging on to every little thing you can.

3. God is working out a good plan.

Guess what? **You will not be satisfied with more, faster, and better.** We are insatiable when we try to go after material things to feel safe and happy. We just can't get enough. Our need is a bottomless pit. God says that we don't have to go down that route. Instead, he takes care of us. In Matthew 6, Jesus teaches about trusting God and not worrying about material needs. The verses are part of the great teaching called the *Sermon on the Mount*. Read it below:

"AND WHY DO YOU WORRY ABOUT CLOTHES? SEE HOW THE LILIES OF THE FIELD GROW. THEY DO NOT LABOR OR SPIN. YET I TELL YOU THAT NOT EVEN SOLOMON IN ALL HIS SPLENDOR WAS DRESSED LIKE ONE OF THESE."

MATTHEW 6:28-29

There is nothing more beautiful than flowers growing freely. Mary Oliver felt happiest and most at peace in nature. Jesus compares God's care of the flowers to his care for us. He encourages people to trust that he will provide for them just like he cares for the flowers. A lot has to happen for a flower to bloom in the wild, and when it does, nothing can compare to its beauty. If God cares about the flowers, he will take care of you. **God knows what you need and will provide for you in his timing.** Can you trust him?

Making A Difference

Some people struggle with giving because they can't pay all their bills. Over half of Americans, about 54%, feel overwhelmed by their financial situations, and inflation has made it harder for some to meet their financial goals.⁴⁴ In the U.S., a significant

44. From *Essentially Translatable: The Lost Book* | Dr. Mike Rodewald, Oct 28, 2022
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/essentially-translatable/id1508168069?i=1000584220483>
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portion of the population is in debt. As of 2023, total consumer debt reached \$17.1 trillion. 77% of American households carry some form of debt, whether it's mortgage debt, auto loans, credit card balances, or student loans. Of these, mortgage debt is the largest, followed by auto loans and credit card debt, which has seen a sharp rise in recent years.⁴⁵

So, in light of America's financial situation as a whole, consider this question: If you were God, would you give America more money?

Or, if you want to make it really personal, would you give YOU more money if you were God?

God promised to provide for our needs. Rather than praying for more and more, what if we changed our thinking to trust that God is giving us what we need, and we can live generously from that? Consider what Alyssa Petty, the Chief Development Officer of Lutheran Bible Translators, said about financial giving on the *Essentially Translatable* podcast.

"You know, it might be giving \$5 here or there or giving \$100, whatever it might be. But just being in that constant communication with God and following where he is guiding you to go and every choice and desire to give is the real part that's impactful. It's not the dollar amount, it's the desire to be involved and to make a difference. God's Word impacts all of our lives in different ways. When we see that impact in our life, we want to share that gift with other people."⁴⁶

Giving to others is a response to the greatest gift you will ever receive: salvation through Jesus's death and resurrection. **That's a truth training you can get behind!**

45. <https://www.experian.com/blogs/ask-experian/research/consumer-debt-study/>

46. From *Essentially Translatable*: Sharing God's Gifts | Alyssa Petty, Mar 17, 2023
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/essentially-translatable/id1508168069?i=1000604623855>

Scripture Challenge

The verse for today is 2 Corinthians 9:7. Read all of 2 Corinthians 9. In this chapter, Paul encourages the Christians in Corinth to be generous in their giving. He reminds them that those who give generously will also receive blessings from God. Paul teaches that giving should come from the heart and not be done reluctantly or because of pressure. He explains that God loves a cheerful giver and will provide everything needed so people can continue to give and do good works. Paul also says that their generosity will not only help others but will also bring praise to God and strengthen relationships between believers.

1. Why do you think Paul emphasizes that giving should be done cheerfully and not reluctantly?
2. How does this reflect our attitude towards generosity in our lives today?
3. How can generosity help others and strengthen your relationship with God and other believers? Can you think of a time when giving had this kind of impact?

Bonus Challenge Training Technique #2: Giving

Donate to help fund Lutheran Bible Translation programs, even if it is just a small amount. Your giving ensures that more people worldwide can access the Bible in their language. Visit LBT.org/give.



DAY 27: TRUTH TRAINING

VOLUNTEER

1 PETER 4:10

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

“Love That Chicken from Popeyes!”

When Cheryl Bachelder became the CEO of the fast-food chain Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen in 2007, her mission field wasn't a foreign country or a church but a struggling fast-food restaurant. She didn't need to quit her corporate career to fulfill God's calling; instead, she used her skills and faith in the workplace.

Bachelder's approach to turning around Popeyes wasn't just about improving profits; it was servant leadership. Servant leadership was a concept she learned and saw modeled at her church. She took what she learned from God's Word into her workplace. She focused on the people within the company: the franchisees, the employees, and the customers. She served them instead of them serving her. Her faith-driven leadership model emphasized service over self-interest, and that shift in priorities revolutionized the company. Popeyes went from being a floundering restaurant to a thriving brand, building a solid work environment, raising revenue, and increasing trust among the franchisees. What a turnaround!

Bachelder and Popeyes Chicken exemplify how God can use us exactly where we are with the gifts we've been given. 1 Peter 4:10 encourages us to be faithful stewards of God's grace by using our unique abilities to serve others. Sometimes, we need to make some huge, drastic life change to fulfill our calling, but other times, God simply puts us exactly where we need to be at the right time. He wants to work through us in the ordinary places we already are—in our homes, at work (like Bachelder!), or in our communities.

God Uses You Just as You Are

God doesn't need you to be someone else or in a different season in life before you can serve him. He created you with specific talents, personalities, and opportunities. The goal is not to change who you are but to become more of who God made you. A lot of who you are was not by your choice: you were born into a particular time, family, and community. God has a plan and wants you to be a part of it. Knowing a grand plan and purpose helps you trust there is a bigger picture than what you see, and you can give your time and talents away to help others.

When Jesus prayed for his disciples in John 17:15-20, he was praying for them to be used right where they are.

"MY PRAYER IS NOT THAT YOU TAKE THEM OUT OF THE WORLD BUT THAT YOU PROTECT THEM FROM THE EVIL ONE. THEY ARE NOT OF THE WORLD, EVEN AS I AM NOT OF IT. SANCTIFY THEM BY THE TRUTH; YOUR WORD IS TRUTH. AS YOU SENT ME INTO THE WORLD, I HAVE SENT THEM INTO THE WORLD. FOR THEM I SANCTIFY MYSELF, THAT THEY TOO MAY BE TRULY SANCTIFIED." [EMPHASIS ADDED]

Jesus wants you to remain in the world you are in. What could that look like?

- Volunteer for LBT by making phone calls, writing blogs, or providing other administrative help they may need.
- Get to know your neighbors and exchange phone numbers so you can stay in touch.
- Shop at your local grocery store and get to know your checkout person by name.
- Serve on your local HOA board.

- Get involved in community projects like clean-ups.
- Adopt a street and commit to keeping it clean by picking up trash.
- Answer calls for crisis hotlines.
- Donate clothing to your local shelter.
- Volunteer at nonprofits.
- Grab a burger at your local joint (or a chicken sandwich at Popeyes!)

There are many ways to be involved in your community. The bottom line is you are not meant to be isolated from the world or to live in fear of stepping out. You are sent into your little spot to use your gifts to bless others. Just like Cheryl Bachelder, you have been blessed to be a blessing for those around you.

In Genesis 12:2, God promises Abraham he would bless him, and then he tells him why he was blessing him. There was a bigger reason than just to give him a good, comfy life.

“I WILL MAKE YOU INTO A GREAT NATION, AND I WILL BLESS YOU; I WILL MAKE YOUR NAME GREAT, AND YOU WILL BE A BLESSING.”

Whether at work, at home, or in our communities, you are called to serve with the gifts God has given you.

Serving in Small and Big Ways

It’s tempting to think that serving others has to be a grand gesture—like quitting your job to go on a mission trip or starting a non-profit. This is true for some people, like CEO Rich Rudowske. Rudowske worked in finance and had an established and financially secure future. But one day, he felt a strong pull from God to do something more meaningful. He realized it wasn’t enough just to make money and wondered if God had bigger plans for him. When he talked to his wife, she revealed she’d been feeling the same way. This led them on an unexpected journey, with Rich eventually joining Lutheran Bible Translators. Now, he helps equip leaders who are bringing the Bible to people around the world who don’t have it in their language.

Rich's story shows how God calls us to be part of his big mission to reach all people. Some people will have a significant role, like Rich. Others will contribute in smaller but still meaningful ways. God also works just as powerfully through small acts of service. You don't have to be in full-time ministry to make a difference. You can serve others in countless ways right where you are. From being a listening ear to a friend, volunteering at your church, or conducting your work in an honorable and God-pleasing manner like Cheryl, every act of service matters in God's kingdom.

When your faith becomes your identity, it affects everything you do. It wasn't just that Cheryl conducted Bible studies before the workday (I'm not saying that is bad). It went far beyond that. Her faith permeated every facet of her work life. It determined the kind of leader she was, the business deals she made, and the goals she established. It affected everything about her approach. This is the kind of transformational effect Jesus wants to have in your life.

This reminds me of an episode from the *Essentially Translatable* podcast. Bible translators Rev. Carl and Kelsey Grulke discussed how different languages reveal deeper meanings in Scripture. As they translated the Bible into various languages, they saw how God's Word came alive in new ways for different cultures. In the same way, when we serve in different contexts—whether at home, in the workplace, or across the world—God's grace is revealed through our unique contributions. Rev. Grulke said, *"One of the things that I love most about Bible translation is that there are so many different ways that our language helps open the Scripture deeper to us. I went to seminary, I learned Greek, I learned Hebrew, and that opened up the Scriptures in a way that I hadn't had before."*

You don't have to learn Greek or Hebrew to see Jesus in a new way. Just as languages offer fresh insights into Scripture, your individual gifts and circumstances give you different ways to see people through God's eyes and reflect his grace.

Using Your Gifts for God's Glory

What gifts or skills has God given you? Think about your natural talents and your learned abilities. Whether you're good at organizing, teaching, listening, or leading, these are not just skills for personal gain. They are tools for serving others and building up the body of Christ.

In 1 Peter 4:10, God's Word reminds us everyone has something to offer.

*“EACH OF YOU SHOULD USE WHATEVER GIFT YOU HAVE RECEIVED
TO SERVE OTHERS, AS FAITHFUL STEWARDS OF GOD’S GRACE IN ITS
VARIOUS FORMS.”*

Your service matters no matter what you do—whether leading a company like Cheryl Bachelder, volunteering at a local food bank, or encouraging a friend.

The Bible encourages us to be faithful with the gifts we’ve been given and to use them to serve others. Being a “faithful steward” means taking care of the gifts God has entrusted you and using them for his purposes. God uses each of us, wherever we are, to reflect his grace and love to the world. **That’s a truth training you can get behind!**

Scripture Challenge

Read all of 1 Peter 4. In these verses, Peter talks about how Christians should live. He says we should stay away from sinful behaviors, because Jesus suffered for us. Instead, we should focus on doing God's will, even if it means going through hard times. Peter encourages us to love each other deeply, be kind, and use our gifts to help others. He reminds us that if we suffer because we're Christians, it's a blessing, and we should trust God, knowing He is in control.

1. Peter talks about suffering for doing good (verses 12-16). How can you respond with a positive attitude when you face challenges because of your faith?
2. What gifts or talents do you have, and how can you use them to help people around you?
3. How can you incorporate faith into your work beyond blatant Christian activities (like Bible studies, putting a Jesus fish on your car, or inviting someone to church)? How can it permeate all of your choices?

Bonus Challenge Truth Training #4: Volunteering

Offer your time and skills to the ministry of Lutheran Bible Translators. Whether through administrative support, language services, or other assistance translation teams need. To find out how you can help, go to <https://LBT.org/many-hands-make-light-work/>.



DAY 28: TRUTH TRAINING

PARTICIPATE IN EVENTS

COLOSSIANS 3:17

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

In Word or Deed

Colossians 3:17 says that whatever we do, we do it all for Jesus. A great way to do that is through the words we speak. But many people around the world don't have a single word written down in the language they understand best. As you have learned, LBT is committed to helping leaders of communities translate the Bible into their heart languages in many parts of the world. This isn't just about putting words on paper; it's about helping people change their lives for the better. LBT plays a pivotal role in this process. One way they do this is by hosting literacy workshops.

Literacy Workshop Events

When I (Allison) grew up in Togo, West Africa, my parents put me in school for first grade. We did not learn the normal subjects that you would expect in school. Instead, the only thing everyone in my class studied was French. My classmates were from different villages that shared a school. Everyone spoke different dialects of their tribal language. Even a few miles made a difference in the words said and used. Imagine how many differences there would be in the entire country! French unified everyone, so they could communicate with others in their country even if they spoke a different tribal language. French unifies, but it is not their first language, the language of the heart. When these little villages receive the Bible in the language they understand best for the first time, the ability to read and understand Scripture is life-changing.

Literacy workshops are a way of making sure they can read what God has breathed out for them. In many language communities, the Bible is the only written book in their tribal language; there had never been a written form of their language! Literacy workshops are not just about learning to read because many probably learned to read French or English at school. The workshops are about *learning to read in their own language*. Having a book in their language, God's Word, provides agency, dignity, and pride in their heritage and history.

The goal of literacy workshops goes beyond teaching basic reading and writing skills. When people can read and write in their mother tongue, it opens doors to new opportunities for spiritual growth. They know God speaks their language. One example is Liberia, which has hundreds of small tribal languages.

Kpelle and Kono Workshops

In October 2024, Lutheran Bible Translators hosted literacy workshops in Liberia for the Kpelle and Kono language communities.⁴⁷ These events focused on equipping participants to read and write in their own languages, ensuring they could fully engage with the newly translated Bible. Here are some of the outcomes of these workshops:

1. Increased Access to Scripture

The primary aim of these workshops was to help individuals read and

47. <https://LBT.org/what-are-literacy-workshops/>

understand the Bible in their language and deepen their relationship with God. When people can engage with Scripture on their own, the Bible becomes a practical tool for daily life.

2. Community Engagement and Ownership

Literacy workshops foster a sense of pride and ownership within the community. When people learn to read and write in their language, they feel more connected to their cultural and spiritual heritage. This leads to greater engagement with the Bible translation project, as community members actively use and share the Scriptures.

3. Empowerment through Education

Learning to read and write opens opportunities for education and growth in the village's economy. Reading helps community members learn new skills, find employment, and contribute meaningfully.

4. Sustainability of Bible Translation Efforts

The workshops help train members, who can then train others! The idea is that their own people teach and lead. Members can continue to teach others and lead Bible studies, helping Scripture become a lasting part of the community's everyday life and removing missionaries from the process, which is the long-term goal.

Literacy as a Key to Transformation

The ability to read opens up new ways for individuals to grow personally, spiritually, and economically. By investing in literacy, LBT isn't just translating the Bible; it's empowering entire communities to thrive in their faith and daily lives. Literacy workshops like those for the Kpelle and Kono communities serve as vital parts of the translation process, ensuring that the Scriptures can be fully understood. Language is one way people can live out Paul's message of doing everything in the name of Jesus.

Reflecting Christ

Let's explore why Lutheran Bible Translators hosts literacy events and make it personal. We are all called to live out our faith, but what does that look like? Read

Colossians 3:17 again below. Do you think Paul is telling the people of Colossae that every second of the day, you have to do things in the name of Jesus?

“AND WHATEVER YOU DO, WHETHER IN WORD OR DEED, DO IT ALL IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS, GIVING THANKS TO GOD THE FATHER THROUGH HIM.”

According to the law, this verse demands consistently reflecting gratitude and intentionality, always representing Christ’s character. If the Bible is just a guide to follow, this verse provides simple steps to living out faith in your daily actions and speech. Simple? Yes. Impossible? Also yes. Do you see how completely crushing that is? It’s an impossible standard.

- Can you consistently reflect gratitude?
- Can you consistently reflect intentionality?
- Can you consistently represent Christ’s character?

The only thing I have ever done consistently be *inconsistent*. No matter how hard we intend to follow Jesus perfectly, we will not cut it. **Intentions cannot get you to the finish line.** What was God’s response to this problem? The cross changed everything.

Crucified With Christ

Read the lyrics to the song *Crucified with Christ* by Philips, Craig and Dean below. This song describes the complete change Jesus’s death and resurrection did for you. Compare all the things the author did in the first verse to the second.

Example:

1st verse: I look back, I thought, I paid, I ignored, I finally reached the point of giving in, I died

2nd verse: I hear, I bow, my hands surrender, I’m set free, I glory, I identify, I am alive

If you can, listen to the song and consider the effect of Jesus’s death and resurrection on the cross.

*As I look back on what I thought was living
I'm amazed at the price I choose to pay
And to think I ignored what really mattered
Cause I thought the sacrifice would be too great
But when I finally reached the point of giving in
I found the cross was calling even then
And even though it took dying to survive
I've never felt so much alive.*

*For I am crucified with Christ and yet I live
Not I but Christ that lives within me
His Cross will never ask for more than I can give
For its not my strength but His
There's no greater sacrifice
For I am crucified with Christ and yet I live*

*As I hear the Savior call for daily dying
I will bow beneath the weight of Calvary
Let my hands surrender to His piercing purpose
That holds me to the cross but sets me free
I will glory in the power of the cross
The things I thought were gain I count as loss
And with His suffering I identify
And by His resurrection power I am alive.*

*And I will offer all I have
So that His cross is not in vain
For I found to live is Christ
And to die is truly gain.*

Alive in Christ

Instead of reading Colossians 3:17 and being crushed by it, read this verse as a description of the new life Christ has given through the cross.

“Whatever you do, in word or deed” – The gospel equips you to reflect Christ in everything you say and do. Paul is not describing what you *should* do; he’s describing the new life Jesus gave you. All your life is now about him. It’s not about saving ourselves; it’s about living out this new life.

“Do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus” – Jesus changes everything about how you read this verse and the whole chapter. In Chapter 3, Paul talks about putting to death sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed. He also writes about removing anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. The second half of the chapter is a list of instructions for Christian households and a whole laundry list of standards.

Living in Christ means none of this is crushing you anymore or that being a Christian means you’re missing out on all the fun. **Jesus took back every second you were not grateful, intentional, or representing God’s character.** He took all your sins and the mistakes of the whole world on himself and took them to the cross, forever defeating sin.

“Giving thanks to God the Father through him” – Your only response to the amazing gift of Jesus is to be thankful. Gratitude is central to the Christian life. That is the secret key to happiness.

We said it’s impossible to find your own happiness. The more you think about it, the less happy you are. (Remember *thehappinesstracker.com*?) It is a lost cause.

The joy and contentment your heart longs for comes through Jesus alone. He isn’t telling you to do something; he is describing a gift you have already received. You are just living it out. **That’s truth training you can get behind!**

Scripture Challenge

Read Colossians 3. Colossians 3 instructs new believers to focus on their new life in Christ by setting their minds on heavenly things instead of earthly desires. It encourages them to put away sinful behaviors like greed and anger and to embrace kindness, humility, and patience. The chapter emphasizes the importance of forgiveness and unity among Christians, reminding everyone that they are all one in Christ, regardless of their backgrounds. (The early church was a hodgepodge of Jews and Gentiles who did not always see eye-to-eye.) Finally, it encourages gratitude and the idea that everything they do should be done in the name of Jesus, helping them live in a way that reflects His love and peace.

1. How does understanding our identity as “raised with Christ” change how you view your daily actions and choices?
2. Why do you think forgiveness and unity are crucial in a Christian community, and how can we cultivate them in our relationships?
3. Which virtues (kindness, humility, and patience) do you find most challenging to practice in your own life, and what strategies could help you grow in that area?

Bonus Challenge: Truth Training #5: Participate in Events

One way to live in this free grace is by engaging in events hosted by Christian nonprofit organizations. You may be participating in one coming up! *Bible Translation Sunday* is an initiative that highlights the importance of making the Scriptures accessible to all people. By inviting others, sharing on your social media, and showing up, you will support spreading the Gospel and education, empowerment, and transformation through literacy.



DAY 29: TRUTH TRAINING

JOIN THE MISSION

EPHESIANS 4:12

*To equip his people for works of service,
so that the body of Christ may be built up,*

Injecting Truths

My (Allison's) parents served as missionaries in Togo from January 1984 until September 1995, almost eleven years. Before they moved overseas, they had to receive a series of vaccinations. All four of my siblings and I also had to receive these vaccinations, so trips back to the United States always included a trip to the doctor for updates on all our shots.

I didn't understand the point of those shots until something happened to change my entire perspective. My African friend, Lamis, who was the same age I was, died of meningitis. I was devastated and had so many questions. *Why couldn't the doctor save her? How did she get it? Could I get it?*

My mom explained that the doctors vaccinated me against meningitis as a baby. So, if I was ever exposed to it, my body knew how to fight the disease. *Please note I am not trying to make any statement for or against vaccinations. I only want to explain my experience with them and how they function.* Vaccinations work like this: the doctors

give you a little bit of the disease that you don't want to catch. When I was a baby, I got a tiny dose of meningitis, which triggered my immune system to create antibodies to fight off the disease. Like a perfectly fitting puzzle piece, that antibody memorized the shape of the disease. If meningitis enters my body in the future, my immune system will create the protein that fits right onto the disease and prevent me from getting sick. Those antibodies are permanently in my body, so my body already knows how to fight them anytime I am exposed.

This is how the Bible works in your life as well. Scripture isn't intended to sit on the shelf until you are in full-blown crisis mode, and then you take it down and desperately try to glean truths from it. The Bible works like an injection, transmitting little truths of God's Word into your heart *before* you are overrun by trouble. These truths are built to **teach** you, **rebuke** Satan's lies, **correct** you when you get off track, and **train** you.

God's Word trains you to fight off evil before it hatches and grows into a giant monster of trouble in your life. One way God's Word does this is by giving believers a place to

1. connect to others,
2. belong to a community, and
3. have a purpose.

Without those things, we are left vulnerable to devastating addictions and poor mental health, which is just what happened during the COVID-19 epidemic. Covid didn't just ravage people's bodies; the pandemic opened the door for Satan to attack people's souls.

Longing for Connection, Community, and Peace

The book *Dopamine Nation* by Dr. Anna Lembke was published in August 2021, right after the world was reeling from COVID-19. As a nation, we were in some trouble after the pandemic. We stuffed our faces, drank too much, online shopped 'til we dropped (or our credit card companies dropped us), consumed social media longer than we even slept each day, and became addicted and very unhappy. Dr. Lembke wrote that the imbalance of dopamine was to blame. All those things we did above overstimulated us, flooding our brains with dopamine and causing us to be desensitized. You don't feel a drop of water when you're swimming in an ocean, right? Her answer was to reset, to do a "dopamine fast," and avoid all pleasures so we could rebalance our

brains. But while this may sound good, it really doesn't work. Read what Maia Szalavitz wrote in response to our "dopamine problem" in her *New York Times* article below:

"The problem with this neuroscience shorthand is that hedonistic excess isn't the cause of addiction, and dopamine's role in the brain is not all about pleasure. While dopamine does play an important role in addiction, it's not what traps people in self-destruction. Americans aren't facing an addiction crisis because we get too much dopamine from overabundant cheap thrills. Our problem, instead, is a lack of connection, community and purpose."⁴⁸ [emphasis added]

Excess becomes a severe problem when it reaches a lonely, isolated, and bored person and offers them temporary relief. So, it isn't enough just to remove something that's causing a problem, like fasting or avoiding things that people have made into addictions. (Of course, drugs, alcohol, and other harmful addictive behaviors must be avoided.) The root cause of addiction runs deeper than the thing itself. **The problem is a lack of connection, community, and purpose.** Without those things, we all go off the rails.

The Truth Shots

Like a vaccination, the Bible prepares you ahead of time so that when trouble comes, you aren't totally devastated by it. You don't have to wait until you have a catastrophic problem, a severe need, or an addiction to get a solution from God. **The Bible isn't a prescription to fill after you are sick. It is an inoculation against the enemy's attacks.**

To examine how the Bible gives us connection, community, and purpose, you will use Ephesians 4:12-15, a small portion of Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus.

1. The Vaccination of Connection

"TO EQUIP HIS PEOPLE FOR WORKS OF SERVICE, SO THAT THE BODY OF CHRIST MAY BE BUILT UP,"

EPHESIANS 4:12

48. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/13/opinion/addiction-dopamine-brain-chemistry.html>

Paul says that you cannot grow into spiritual maturity by sitting isolated in your basement. The gospel gives you a common denominator with any person that's more bonding than race, gender, country of origin, or even language.

2. The Vaccination of Community

*UNTIL WE ALL REACH UNITY IN THE FAITH AND IN THE KNOWLEDGE
OF THE SON OF GOD AND BECOME MATURE, ATTAINING TO THE
WHOLE MEASURE OF THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST.*

EPHESIANS 2:13

You will grow through deep involvement in a church community, joining the mission God has for you, and uniting around the Bible. Everyone can't be everything. Being in a community provides a safe place to keep growing. You can lean on others and count on them to have your back. **A community gives you something bigger to be a part of outside of you.**

Think about it: Can you snap a toothpick in half? Sure, no problem. It's easy. Now, take ten or twenty toothpicks and tape them together. Try to snap those. It's impossible.

3. The Vaccination of Purpose

*THEN WE WILL NO LONGER BE INFANTS, TOSSED BACK AND FORTH
BY THE WAVES AND BLOWN HERE AND THERE BY EVERY WIND OF
TEACHING AND BY THE CUNNING AND CRAFTINESS OF PEOPLE IN
THEIR DECEITFUL SCHEMING. INSTEAD, SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN
LOVE, WE WILL GROW TO BECOME IN EVERY RESPECT THE MATURE
BODY OF HIM WHO IS THE HEAD, THAT IS, CHRIST.*

EPHESIANS 4:14-15

Paul compares a Christian to a boat on the water. Without an anchor, it is tossed around by the wind and waves. It has nothing to hold it in place. You have a specific role in the body of Christ. You are vital and needed. If you know you have a purpose, you can keep going even after a failure or setback. You're not left floating and tossed around.

For everyone, this purpose will be a radical life change for Jesus. For some, this radical change may include a call to the mission field for LBT. Is that you? Is God calling you to make a huge life change and move overseas?

Your Faith Vaccination

Vaccinations don't always prevent illness. Even if you get every possible vaccination, there are viruses you cannot inoculate against and some diseases you will most likely get at some point.

Reading the Bible doesn't prevent trouble and hardship from happening in your life. You will still go through seasons where you struggle with loneliness, disconnection, and a lack of purpose, like missionaries Nathan and Sarah Esalas.

In 2004, the Esalas were working with the Komba people in Ghana. One night, they were both horribly sick with malaria. The coolest room in their house was the living room, so they found themselves lying on the floor under a fan, barely able to move. Feeling weak and feverish, they read comforting verses from the Psalms out loud to each other. That small act gave them hope to make it through the worst, and it reminded them of their purpose. The Komba people didn't have a Bible in their language to turn to for the same comfort as the Esalas did. This motivated the Esalas to continue their mission to help bring the Bible to the Komba people. Ten years later, in 2014, the Komba people joyfully celebrated receiving the New Testament in their language for the first time. And in 2025 the full Komba Bible, including the Psalms the Esalas read to one another while lying on the floor, is scheduled to be printed and dedicated.

When you join the mission, and those hard times come, you will get through them with the "antibodies" of the Gospel. **With Jesus, you will be equipped to get through anything. That's a truth training you can get behind!**

Scripture Challenge

Read Ephesians 2. Ephesians 2 talks about how we were once spiritually dead because of our sins, but God, because of His great love for us, made us alive through Jesus Christ. We are saved by God's grace, not because of anything we do, but as a gift from Him. The chapter also explains that Jesus has brought peace by breaking down the barriers between people, making everyone one in Him. We are no longer strangers to God but are part of His family, built on the foundation of Jesus and the apostles.

1. What does it mean to be "saved by grace," and how is that grace like a vaccination to our systems?
2. How does Jesus bring people together, and how can we help break down barriers between different groups of people?
3. What does being part of God's family mean, and how does that help us get through life's challenging times?

Bonus Challenge Truth Training # 6: Join the Mission

How does your faith give you:

Connection: _____

Community: _____

Purpose: _____

Not everyone is called to the mission field, but you might be! For those who feel called, there are opportunities for **YOU** to become a missionary or staff member with Lutheran Bible Translators, directly contributing to the translation work in the field. To check out your opportunities, go to LBT.org for more information.



DAY 30: CONCLUSION

THOROUGHLY EQUIPPED

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, **so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.** [emphasis added]*

Thoroughly Equipped for Life

We all know life has its ups and downs. God gives us wisdom in those difficult situations, and his process is very simple. God takes his breathed-out words from the Bible and brings them to your mind at the appropriate time. The key, though, is for us to have the Bible in our hearts already. **The Holy Spirit can't remind you of a verse you never learned.**

In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul reminds us that God inspires all Scripture to be useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. The purpose of Scripture is to equip you for every good work, ensuring that you are prepared ahead of time for the work you encounter.

What does trying to do good works without being equipped by Scripture look like? You have seen in this study that navigating life without God leads to

- failure,
- frustration,
- and burnout.

Jesus made this clear in John 15:5 when he said, *“Apart from me, you can do nothing.”* Without his guidance through the Word and the power of the Holy Spirit, our efforts will not amount to much, no matter how well-intentioned. Paul echoes this sentiment in Ephesians 2:8-9, reminding us that grace, not our own works, saves us.

*FOR IT IS BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED, THROUGH FAITH—AND
THIS IS NOT FROM YOURSELVES, IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD—NOT BY
WORKS, SO THAT NO ONE CAN BOAST.*

Our good deeds flow from our relationship with Jesus, so we need to be equipped by him. The Bible warns us that relying on our wisdom and efforts often leads to pride and self-righteousness. Isaiah 64:6 says that our *“righteous acts are like filthy rags”* when done apart from God. True good works result from a heart transformed by the Holy Spirit and guided by the wisdom of Scripture.

The Danger of Not Being Equipped

An interesting biblical example of the dangers of doing good works without being equipped by Jesus is found in Acts 19:11-16, where you can read a bizarre story about the seven sons of Sceva.

These men tried to cast out demons in the name of Jesus, but they had no connection with him. They copied Paul, saying, “In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.” But evil spirits are no dummies. They responded, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?” The demon-possessed man then attacked them, beat them up, and they ran from the house naked and afraid.

Trying to do good works without being connected to Jesus and equipped by his Word is a recipe for disaster. Christ did not equip the seven sons of Sceva. They tried to tap into power for their own sake, but their efforts backfired. The same is true for you

today—if you try to do good work without being thoroughly equipped, you risk failing or causing even worse harm.

Equipped Through Spiritual Growth and Maturity

Earlier, we said growth is not an overnight change but an incremental transformation. In 1 Corinthians 13:11, Paul talks about spiritual growth, saying, *“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.”*

As you grow physically and mentally over time, you are also called to grow spiritually. This growth comes from spending time in God’s Word and allowing it to shape your heart and mind. Isaiah 40:31 promises *“Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”* God’s work for Lutheran Bible Translators is to equip local leaders around the world with the tools they need to translate the Bible into the language they understand best.

Five Ways Lutheran Bible Translators Equip

Lutheran Bible Translators believe everyone deserves to hear and understand the Bible in the language that speaks to their heart. Translating the Bible is a huge job, but it’s also a powerful way to share God’s love. That’s why they don’t do it alone! LBT works with local leaders worldwide, giving them the tools, training, and support they need to translate the Bible into their own languages. Here are five ways they use the Bible to equip others.

1. Teaching Language and Translation Skills

This is a no-brainer: it’s the name of who Lutheran Bible Translators is! Translating the Bible isn’t just about knowing two languages well enough to translate accurately. It’s about making sure the Bible’s message is clear and meaningful. Lutheran Bible Translators trains local leaders in language skills and translation methods, helping them better understand both the Bible and their own language. This way, their translations can be faithful to the Bible’s original message and make sense to their communities.

2. Helping People Connect with Scripture

Believe it or not, translation is just the first step! Lutheran Bible Translators also finds ways to make the Bible a part of everyday life. This might mean creating Bible study materials, planning events, or showing people how to use the Bible in worship. Local leaders encourage people to read and think about the Bible to help their communities grow in faith.

3. Providing Technology and Tools

Technology is a big help in Bible translation today. It has made it so much easier than it used to be in the past with a chalkboard (as you read with Walt DeMoss in the introduction!) Lutheran Bible Translators gives leaders access to tools like translation software, recording equipment, and even apps for phones. These tools make the translation process easier and allow the Bible to be shared in new ways, like audio recordings or Scripture set to song. Rob & Eshinee Veith use their gift of music to put Scripture to song and teach others to do it for themselves. (Listen to episode six of the *Essentially Translatable* podcast for more on their story.) For people who can't read, listening to the Bible in their language can be a powerful way to connect with God.

4. Training Leaders in Project Management

Bible translation is a team effort that takes time and careful planning. Lutheran Bible Translators teaches leaders how to organize and manage their projects to set goals, work with others, and ensure the translation gets done. With these skills, local leaders can keep their projects moving and inspire their communities to support this important work.

5. Supporting Literacy Programs

In some places, the Bible is the first book written in a community's language, so learning to read is key. Lutheran Bible Translators supports literacy programs that help people read and understand the Bible. On Day 28, you read about how local leaders run workshops and create reading materials in their language. Literacy helps people read the Bible and opens doors to more education and job opportunities.

Making a Difference That Lasts

By providing five kinds of support—language training, engagement with Scripture, technology, project management, and literacy programs—Lutheran Bible Translators helps local leaders bring the Bible to life in their communities. Each translation is unique because it's done by people who know the language and culture best.

Lutheran Bible Translators' goal is to empower these leaders to share God's message in a way that speaks to their people. Your support helps make this work possible so that together we can bring God's Word to communities around the world, one translation at a time.

Cultural Preservation

Missionaries have been accused of changing or even watering down the nation's rich culture and heritage where they serve. But that simply isn't the case for Lutheran Bible Translators. They are committed to the opposite. They want to embrace the arts, food, music, and stories of the people. Jesus empowers us all to make beauty in our world and embrace our uniqueness. Written language is more than a tool for communication; it is a way to protect and celebrate traditions, stories, and wisdom that might otherwise be lost. We certainly don't want everyone to be "Americanized." We want them to preserve their unique heritage. Lutheran Bible Translators helps do that through language development.

God's Work in Us

Ultimately, it is God who equips Lutheran Bible Translators (and you!) for every good work. Psalm 32:8 says, *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you."*

As you grow in your relationship with him, new patterns form in your life, and you begin to see God's will more clearly. Let's end this study by looking at an interesting translation of the verse you've been unpacking all month. In the Philippines, the Tagbanwa people translate 2 Timothy 3:17 like this:

“THEREFORE THIS WORD OF HIS, IT’S THE DETERMINED PLAN OF GOD SO THAT WE WHO SERVE HIM ARE NOT, AS IT WERE, UNARMED OR INCOMPLETE, BUT RATHER WE ARE COMPLETE IN ALL WE HAVE NEED OF FOR ALL GOOD WORKS.”

You don’t have to wait to get what you need. You, dear friend, are completely equipped. Right here, right now! **Through Jesus, you’ve got what it takes.**

Scripture Challenge

Hopefully, you have 2 Timothy 3:16-17 memorized by now! Zoom out and read all of 2 Timothy 3. Paul warns Timothy that in the last days, people will be selfish, love money, and be proud. They won’t respect their parents, be grateful, or love what is good. These people may seem like they follow God but deny his power. Paul reminds Timothy to avoid such people. He also tells Timothy to remember his teachings and stay strong in his faith. Paul emphasizes that all Scripture comes from God and is useful for teaching, correcting, and training so every follower of Jesus is equipped for the work God has prepared for them.

1. Why has Paul warned Timothy about selfishness and pride in the last few days? What do you think he means by “last days”?
2. What does it mean when Paul says people will “have a form of godliness but deny its power”?
3. What good works has Jesus equipped you for through this study?

About the Authors

Allison and Zach Zehnder are a devoted husband-and-wife team passionate about inspiring people of all ages to become greater followers of Jesus.

Allison, who grew up as a missionary kid in Togo, West Africa, graduated from Concordia University Wisconsin with a degree in Theology and minors in Missions and Youth Ministry. She is the author of *Red Letter Challenge Kids*, *Being Challenge Kids*, *Forgiving Challenge Kids*, and *Serving Challenge Kids*, and blogs regularly for Red Letter Living.

Zach, a pastor, public speaker, and bestselling author of *Red Letter Challenge*, is the Founder and President of Red Letter Living and host of *The Red Letter Disciple* podcast. He has written or co-authored ten books. Together, they live in Elkhorn, Nebraska, with their two sons, Nathan and Brady, and are committed to sharing Jesus's message through their writing, speaking, and ministry.

About Lutheran Bible Translators

Lutheran Bible Translators is committed to making God's Word accessible to every language community, so that all people may come to know Jesus and grow in faith. In partnership with local leaders and global organizations, we translate Scripture into the heart languages of communities around the world. Our mission is grounded in the belief that Bible translation is not merely about words—it's about transforming lives through the power of the Gospel. As a proud partner in the *illumina*Nations alliance, we join with others in a unified effort to make Scripture available to all people in a language they understand best. This work is ultimately about empowering and engaging communities to interact with God's Word in ways that are sustainable, meaningful, and transformative. We long for every person to know that God speaks their language—and that His Word is not distant or foreign, but personal, present, and powerful in the language of their heart. Learn more at LBT.org.

Start a Movement in Your Church

Many believers today feel disconnected from the transforming power of God's Word. Biblical literacy is at an all-time low, but together, we can reverse the trend—and it starts with you.

God Speaks: A 30-Day Challenge to Read Your Bible is more than a devotional. It's a 30-day churchwide challenge designed to reignite a passion for Scripture. Through daily readings, small group discussion, and weekly sermons, your church can experience transformation rooted in 2 Timothy 3:16–17.

Whether you're a pastor, a church leader, or a passionate member of your congregation, you can launch this life-changing journey in your church.

What's Included:

- 30-Day Devotional Book (via Amazon)
- 4-Part Video Teaching Series through RightNow Media or via download.
- 4-Week Sermon Series
- Small Group & Sunday School Materials
- Kids & Youth Curriculum
- Implementation Guide

This all-in-one program makes it simple to bring your entire church into deeper engagement with Scripture.

Ready to lead the way?

Visit LBT.org/GodSpeaks for more information and to sign up for a God Speaks: 30-Day Challenge.

Let's spark a renewed love for God's Word—one church at a time.

LBT.org/GodSpeaks

