

Dear Pathway Family,

June is such a special month as we honor and celebrate our fathers, not just our earthly fathers but our Heavenly Father as well. God provided our fathers with instructions on how to raise godly children. I was very blessed to be raised by an exceptionally God-fearing and loving father. **Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many. I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths. When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble. Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life. Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence. But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble** (Prov. 4:10-19).

Like many of you, I will not be able to physically spend Father's Day with my Daddy, but I cherish the memories of listening to him from the pulpit every Father's Day. As we honor our fathers this month, let us give special honor to our one true Father, God Almighty. **And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up** (Deut. 6:5-7).

I pray that God will truly bless each of you and your families abundantly. We continue to pray for you and those who still have not found the saving grace of our Father. I ask that you keep this ministry in your prayers as we strive to carry out God's Great Commission.

In His Love,

*Jennifer*

This month, we (the staff of Bible Pathway) want to share a part of us with you by honoring our fathers on the cover. (top left) the late Donacieno Palafox (Gilbert's Dad), (top middle) the late James R. Jennings (Kevin's Dad), (top right) Charles McCrary (Ryan's Dad), (center & bottom center) the late Rev. Donald L. Stone (Judy and Jennifer's Dad), (bottom left) Jerry Edwards (Tiffany's Dad), (bottom right) Gilbert Palafox (Rosalinda's Dad).

***Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and He hath charged me to build Him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (He is the God,) which is in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2-3).***

***That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee*** (Deut. 30:3). The children of Israel had willfully disobeyed the Lord's commands and, as a direct result, had suffered many of the curses that the Lord had promised would befall His chosen people if they deliberately turned their hearts from Him. Captured by the once proud Babylonian empire (which had then, in turn, fallen to a greater power), the descendants of Abraham now found themselves nationless, scattered throughout the vast territories of the Medo-Persians.

Scripture does not tell us how many exiles had allowed themselves to be 'swallowed up' by the gods and customs of their new homes. We don't know how many of them cast away their birthright as children of Israel to embrace the way of the world around them. We do know, however, that despite all the changes that came into their lives, a remnant faithful to God always remained. It was to this remnant that God now extended the fulfillment of His promise: ***For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform My good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place*** (Jer. 29:10).

The manner in which the Lord chose to restore His people was not what many would have expected. He did not raise up a champion from amongst their midst and triumphantly lead them out of captivity, nor did He arrange for their enemies to be clearly and convincingly vanquished. Instead, He moved Cyrus, a heathen king of a pagan nation, to rebuild ***the house of the LORD God of Israel***. It was Cyrus who put out the call to

the faithful remnant, seeking volunteers to stand for God and return to Jerusalem. It was Cyrus who organized the 42,360 Israelites who answered the call (Ezra 2:64), and it was Cyrus who sent them on their way, loaded down with many of the Temple vessels made of precious metals that had been seized by Nebuchadnezzar 70 years previously (1:7-11).

While many faithfully answered the call, it is likely that there were others who ignored it out of disapproval of the person who issued it. These people threw away their chance to serve God simply because they couldn't accept His choice of messenger. Yet if they had just taken a moment to look beyond their own pre-conceived notions, they would have been able to confirm through His Word that this had been His plan all along (Is. 44:28).

God is the Creator of all, and all of creation is His to use. He is not limited by customs and doctrine; His message is not confined to the inside of a church building or the message of an ordained minister. If we are to fully serve Him, we must be open to hearing His call in whatever form it is presented. When in doubt, turn to His Word. Through prayerful study, His voice will be made clear to us regardless of which direction it comes.

***So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy*** (Rom. 9:16).

**Thought for the Day:** *God saves all who come to Him in genuine repentance and confession of faith; whether or not WE believe they deserve to be saved does not enter into the equation.*

**Christ Portrayed:** By *Sheshbazzar*, another name for Zerubbabel, ***the prince*** (governor) ***of Judah*** (Ezra 1:8). Christ is both ***The Prince of Peace*** (Is. 9:6) and ***the Lion of the tribe of Juda*** (Judah) (Rev. 5:5).

**Word Studies:** 1:6 **strengthened their hands** = gave them assistance; 2:43 **Nethinims** = Temple servants; 2:63 **Tirshatha** = Governor

**Pray for Staff:** Jennifer Palafox • **Government Officials:** Rep. Lucy McBath (GA) • **Country:** Palau (21,108) North Pacific Ocean • Major Languages: Palauan, Filipino, English • Religious Freedom • 41.6% Roman Catholic; 23.3% Protestant; 8.8% Modekngel (Indigenous to Palau); 5.3% Seventh-Day Adventist; 0.9% Jehovah's Witness; 0.6% Mormon; 3.1% Other; 16.4% Unspecified/None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray that people will come to a knowledge of the Lord God (I Kings 18:36-37).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 3

**B**ut Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us. Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia (Ezra 4:3-5).

**And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof** (II Kings 17:24). Following the falls of first Israel and later Judah, the land did not remain desolate and empty. Amongst the ruins of the cities and towns, foreigners took up residence, intermarrying with the small remnant of Israelites and Jews who had been left behind. These people believed in the existence of the Lord and incorporated His worship into their religious routines, but they believed He was only one god amongst many and acted accordingly. **They feared the LORD, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence** (17:33).

When they approached Zerubbabel with offers to help with the rebuilding of the Temple, they did so with an eye toward expanding their influence over the returning exiles. They likely believed what they were saying when they claimed to seek God (Ezra 4:2), but they were seeking Him on their own terms, not on His. They wanted to ensure that their claim to the land remained strong. By joining forces with the children of Israel who had returned, they intended to use their influence to shape the national reformation to fit their values and ideals.

**Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel** saw through their offer of help to the motivations behind it and rightfully refused them, which angered **the people of the land**. They quickly determined that if they could not

gain control over the religious focus of the returning exiles, then they must prevent them from establishing a real and meaningful presence in the land. To that end, they immediately set out to sabotage the efforts to rebuild the Temple of the Lord.

The tactics used by ***the people of the land*** are ones that we should readily recognize, as they are still very much in practice today. Many wish to coopt the worship of God to push their own agendas. They call themselves Christians and insinuate themselves into our churches and communities, offering help and support, but only on their own terms. When they are rightfully rebuffed, they turn nasty and attempt to discredit and undermine those of us who are genuinely working within the will of God. Just as did Zerubbabel and his peers, we must train ourselves to recognize and stand firm against the deceptive practices of those who attempt to claim God with their mouths but deny Him with their actions.

***Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate*** (Titus 1:15-16).

**Thought for the Day:** *To allow the selfish motivations of others to dilute the Word of God ultimately muddies His message beyond recognition.*

**Christ Revealed:** Through the **great** (huge) **stones** used in building the Temple of God (Ezra 5:8). Jesus Christ is **the Stone which the builders refused** (rejected), and He has **become the Head Stone of the Corner** (Cornerstone) of our faith (Ps. 118:22; Matt. 21:42).

**Word Studies:** 3:3 **his bases** = its original foundation; 3:8 **set forward** = oversee; 3:11 **by course** = by the assigned divisions of priests; 4:4 **weakened the hands of** = discouraged and frightened; 5:10 **certify** = inform.

**Pray for Government Official:** Rep. Delia Ramirez (IL) • **Country:** Panama (3,559,408) Southern Central America • Major Languages: Spanish, English • Religious Freedom • 85% Roman Catholic; 15% Protestant; (Small groups of: Seventh-Day Adventist; Mormon; Jehovah's Witness; Hindu; Buddhist; Rastafarian; Jewish; Muslim) • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray, in faith, for God to work a miracle (II Kings 4:33-34).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 4

***And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia (Ezra 6:14).***

The exile was over. God had cleared the way for the Jews to return to their homeland. Not only that but they were also encouraged by the Persian king to worship the Lord openly and rebuild His Temple. Immediately following the laying of the foundation for the new Temple, the people were engulfed in the spirit of worship-filled celebration (Ezra 3:10-11). God's work was being done! ***For the Word of the LORD is right; and all His works are done in truth*** (Ps. 33:4).

The Lord was rejoicing alongside His people, but to the enemy (Satan), this feeling of revival and belonging signaled danger. It should come as no surprise to any of us that this is the exact time he chose to attack. He started off subtly, whispering in the hearts of men. He led them to forego God's work in favor of their own (Hag. 1:2-4). He also stirred the emotions of their mortal adversaries, causing them to interfere with the construction efforts (Ezra 4:4-23). All of this together had the desired effect, and work on God's Temple was halted (4:24). The harder Satan pushed, the further the people withdrew from God until over a decade had elapsed without any progress being made.

Whatever power the devil believes he has is totally eclipsed by the awesome power of the Lord. First, God sent His prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to instruct and motivate His people (5:1-2). Second, He worked in the heart of Darius, the current King of Persia, to cause him to not only seek out the decree issued by Cyrus but also to expand upon it and put his own authority behind it. In other words, God restored the faith in the hearts of His people, and then He effectively shut down the opposition.

There is a tendency among many believers today to discount the reality of evil. One of the devil's most successful lies is the one where he tells us he doesn't exist. Scripture tells us: ***And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the***

***Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him*** (Rev. 12:9). Peter warns us: ***Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*** (I Pet. 5:8). By refusing to believe he exists, we are giving him free rein in our lives. It is impossible to be vigilant against something that we don't perceive as a threat. God WANTS us to believe in the devil—He just doesn't want us to believe a word he (Satan) says.

When we find ourselves under attack, either through internal thoughts and feelings or external pressures, we must first acknowledge the problem and then reach out to God for the solution. Pray, immerse yourself in His Word, and reach out to your Christian brothers and sisters for help. Just as God supported the returning exiles, He will strengthen and sustain us. With God as our Captain, our ultimate victory over Satan is assured.

***Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you*** (James 4:7).

**Thought for the Day:** *To believe fully in our own self-sufficiency is to discount Satan's influence; only with God can we avoid this folly.*

**Christ Revealed:** Through ***the Feast of Unleavened*** (yeast-free) Bread (Ezra 6:22). Jesus is ***the Bread of Life*** (John 6:35), and He was ***without sin*** (Heb. 4:15). Leaven is symbolic of sin.

**Word Studies:** 6:1 **house of the rolls** = building where records were kept on scrolls; 6:4 **king's house** = royal treasury; 6:15 **Adar** compares with February and March; 7:21 **the river** = Euphrates.

**Pray for Staff:** Tiffany Parisi • **Country:** Papua New Guinea (6,552,730) Southwestern Pacific • Major Languages: Tok Pisin, English, Hiri Motu, 836 Indigenous Languages • Religious Freedom • 69.4% Protestant; 27% Roman Catholic; 0.3% Baha'i; 3.3% Indigenous Beliefs/Other (Muslim; Confucian) • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray, remembering that there is no one like God (II Kings 19:14-15,19).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 5

***Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of Him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him; but His power and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him. So we fasted and besought our God for this: and He was intreated of us*** (Ezra 8:21-23).

***Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; He also is become my salvation*** (Is. 12:2). Ezra had stood before King Artaxerxes and proclaimed his allegiance to, and utter faith in, God. Thus, when he prepared to make the dangerous journey to Jerusalem, he found himself in a bit of a bind. He believed that going to Artaxerxes and requesting a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect them on their journey, a request that we know Artaxerxes would have happily granted based off of what he gave to Nehemiah in later years (Neh. 2:9), would have given lie to his previously stated trust in God. Yet attempting the journey without protection would be extremely unwise. Ezra was not worried, however. His words to the king regarding God had been heartfelt and sincere, and he was confident that he had the perfect solution. ***Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of Him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.***

Ezra approached God in absolute faith, and in faith, he was rewarded. ***And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive*** (Matt. 21:22). God heard and answered his prayer, and he and his party were brought safely to the city of Jerusalem. ***Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way*** (Ezra 8:31).



There is much we can learn from Ezra's confident and strong faith. His understanding and acceptance of the all-sufficiency of God are humbling, and he provides us with a clear example of how faith can move mountains (Matt. 17:20). We must take care, however, when following his example, to never mistake pride for faith.

Faith places absolute trust in God. Faith listens to His will and accepts His directions and blessings from whatever source He chooses to utilize. Pride approaches God with a solution in hand and refuses to accept any other. Faith is born of selfless love; pride is a product of self-obsession. Faith draws us closer to God; pride destroys our ability to hear Him by elevating our own perceived importance to a level that is equal to or higher than His. In faith, we find life, but pride's only reward is death.

***For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit*** (Is. 14: 13-15).

**Thought for the Day:** *Confident faith is not prideful; it is a state of humility so complete that God's will goes unquestioned.*

**Christ Portrayed:** By Ezra, who mourned over the sins of the people of Jerusalem (Ezra 9:5). Twice it is recorded that, when Jesus looked upon Jerusalem, He also mourned for the people (Luke 13:34; 19:41).

**Word Studies:** 8:29 **chambers** = storerooms; 9:3 **mantle** = robe; 9:7 **confusion of face** = shame, confessing to following God but living like the world.

**Pray For Staff:** Judy McCrary • **Government Officials:** Sen Mike Lee (UT), Rep. Chris Pappas (NH) Rep Jim Baird (IN) • **Country:** Paraguay (6,703,860) Southern South America • Major Languages: Spanish, Guarani • Religious Freedom • 89.6% Roman Catholic; 6.2% Protestant; 1.1% Other Christian; 1.1% None; 1.9% Unspecified/ Other (Jehovah's Witness; Jew; Mormon; Muslim; Buddhist; Baha'i; Mennonite; Unification Church; Indigenous Tribal) • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray for spiritual prosperity (I Chr. 4:9-10).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 6

***Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away. And they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem; And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away (Ezra 10:6-8).***

God's directive was clear: ***And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son*** (Deut. 7:2-3). Disobedience of this ordinance was one of the primary factors in the original downfall of Israel/Judah. Just as God had warned (7:4), allowing the pagan roots to infiltrate their land had led them into temptation from which they'd been unable to recover (II Kings 17:16-17).

Despite the depth of their betrayal, God had not utterly destroyed His people, instead leading a remnant back from exile to reclaim their homeland. Now, the revival of Judah was threatened by the same sin that had crippled their forbearers. Ezra had been overcome by grief when he discovered their sin, and his subsequent intercessory prayer of humble repentance and pleas for mercy resonated in the hearts of the people. In consultation with Ezra, ***the princes and the elders*** of the congregation determined to work within the law of the Old Covenant to separate themselves from their sins and reconcile themselves to God.

The decision of whether to repent and turn from sin was one each man had to make for himself, but for the spiritual health of the congregation as a whole, it was determined that any who chose not to separate themselves from their sin would be ***sepa-***

**rated from the congregation of those that had been carried away.** The **elders** rightly determined that those who blatantly chose to continue in sin even after being shown the error of their ways were making the conscious choice to shut out God and, therefore, should not be allowed to remain as temptation in the midst of those who were trying to conform to His will.

God calls us to shine His light on the lost, to minister to the needy, to lift up the downtrodden, to love the unloveable, and to pray for all without ceasing. Yet nowhere in His Word has He told us to agree with the enemy's lies or to encourage others in their delusions. Those who know His will and openly defy it even as they claim to love Him are spinning a deadly, deceitful web, and the longer it is allowed to remain in our midst, the more people it will ensnare. We have a responsibility to God, ourselves, and the witness with which we have been charged to denounce it and separate ourselves from it.

***But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat*** (I Cor. 5:11).

**Thought for the Day:** *Love and acceptance are not dependent upon each other; we can love those who stray from God without accepting their choices.*

**Christ Revealed:** Through the ram (male sheep) that was offered for the offenses of the sons of the priests (Ezra 10:19). Christ offered Himself for the sins and offenses of all mankind. ***He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them*** (Heb. 7:25).

**Word Studies:** 10:1 **wept very sore** = wept bitterly; 10:2 **strange** = foreign; 10:8 **substance** = property; 10:13 **without** = outside in the rain; 10:15 **were employed about** = were opposed to; 10:19 **gave their hands** = promised, vowed.

**Pray for Staff:** Ryan McCrary • **Government Official:** Gov. Tate Reeves (MS), Rep. Chrissy Houlahan (PA) • **Country:** Peru (30,147,935) Western coast South America • Major Languages: Spanish, Quechua, Aymara • Open to evangelism and Bible distribution • 81.3% Roman Catholic; 12.5% Evangelical; 3.3% Other (Seventh-Day Adventist; Mormon; Jehovah's Witness; Israelites of the New Universal Pact Baptist; Jew; Baha'i; Hare Krishna; Muslim); 2.9% None/Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray and then obediently do what God says (I Chr. 14:14-16).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 7

***And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire (Neh. 2:1-3)?***

Approximately 73 years after the rebuilding of the Temple, Nehemiah, the Jewish cupbearer for King Artaxerxes of Persia, was visited by his brother and other travelers from the holy city of Jerusalem. Nehemiah was distressed to learn that Jerusalem still lay in a state of ruin long after the Temple of the Lord had been rebuilt. Her walls and gates, destroyed in the final Babylonian siege, had seen no repair; consequently, she was vulnerable to raids and attacks from her enemies. Nehemiah's heart was in tune with the Lord, and he was moved by compassion and grief. He immediately went to God in prayer, asking for the Lord's help in softening the heart of his king so that he would be allowed to aid the people of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah's position in the court of King Artaxerxes provided him with comfort and security. He lived in the royal palace and enjoyed the favor of the king, which ensured that he was respected in the community at large. Yet none of that meant as much to him as did his relationship with his God. He was willing to give up the life he had built if that meant he could be of even greater service to the Lord. Instantly, Nehemiah accepted the Lord's call to undertake a long journey to a homeland he had never seen in order to help virtual strangers rebuild the city of David. Nehemiah knew that God's work was more important than anything else he could do.

When seeing an unfilled need that is within our power to do something about, faithful followers of Christ should react just as Nehemiah did. The greatest joy that can be gained in the life of

the believer comes from serving mankind just as Christ Himself served. ***But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men*** (Phil. 2:7). Far too many of us claim to love the Lord but regularly use our life circumstances as an excuse to sidestep His work. The reasons we offer are varied and may even seem reasonable from a worldly perspective, but God sees them for the baseless excuses they are. Whether we say (with an appropriate level of regret), "It would be irresponsible to jeopardize our earning potential when we have a family to support," or claim, "I would, but I just don't have the money/training/skills to help," what we are really saying is that our own comforts and wishes are more important to us than the needs of others.

Nehemiah made the right choice. He saw the need, confidently stood, and said to God, "I will serve." The need is great in our world today. No matter where you live or what your circumstances are, God has a job for you. Are you willing to serve? Will you answer the call?

***It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect*** (Ps. 18:32).

**Thought for the Day:** *Remember, what holds you back from God's service will potentially hold you back from His great reward as well.*

**Christ Revealed:** Through Nehemiah's prayer for his people (Neh. 1:4-11). Christ also prayed for His own throughout the ages, which includes us today (John 17:20).

**Word Studies:** 1:5 **terrible** = awesome, greatly to be feared; 2:2 **countenance** = face; 2:7 **convey me over** = allow me to pass; 2:20 **no portion** = no part or property; 3:19 **turning** = corner; 3:23 **over against** = in front of, opposite of.

**Pray for Staff:** Gilbert Palafox • **Government Officials:** Rep. Marie Perez (WA), Rep. Madeline Dean (PA), Sen. Marsha Blackburn (TN) • **Country:** Philippines (107,668,231) Southeast Asia • Major Languages: Filipino, English • Religious persecution in some areas • 82.9% Catholic; 2.8% Evangelical; 5% Muslim (mostly Sunni); 4.5% Other Christian; 2.3% Iglesia ni Cristo; 1.8% Other; 0.6% Unspecified; 0.1% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Seek God in prayer continually and depend on His strength (I Chr. 16:11).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 8

***So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work (Neh. 4:6).***

Nehemiah was a straightforward, no-nonsense man of God. From the moment that he was made aware of the state of affairs in Jerusalem, he began actively working towards a solution (Neh. 1:11; 2:5). He labored tirelessly until he was able to triumphantly say: ***So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days*** (6:15). In 52 days, Nehemiah had been able to accomplish more than the citizens of Jerusalem had in the last 52 years! As we read about his faithful work, many questions arise. Why was the wall ignored for so long? How did Nehemiah succeed where so many others had failed? What can we learn from his efforts that can be applied to our lives today?

Scripture does not give a concrete answer as to why the repairs on the city wall had been ignored for so long, but it does provide us with many of the likely reasons. We know that life in the province of Judah was hard (1:3) and that the surrounding territorial governors were hostile to improvements among the Jews (2:9-10). We also know that the people were living in a prolonged state of physical and financial hardship and that this was made worse by their treatment of each other (5:1-5). The people living in Jerusalem likely viewed the rebuilding of the wall as a project that was too big for them to handle. They had their hands full simply trying to keep their own affairs in order.

Despite the opposition, Nehemiah knew God's work would be done. How could he be so certain? The answer to that can be found eleven times in this short book. Nehemiah prayed (1:4-11; 2:4; 4:4-5,9; 5:19; 6:9,14; 13:14,22,29,31). Through prayer, God revealed both the need and the solution (1:4-11). Through prayer, God provided the strength and the fortitude (4:9). Prayer allowed Nehemiah to safely vent his anger (4:4-5) and to confess his fears (6:9). In short, it was Nehemiah's constant contact with the Lord that allowed him to prevail. Nehemiah was not acting on his own authority; he was working under the leadership of God. ***But Jesus beheld them, and***

***said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible*** (Matt. 19:26).

In today's world, there are many "Jerusalem's Walls" waiting to be rebuilt by people in such desperate need that they are incapable of moving forward on their own. They are so overwhelmed by their situation that they cannot even visualize a better life, much less work toward achieving one. As outside observers, God frequently gifts us with the clarity to see what needs to be done, just as He did with Nehemiah. He then sends us in, not to judge, but to motivate and guide. Nehemiah entered Jerusalem armed with God's power and supported by kingly authority. Still, he did not use that as an excuse to keep from working side by side with those he came to help (4:23). If we are willing to adopt the same attitude of prayer and service as Nehemiah, we too will learn to see the possibilities of God instead of the impossibilities of man.

***And whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son*** (John 14:13).

**Thought for the Day:** *God's work is always there to be done, and we will find no other task that can better enrich the soul.*

**Christ Portrayed:** By Nehemiah and other Jews who had bought back (redeemed) Jews who had been sold to the heathen as slaves while in Persia (Neh.5:8). We, ***which He hath purchased with His own blood*** (Acts 20:28), were redeemed when we accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

**Word Studies:** 4:7 **breaches** = broken places; 4:10 **strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed** = strength of the workmen is failing; 4:20 **resort ye thither** = assemble there; 5:3 **dearth** = famine; 5:7 **usury** = interest.

**Pray for Staff:** Kevin Jennings • **Government Officials:** Sen. Ben Luján (NM), Rep.Susan Wild (PA), Rep.Alex Mooney(WV) • **Country:** Pitcairn Islands (48) South Pacific Ocean • Major Languages: English, Pitkern • 100% Seventh-Day Adventist • **Prayer Suggestion:** Humbly kneel before the Lord in prayer and worship the Lord (II Chr. 6:13).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 9

***And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground (Neh. 8:5-6).***

Why does mankind exist? What was God's intended purpose when He placed us at the pinnacle of His creation? To those of us who have immersed ourselves in His Word, there is but one answer to these questions. ***But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine (Is. 43:1). Even every one that is called by My name: for I have created him for My glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him (43:7).*** We were created by God, in His image (Gen. 1:26), to bring Him glory. We are here to worship Him and reflect His grace and glory over all creation. That is it. It is our sole purpose for existing. As hard as it might be for the world at large to accept, we were not created so that we could seek fulfilling lives and earthly happiness. God has not given us life for the purpose of self-discovery and personal achievement. Our lives, and the lives of each and every other human being on this planet, are not our own; they are His.

Reflecting the glory of God is not just a responsibility but a profound privilege. It is from that glory that all His blessings flow, and it is in the face of this glory ***that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth (Phil. 2:10).*** We reflect the glory outward across the world through obedience to His will, and we reflect it inward towards God through praise and worship. As Ezra gathered the people together in revival and worship, he sought to facilitate both of these mandates.

At the behest of the people, Ezra read the Book of the Law to the assembled masses. As he read, he sent selected Levites out amongst the crowd to work individually with members



of the congregation ***so they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading*** (Neh. 8:8). Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Levites worked tirelessly to ensure that God's people had the knowledge that they needed to reflect His glory outward through obedience to His will.

Just as importantly, they ensured that the people didn't get so caught up in their earthly spiritual responsibilities that they forgot to celebrate the Lord. ***Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our LORD: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength*** (8:10). They encouraged God's people to fully turn their faces to Him in praise and worship, knowing that in this way, and only in this way, would they be able to pull the Glory of God inside themselves and tend the spark of holiness that He had planted in their hearts.

***These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full*** (John 15:11).

**Thought for the Day:** *To acknowledge God is to celebrate Him; any other reaction only demonstrates that one does not know Him.*

**Christ Revealed:** Through the names required to be registered for priestly service (Neh. 7:64). Christ, our Great ***High Priest*** (Heb. 3:1), will soon return, wearing His Name, ***KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS*** (Rev. 19:16).

**Word Studies:** 7:2 **feared** = had reverential, heartfelt submission to; 7:3 **stand by** = stand on guard; **watches** = guards; 7:61 **seed** = genealogical descent; 7:65 **Urim and Thummim** = two objects kept in the high priest's breastplate and used to determine the Lord's will (Ex. 28:30); 8:14 **booths** = temporary shelters.

**Pray for Staff:** Tiffany Parisi • **Government Official:** Rep. Ken Calvert (CA), Rep. John James (MI) • **Country:** Poland (38,346,279) Eastern Europe • **Major Language:** Polish • **Religious Freedom-Reports of Societal abuses or discrimination** • 89.8% Roman Catholic; 1.3% Eastern Orthodox; 0.3% Protestant; 8.3% Unspecified; 0.3% Other (Jew, Muslim) • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray and praise God for His faithfulness and mercy in keeping all His promises (II Chr. 6:14-15).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 10

***Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: And madest known unto them Thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses Thy servant: And gavest them bread from heaven for their hunger, and broughtest forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and promisedst them that they should go in to possess the land which thou hadst sworn to give them. But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments, And refused to obey, neither were mindful of Thy wonders that Thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not (Neh. 9:13-17).***

In order to fully understand the breadth and depth of God's love, mercy, and grace, we must first uncover and accept the treachery of our own faithlessness. ***Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers*** (Neh. 9:1-2). After a period of joyous revival in which they renewed their understanding of the law (8:1-2) and celebrated their joy in the Lord (8:9-12), the children of Israel came together as one and humbled themselves before God, laying out their transgressions one by one. They offered neither justification nor excuse for their actions; instead, they opened their hearts and minds and examined them through the filter of God's Word. The deeper they got into their recitation, the more they recognized their faithlessness, guilt, and sin. ***Howbeit Thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for Thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly: Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept thy law, nor hearkened unto***

***Thy commandments and Thy testimonies, wherewith thou didst testify against them. (9:33-34).***

As they stood before God with their defenses stripped away, they were hit with a wonderous epiphany—at their wicked, worthless worst, God still loved them. He stood by them even when they were determined to deny Him; he shepherded and protected them even as they rushed headlong into danger, and always, ALWAYS, He kept the path home to Him open and clearly marked. ***If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land (II Chr. 7:14).*** Enriched and uplifted by proof of God’s unwavering faithfulness, the children of Israel solemnly renewed their Covenant with Him. And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it (Neh. 9:38). ***They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God’s law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our LORD, and His judgments and His statutes (10:29).***

***O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever (Ps. 136:1).***

**Thought for the Day:** *A single unrepentant sin can chain us to this world, but no sin, no matter how great, can destroy God’s love.*

**Christ Revealed:** As the Creator of heaven and earth (Neh. 9:6). ***All things were created by Him, and for Him (Col. 1:16).***

**Word Studies:** 9:18 **wrought great provocations** = committed great blasphemy; 9:22 **didst divide them into corners** = allotted and set boundaries; 9:25 **fat** = rich; 9:29 **withdrew the shoulder** = turned away rebelliously; **hardened their neck** = were stubborn, obstinate; 10:1 **Tirshatha** = governor; 10:28 **Nethinims** = Temple attendants or servants

**Pray for Staff:** Judy McCrary • **Country:** Portugal (10,813,834) Western Europe • Major Languages: Portuguese, Mirandese • Limited Religious Freedom • 81% Roman Catholic; 3.3% Protestant; 0.6% Other (Muslim, Hindu, Jew, Buddhist, Taoist, Zoroastrian); 6.8% None; 8.3% Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** Humble yourself, pray, and seek the will of God as you read His Word (II Chr. 7:14).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 11

**N**ow these are the chief of the province that dwelt in Jerusalem: but in the cities of Judah dwelt every one in his possession in their cities, to wit, Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants. And at Jerusalem dwelt certain of the children of Judah, and of the children of Benjamin. Of the children of Judah; Athaiah the son of Uziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephathiah, the son of Mahalaleel, of the children of Perez; And Maa-seiah the son of Baruch, the son of Col-hozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of Shiloni. All the sons of Perez that dwelt at Jerusalem were four hundred threescore and eight valiant men (Neh. 11:3-6).

**And the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem: the rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city, and nine parts to dwell in other cities** (Neh. 11:1). All that we need to know from an overall historical perspective about the resettlement of Jerusalem is contained in this first verse. The **rulers of the people** and one-tenth of the general population were chosen to live within the walls of the holy city of Jerusalem, and the remaining 90 percent were spread out amongst the rest of the reclaimed Judean towns. These facts and figures allow us to visualize the distribution of the repatriated Jews and adequately prepare us to process further information on the resettlement should it become available. Yet after giving us the pertinent facts, Nehemiah went on for 79 additional verses (two whole chapters) listing his fellow Jews by name, lineage, and settlement location.

Nehemiah's painstakingly detailed list of names serves as a poignant reminder that God works through individuals, not statistical blocks, for the furtherment of His perfect plan. We do not exist to Him as nameless, faceless, interchangeable pawns, but as unique individuals, the only one of our kind ever created. **But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou**

**art Mine** (Is. 43:1). God knows us on an intimate level, better even than we know ourselves. **But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows** (Luke 12:7). He is Creator and Lord of all, but He saves individuals. **Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me** (Rev. 3:20). In the end, God's placement of our name, which He has known since before the beginning of time, will decide all. **And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire** (20:15).

As members of the body of Christ, our most important work is for God, not man (Col. 3:23-24). Consequently, much of what we do may go unremarked and unappreciated by our fellow man. When we do it right, then it likely won't even garner much attention from our brothers and sisters in Christ because all the Glory will rightfully be channeled to God (Eph. 3:21). But that doesn't mean we are unimportant, overlooked, or forgotten. God sees. God knows. And God will remember.

**Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways** (Ps. 139:2-3).

**Thought for the Day:** *Our place in the world may be insignificant, but we should never doubt the importance of our place in God's plan.*

**Christ Portrayed:** By the priests and Levites who purified (sanctified) themselves and the people (Neh. 12:30). Christ our High Priest, through His perfect sacrifice, purified His believers by His Word. **Now ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you** (John 15:3; 17:17).

**Word Studies:** 11:16 **outward business** = external business of the Temple; 11:24 **was at the king's hand** = was advisor, administrator of the king; 12:44 **that waited** = who officiated, ministered, kept the watches.

**Pray for Staff:** Rosalinda Palafox • **Country:** Puerto Rico (3,620,897) Caribbean • Major Languages: Spanish, English • Religious Freedom • 85% Roman Catholic; 15% Protestant/Other (Buddhist, Jehovah's Witness, Jew, Muslim) • **Prayer Suggestion:** Ask the Lord when you have a need (II Chr. 14:11).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 12

***Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath (Neh. 13:17-18).***

In many ways, the Book of Nehemiah illustrates the perpetual and unchanging essence of mankind's relationship with God. It emphasizes the all-consuming nature of His love and faithfulness and allows us to experience the joy that comes from being wholly dedicated to Him. It also showcases the weak-willed and self-centered nature of mortal man.

Under the direction of God and the earthly leadership of Nehemiah, the city of Jerusalem was rebuilt and repopulated. The people rededicated themselves to following the law as it had been given to Moses (Neh.10:29), separating themselves from those who were not of the family of God (13:3) and turning their hearts to living fully within the Covenant that the Lord had established (Ex. 20-23; Deut. 28). Yet, as was the case with their forefathers, this godly behavior lasted only so long as they had a strong, godly leader. When Nehemiah temporarily returned to the king's service in Babylon (Persia) (Neh. 13:6), the people grew lax about attending to their everyday duties to God. They became less concerned with His will and more concerned with their own greed-based worldly pursuits. They neglected the Temple and those appointed to serve in it (13:10), allowed an Ammonite to reside there (2:19; 13:4-5), and profaned the Sabbath (13:15-18)—all without any outward evidence of guilt over betraying the Lord whom they claimed to serve.

The lesson that God has for us here is painfully simple. Left to our own devices, we are certain to fail Him. It doesn't matter what our intention might be at the outset; we are not strong enough, in and of ourselves, to rise above our baser natures. ***For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do*** (Rom. 7:18-19). It is

not enough for us to read God's Word and decide that we want to try to live by Its concepts; the history of the nation of Israel has shown us over and over again that that is an impossible undertaking. ***As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.*** (Rom. 3:10-11). We cannot live FOR God, but through His grace and with the presence of His Spirit within us, we can live WITH Him.

***When His disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible*** (Matt. 19:25-26). The only way in which we will ever have the strength to follow God's will is by drawing that strength directly from God. Everyone who has been joined with the body of Christ has also been blessed with the indwelling Holy Spirit. ***And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father*** (Gal. 4:6). By embracing His presence within our hearts, we can discern His will and hold fast to His Word.

***The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God*** (Rom. 8:16).

**Thought for the Day:** *Without God to guide us, we quickly fall into sin. If we willingly leave His side, we place ourselves in mortal danger.*

**Christ Portrayed:** By Nehemiah, who cleansed the priests and Levites and defined their duties (Neh. 13:30). Christ cleanses us from all our sins when we confess them (I John 1:9). Through Him we have been made ***a royal priesthood*** to serve the Lord (I Pet. 2:9).

**Word Studies:** 13:17 **contended with** = confronted, rebuked; 13:26 **outlandish** = foreign idol worshiper; 13:30 **strangers** = idol-worshipping foreigners; **wards of** = duties for.

**Pray For Staff:** Ryan McCrary • **Country:** Qatar (2,123,160) Southwestern Asia • Major Languages: Arabic, English • Muslim conversion to Christ is forbidden, but expatriate Christians are allowed to meet informally • 77.5% Muslim; 8.5% Christian; 14% Other (Hindu, Buddhist, Anglican, Egyptian Copt, Baha'i, Greek & Eastern Orthodox Church) • **Prayer Suggestion:** When you are in desperate circumstances, turn to the Lord with fasting and prayer (II Chr. 20:2-4).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 13

***And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries. And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy (Esth. 3:8-10).***

In the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, we read of the return of the exiles and the rebuilding of the Temple, the walls of Jerusalem, and the faith of the people. Now, as we begin the book of Esther, we switch our attention to the lives of the Jews who had not returned and had instead remained in Medo-Persia (what once was Babylon). It is interesting to note that while Esther is a book chronicling the power of absolute faith and devotion to God in times of trouble, it does so without ever once mentioning God by name. We can infer, then, that the scribe of Esther was not attempting to teach us the law of God. Instead, his intent was to show us God's law in action in the lives of His people.

We can quickly discern from our reading that Haman was a petty, devious man. He was high in the king's favor but took no confidence in the position. Consequently, he required complete and total allegiance from every inhabitant of the land in order to feel secure. Mordecai's refusal to bow to him in worshipful obeisance infuriated Haman. That fury turned to rage when it was revealed that it was Mordecai's beliefs as a Jew that had led to his refusal. In a move that would later baffle the citizens of the city of Shushan (Esth. 3:15), Haman concocted a plan that would destroy not only Mordecai but also all of the Jews within the border of Ahasuerus' kingdom.

Even as this evil man rose to his position of power, God was working behind the scenes to arrange for the deliverance of His people. ***Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour. They shall be ashamed, and also con-***



***founded, all of them: they shall go to confusion together that are makers of idols*** (Is. 45:15-16.) In hindsight, it is evident that God used the falling out between a pagan king and his queen to pave the way for Esther to rise to favor with the king.

Scripture describes Esther as a dutiful Jewish maiden. She conducted herself at all times in accordance with the laws of God, following the example set by her adoptive father, Mordecai. God worked through them without fanfare because of their devout obedience to Him. They didn't need a prophet to remind them of their duty or to promise them a specific outcome in order to trust in the Lord. Instead, they instinctively applied His word to every situation and acted accordingly, confident that His will would be done.

***Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil*** (Prov. 3:5-7).

**Thought for the Day:** *The evil of the world can conspire against God's children, but it cannot hinder Him.*

**Christ Portrayed:** By Mordecai, who adopted Esther (Esth. 2:15). We are adopted into the family of God by Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:5; I John 3:1). ***Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*** (Gal. 3:26).

**Word Studies:** 1:10 **chamberlains** = officials; 2:16 Tebeth compares with our December/January; 3:8 **to suffer them** = to let them remain; 3:13 Adar compares with our February/March; 3:15 **posts** = special messengers.

**Pray for Staff:** Rosalinda Palafox • **Government Officials:** Rep. Mark Amodei (NV) • **Country:** Romania (21,729,871) Southeastern Europe • Major Languages: Romanian, Hungarian • Freedom of Worship • 86.8% Romanian Orthodox Church; 7.5% Protestant; 4.7% Roman Catholic; 0.9% Other/Unspecified (Muslim; Jew, Jehovah's Witness, Baha'i, Mormon, Zen Buddhist, Unification Church, Krishna); 0.1% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Intercede in prayer for others, knowing that God hears your prayer (II Chr. 30:18-20).

**Optional Reading:** Galatians 1

***Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this (Esth. 4:13-14)?***

As we read through the Book of Esther, we can't help but marvel over how a seemingly unrelated string of coincidences work together to save the lives of God's people. First, Queen Vashti was deposed as queen for refusing the summons of a drunken king (Esth. 1:10-12). The king held absolute power, and she had to have known that the consequences of ignoring him would be dire, yet she chose to do so anyway. Next, Esther, out of all the virgins in the land, was selected as her replacement and installed as queen (2:17). Third, Esther's cousin/adopted father Mordecai accidentally overheard a plot against the king and, through his connections with Esther, managed to save the king's life (2:21-23). Finally, because of a bout of insomnia, the king read about Mordecai's actions and realized that he hadn't adequately thanked him for his help (6:1-4). The king's desire to rectify that situation set into motion the events that would destroy Haman, the enemy of the Jews.

Most of us expect that when God works in our lives, we will be hit with a big sign that says, "God was here!" After all, why would the Creator of the universe waste His time on being subtle? As we can see from today's reading, that is not always the case. God frequently works behind the scenes, giving us little nudges to point us in the right direction. Often, what we believe to be sheer coincidence or simply a case of us following our gut instincts should rightly be attributed to direction from God. It is our responsibility, as His children, to always keep our hearts and minds alert and open so that we might recognize and be ready to respond to his will in any given situation.

The long string of 'coincidences' placed Esther in a precarious position. She had the connections to possibly save her people,

but she would have to put herself in grave personal danger to do so (4:11). ***And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*** Mordecai's advice to Esther is just as pertinent to our lives today as it was when it was given. We are incapable of understanding the complexities of God's plan, but that should never stop us from doing our part to work toward its ultimate fulfillment. ***And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God*** (Rev. 21:3). When we find ourselves in the position to positively affect the lives of others in a godly manner, it is reasonable to assume that God has put us there and act accordingly. What greater gift can we be given than the opportunity to share God's love with others?

***And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me*** (Matt. 25:40).

**Thought for the Day:** *God is not worried if we don't fully understand the complexities of His plan when He calls us to act, and neither are those who benefit from our actions.*

**Christ Revealed:** In the honor shown to Mordecai as he was led through the streets (Esth. 6:10-11), Jesus was greatly honored in His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:8-9).

**Word Studies:** 4:1 **rent** = tore, as an act of grief and mourning; 6:13 **be of the seed of the Jews** = is of Jewish origin; 7:4 **countervail** = justify, compensate, or make up for; 7:5 **that durst** = who dares to.

**Pray for Staff:** Gilbert Palafox • **Government Officials:** Rep. Jerrold Nadler (NY), Gov. Roy Cooper (NC) • **Country:** Russia (142,470,272) Northeastern Europe and Northern Asia • Major Languages: Russian, Dolgong, German, Chechen, Tatar • Restricted Religious Freedom • 15-20% Russian Orthodox; 10-15% Muslim; 2% Other Christian; Large population of non-practicing & non-believers • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray for national leaders and their families (Ezra 6:10).

**Optional Reading:** Galatians 2

***And the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land, and upon the isles of the sea. And all the acts of his power and of his might, and the declaration of the greatness of Mordecai, whereunto the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? For Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed*** (Esth. 10:1-3).

As we come to the close of the Book of Esther, we find that much has changed for all involved. At the beginning of this Book, Ahasuerus had little to no knowledge of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He knew little of the Jewish people who lived under his rule. Haman, the king's most trusted advisor (Esth. 3:1-2), was a man of ambition willing to do whatever it took to gain power and notoriety. Meanwhile, Esther was just another Jewish maiden living quietly in the land of her conqueror, and Mordecai was a simple Jewish servant working at the palace gate. There was no readily discernable reason why these lives should have intersected, but as the Book continued, we discovered the connection. All of these people were being used to forward the purpose of the Lord. Each one of them, willingly or unwillingly, played a part in preserving God's people. God used the desires of the hearts of each of these individuals to bring His plans to fruition. Some of these hearts had good inclinations, while others were bent on evil, but the Lord God used them all. Each vessel worked to the function it was fit for. ***But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour*** (II Tim. 2:20).

Those who worked for the good of the plan of God saw all areas of their lives blessed. We know how greatly the life of Esther was changed. She went from being a servant to a queen. We also see how abundantly God blessed Mordecai. As He had done with Joseph, son of Jacob (Israel), God raised Mordecai from a lowly servant to a high official in a land that was not his own. Just as Joseph had gained favor in Egypt and

had become second only to Pharaoh, Mordecai became second only to Ahasuerus. Ahasuerus found his life enriched by a godly wife and an upright friend. You can never go wrong by doing right by the people of God. ***He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward*** (Matt. 10:41).

Haman, on the other hand, never understood the part he played in God's plan. He got everything he wanted, albeit for only a brief period. He wielded great power over his countrymen, and his actions immortalized his name both in the history books of his people and in the Word of God. His evil ambition will never be forgotten, but it is highly doubtful that this is the fame that he sought. From Haman, we learn that, while it may be possible to get our heart's desire in this life, if that desire runs counter to God's will, it will always come at too high a price.

***For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul*** (Mark 8:36)?

**Thought for the Day:** *God's plan does not require our support or involvement, but we cannot share in its benefits without doing so.*

**Christ Portrayed:** By Mordecai, who was exalted from servanthood to a position of honor and glory ***next unto*** (the) ***king*** (Esth. 8:2,15; 10:3). His life illustrated Christian conduct. Christ came to earth as a servant and was exalted to ***the right hand of God*** (Phil. 2:5-11; Mark 16:19).

**Word Studies:** 8:3 **put away the mischief** = avert the evil; **device** = scheme; 8:10 **posts** = couriers; 9:4 **waxed greater and greater** = became increasingly popular and powerful.

**Pray for Our Nation:** Today is Flag Day • **Government Officials:** Rep. Steny Hoyer (MD) • **Country:** Rwanda (12,337,138) Central Africa • Major Language: Kinyarwanda • Religious Freedom • 56.5% Roman Catholic; 26% Protestant; 11.1% Adventist; 4.6% Muslim; 0.1% Indigenous Beliefs; 1.7% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Glorify God, who is able to use national leaders to accomplish His purposes (Ezra 7:27-28).

**Optional Reading:** Galatians 3

***There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil (Job 1:1). Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die. But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips (Job 2:9-10).***

Our journey began on January First with the words, ***In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*** (Gen. 1:1). Over the last six months, we have taken an in-depth look at God’s creation, focusing primarily on the history of His relationship with His chosen people. Most recently, we have studied the Book of Esther and watched as God worked behind the scenes for their ultimate good. As we begin the Book of Job, we are drawn away from this familiar narrative. For the next ten days, our focus will shift away from establishing the foundations of God’s ultimate plan and turn towards exploring the transient nature of earthly life in comparison to the permanency of God.

Job was ***perfect and upright; he feared God and eschewed evil***, but he was forced to endure suffering greater than any other mortal man in the Word of God. Throughout his ordeal, Job sought the answer to just one question, which he asked in a multitude of different ways. “Why?” To this question, he was never given an answer.

Much is made over Job’s patience and endurance, but that is not the primary lesson the Lord has for us here. At its core, Job is a Book of faith, not a book of painful resignation. It teaches us that the key to surviving suffering is NOT that we must understand why we suffer but that we must trust God enough to be content even in our suffering. Job’s wife could not understand. She saw her husband as a victim, a man in agony whom God had not moved to help, and she saw no further use for God. When she told Job to ***curse God, and die***, she spoke with belief, but without faith. She felt betrayed by God because He was not providing them with the blessings they had earned, and she was filled with righteous anger. Job, on the other hand,

believed in the sovereignty of God. ***What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?*** His faith was enough that he accepted all that befell him, both good and evil, as an opportunity to grow in his relationship with the Lord.

Sooner or later, unprovoked suffering will enter into the life of even the godliest amongst us. It might be temporary, such as a limited illness or loss of a job, or it could be long-term, such as chronic illness or disability. It might be sudden and overwhelming, such as the loss of a loved one or the diagnosis of a terminal disease, or it could come on gradually over time as minor stressors pile together to form a seemingly insurmountable wall. No matter the situation, it will feel like a sucker punch that we didn't see coming, and our faith will be tested like never before. In these times of darkness, we must consciously choose to cling to the light (John 8:12). Be like Job, not his wife.

***We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed*** (II Cor. 4:8-9).

**Thought for the Day:** *God already knows the final outcome, but that does not make our journey with Him any less necessary.*

**Christ Revealed:** In the conversation between Satan and God Almighty (Job 1:6-12). We can see the meaning of Christ's warning to Peter that Satan wanted to sift him ***as wheat*** (Luke 22:31). It is comforting to know that Satan cannot test us beyond the will of God.

**Word Studies:** 1:1 **eschewed** = avoided; 1:20 **rent** = tore; **mantle** = robe; 2:8 **potsherd** = piece of broken pottery; 3:16 **untimely birth** = stillborn; 3:24 **roarings** = grief, groanings; 4:2 **assay** = attempt; 4:4 **upholden** = helped, upheld.

**Pray for Government Officials:** Rep. Rick Larsen (WA), Rep. Adam Smith (WA), Rep. Kevin Mullin (CA) • **Country:** Saint Barthelemy (7,267) Caribbean • Major Languages: French, English • Religious Freedom • Roman Catholic; Protestant; Jehovah's Witness • **Prayer Suggestion:** Humbly kneel before the Lord with a contrite heart as you pray (Ezra 9:5-6).

**Optional Reading:** Galatians 4

**Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: For He maketh sore, and bindeth up: He woundeth, and His hands make whole. He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee. In famine he shall redeem thee from death: and in war from the power of the sword** (Job 5:17-20).

According to Scripture, Job was a man of substantial means. He was highly respected in his community, with a large, close-knit family and a well-established and thriving estate (Job 1:2-5; 29:7-18). When unthinkable tragedy struck, taking the lives of all ten of his children, as well as his livestock herds and his servants (1:14-20), his friends were horrified. And as if that were not enough for one man to bear, Job's own health soon began to fail. **So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes** (2:7-8). When his closest friends heard of this, they rushed to his side to offer what support and comfort they could. **So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great** (2:13).

For seven days and seven nights, they grieved alongside Job in quiet solidarity. They knew their friend and believed that he would move heaven and earth to atone for whatever he had done to bring this great calamity upon himself and his family. Yet when Job opened his mouth and spoke, they didn't hear the humble, penitent confession they were expecting. Instead, Job poured out words of pain and confusion, questioning why God had allowed him to be born knowing how greatly he would eventually suffer (3:10-22).

Job's attitude greatly troubled his friends. They couldn't understand why Job was acting as if he were an innocent who was being unfairly persecuted. Cautiously, but with the conviction of one who believes his words to be unassailable fact, Eliphaz turned to confront his distraught friend. He felt it vital that Job



return to his senses and remember his place before God before he brought even greater calamity down upon himself. Eliphaz's viewpoint was simple. God rewarded the righteous and punished those guilty of sin. Job was being punished; therefore, Job had to have sinned. To Eliphaz, no other explanation was possible. In his opinion, Job should be grateful that God was correcting him and giving him a chance to repent. Instead of complaining, Eliphaz believed that Job should be reflecting on his transgressions and working to repair his relationship with the Lord.

Before we criticize Eliphaz too harshly, we must stop and consider the validity of his words. How many times have we, or someone we know, suffered as a direct result of personal sin? In those instances, Eliphaz's advice would have been sound. The problem is not with what he said but how he said it. Eliphaz approached Job with judgment and censure despite having no evidence to support his accusations. His words did not express love and concern for his friend's well-being. Instead, they harshly condemned and shamed him. This is not what God calls us to do, ever.

***Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted (Gal. 6:1).***

**Thought for the Day:** *When we blame others for their own misfortunes, are we seeking to enlighten and aid them or confirm our own perceived righteousness?*

**Christ Revealed:** Through Job's sorrowful condition (Job 7:1-6). Christ was known as **a Man of sorrows . . . acquainted with grief** (Is. 53:3). On the cross, separated from God in His humanity, Jesus felt the pain of that separation as well as the pain and suffering for all the sins of mankind for all time (Mark 15:34).

**Word Studies:** 5:12 **devices** = plans, plotting; **enterprise** = schemes; 5:13 **froward** = deceitful; **carried headlong** = frustrated; 5:18 **maketh sore** = inflicts pain; 6:3 **swallowed up** = rash; without restraint; 7:21 **sleep in the dust** = be dead in the grave

**Pray for Government Officials:** Gov. Dan McKee (RI), Rep. Jason Smith (MO) • **Country:** St. Helena, Ascension, and Tristan da Cunha (7,776) South Atlantic Ocean • Major Language: English • Religious Freedom • Protestant (Anglican (majority); Baptist; Seventh-Day Adventist); Roman Catholic • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray and fast as you confess your sins and intercede for our nation (Neh. 1:4-6).

**Optional Reading:** Galatians 5

***For He is not a man, as I am, that I should answer Him, and we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both (Job 9:32-33).***

***Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind (Job 12:9-10).*** Even as he despaired, Job's absolute belief in God never wavered. He knew the Lord was his Creator, and he did not question the Lord's right to bring about destruction and pain. ***Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me (10:8).***

Bilidad had concluded: ***Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will He help the evil doers (8:20).*** Job could not argue with that logic because that was the belief that he, too, had always held. ***I know it is so of a truth: but how should man be just with God?*** Yet that still left Job with a seemingly unanswerable question. How can a man prove himself righteous before God? ***For He is not a man, as I am, that I should answer Him, and we should come together in judgment.***

Instinctively, Job knew that something vital was missing. ***Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both.*** God was perfect, but mankind had been rendered incapable of being so by the choices of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. ***Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned (Rom. 5:12).*** Therefore, a gulf existed between the two that no man could breach. ***But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear (Is. 59:2).*** Job was convinced, therefore, that attempting to converse with God was futile.

Unbeknownst to Job, God saw the same need and had already set His plan in motion to provide the solution. ***For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time (1 Tim. 2:5-6).*** The first step in the

Lord's master plan was to cause mankind to see their need – a Savior would be useless to a population that didn't understand their need for salvation. As we read Job's heartfelt pleas, we are forcefully reminded how blessed we are to live in a time in which God's plan has been made clear. ***For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life*** (John 3:16). We need never feel the agony of believing that God does not hear our cries, ***for Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us*** (Heb. 9:24). Once we have accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we will never be alone again.

***For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*** (Rom.8: 38-39).

**Thought for the Day:** *When we have no one else to turn to, God is still there.*

**Christ Portrayed:** Through the daysman (mediator) that Job longs for (Job 9:33). Christ is the only ***Mediator between God and men*** (I Tim. 2:5).

**Word Studies:** 9:33 **daysman** = mediator; 9:34 **rod** = chastisement; 10:11 **fenced** = knit me together; 11:6 **exacteth** = demands; 11:14 **tabernacles** = dwellings; 11:19 **make suit unto thee** = seek your favor; 12:19 **spoiled** = stripped and plundered.

**Pray for Staff:** Jennifer Palafox • **Government Officials:** Rep. Scott Peters (CA), Rep. Jerry Carl (AL), Rep. Marcy Kaptur (OH), Rep. Brad Wenstrup (OH) • **Country:** St. Kitts and Nevis (51,538) Caribbean • Major Language: English • Religious Freedom • 50% Anglican; 25% Roman Catholic; 25% Other (Protestant; Seventh-day Adventist; Jehovah's Witness; Mormon; Rastafarian; Muslim; Hindu; Baha'i) • **Prayer Suggestion:** Confess and forsake any known sin (Neh. 1:6).

**Optional Reading:** Galatians 6

***If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands. For now thou numberest my steps: dost thou not watch over my sin? My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity (Job 14:14-17).***

Yesterday, we discussed Job's distress at viewing the gulf that sin had created between God and man and his desperate desire for a mediator to bridge the gap and allow for meaningful communication. Today, we bear witness to another one of Job's fervent desires. ***If a man die, shall he live again?***

Historically, the Book of Job is set somewhere before or around the time of Abraham. The laws of Moses had not yet been given, and the nation of Israel had not been formed. The future Messiah had not yet even been hinted at. All men existed under the cloud of the punishment of Adam. ***In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return (Gen. 3:19).*** Even those who sought to serve the Lord did so for only the span of one lifetime, with no expectation of anything afterward. ***And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years (Gen. 6:3).*** It is a great testament to Job's faith that he dreamed of more. As we read his heartfelt plea, we should take a moment to reflect on the true magnitude of the gift that was given to us with the coming of Jesus. ***But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (John 1:12-14).***

We know with certainty what Job did not. Yes, the dead can live again! ***For the Lord Himself shall descend from***

**heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first** (I Thess. 4:16). Jesus does **call**, and all we have to do is answer. He promises much more than the sealing and hiding of our sins; His blood permanently washes them away. **But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin** (I John 1:7). The Holy Spirit now lives within every believer, providing guidance and support as we go through our lives. In other words, we now have the reassurance that Job craved. We know that no matter how bad our life on this earth gets, the Lord has not abandoned us. Instead, He eagerly awaits the moment He will welcome us home.

***In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also*** (John 14:2-3).

**Thought for the Day:** *Fear of death is a fear of the unknown; with the certainty provided by God's Word, that fear is defeated.*

**Christ Revealed:** Through the smiting of Job (Job 16:10). Christ also was struck by those who ridiculed Him (Matt. 27:29-44; John 18:22-23; 19:2-3; Ps. 22:7-8; 109:25; Is. 53:3-5,7-10).

**Word Studies:** 14:5 **days are determined . . . with Thee** = allotted time to live depends on You; 15:4 **restrainest** = hinder; 15:25 **strengtheneth himself against the Almighty** = defies the Almighty; 15:26 **upon the thick bosses of his bucklers** = with massive shields.

**Pray for Staff:** Tiffany Parisi • **Government Officials:** Rep. Andy Ogles (TN), Rep. Paul Tonko (NY), Rep. Jen Kiggans (VA) • **Country:** St. Lucia (163,362) Caribbean • Major Languages: English, French Patois • Religious Freedom • 61.5% Roman Catholic; 25.5% Protestant; 3.4% Other Christian; 1.9% Rastafarian; 0.4% Other; 1.4% Unspecified; 5.9% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** The Word of God, confession, and prayer bring the believer into close communion with God (Neh. 9:2-5).

**Optional Reading:** Ephesians 1

**Y**ea, the light of the wicked shall be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine. The light shall be dark in his tabernacle, and his candle shall be put out with him. The steps of his strength shall be straitened, and his own counsel shall cast him down. For he is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walketh upon a snare (Job 18:5-8). He shall be driven from light into darkness, and chased out of the world. He shall neither have son nor nephew among his people, nor any remaining in his dwellings. They that come after him shall be astonished at his day, as they that went before were affrighted. Surely such are the dwellings of the wicked, and this is the place of him that knoweth not God (Job 18:18-21).

By the time Bildad delivered his second speech to Job, any sympathy he had for his friend's plight had long since evaporated. In his first speech, Bildad had laid out the truth as he knew it. He'd rebuked Job for his useless, whining complaints (Job 8:2) and advised him of what he needed to do to improve his circumstances. ***If thou wouldst seek unto God betimes, and make thy supplication to the Almighty; If thou wert pure and upright; surely now he would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous. Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase*** (8:5-7). Job's (perceived to be) spiritually blind, self-absorbed response incensed Bildad. Instead of confessing his sins and humbling himself before God, Job had doubled down on his protestations of confused innocence. ***I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore Thou contendest with me*** (10:2). His limited patience exhausted, Bildad switched from offering counsel to issuing a blistering condemnation of what he saw as Job's ongoing hypocrisy.

***How long will it be ere ye make an end of words? mark, and afterwards we will speak. Wherefore are we counted as beasts, and reputed vile in your sight*** (18:2-3)? Bildad accused Job of mistreating his friends by refusing to engage in rational, reasonable conversation and of having secured his own fate through a multitude of (curiously unnamed) evil

choices. Unlike in his first speech, Bildad offered no advice, encouragement, or hope. In his eyes, Job had willfully chosen to turn from God and embrace evil. Faced with such a vile truth, Bildad acknowledged the judgment and justice of God, then turned away in disgust. ***Surely such are the dwellings of the wicked, and this is the place of him that knoweth not God.***

Because we already know of Job's righteous standing in the eyes of God (1:8), our first inclination is to condemn Bildad's message, but we would be wrong to do so. The fault is not in what he said — it's in how and why he said it. It is absolute truth that God will not abide evil; those who live unrepentant in opposition to His will are on the path to utter destruction, and to pretend otherwise is to deny God. Bildad's facts were correct, but his attitude revealed his own sinful nature.

Bildad was arrogant and prideful; he presumed to know God's mind. He spoke from a position of authority and judgment, his words devoid of love or compassion. His mouth was open, but his ears and his heart were closed. His ability to serve as an effective witness for God was destroyed by his 'holier than thou' attitude, and his belief that he 'knew it all' did more to separate him from God than did Job's anger and confusion.

***Judge not, that ye be not judged*** (Matt. 7:1).

**Thought for the Day:** *Our relationship with God cannot be imposed on another, and we should never make assumptions about their relationship with Him.*

**Christ Revealed:** As the ***Redeemer*** (Job 19:25). Jesus Christ is our Redeemer. By His death, He provided the required sacrifice to pay for our sins (Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:13-14; Rev. 5:9). ***Our Saviour Jesus Christ . . . gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity*** (Titus 2:13-14).

**Word Studies:** 17:1 **My breath is corrupt** = My life is ruined; 17:6 **a tabret** = an object of contempt, ridicule; 17:14 **corruption** = decay; 17:16 **bars of the pit** = unseen state; **our rest . . . is in the dust** = we are buried; 18:9 **gin** = snare, trap; 18:20 **day** = fate; tragic end; 19:3 **make yourselves strange to me** = wrong me; 19:14 **familiar** = close; 19:17 **strange** = unbearable, repulsive; 19:19 **inward** = dearest, intimate; 19:27 **reins** = heart.

**Pray for Government Officials:** Rep. Josh Brecheen (OK), Rep. Pete Aguilar (CA) • **Country:** St. Martin (31,530) Caribbean • Major Languages: French, English, Dutch • Religious Freedom • Roman Catholic, Jehovah's Witnesses, Protestant, Hindu • **Prayer Suggestion:** Intercede for your nation and friends in prayer with fasting and a self-sacrificing spirit (Esth. 4:16).

**Optional Reading:** Ephesians 2

**Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? or is it gain to Him, that thou makest thy ways perfect? Will He reprove thee for fear of thee? will He enter with thee into judgment (Job 22:2-4)?**

As modern-day readers in possession of all the facts, it is easy for us to pass harsh judgment on the conduct of Job's friends. We know, for God has told us, that Job was a righteous man. **And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil** (Job. 1:8). We view Job in the light of a suffering saint, and we realize that all that was required of him was to endure and remain faithful to God. Indeed, we know there was nothing else he could have done to change his circumstances. What we must strive to remember is that, during the time all of this was happening, this knowledge was not available. Job's friends were excessively harsh in their rush to judgment against him, but it would be a mistake for us to discount everything they said as wrong-headed and false without first examining in the light of God's word.

As Eliphaz begins his third round of 'advice' to Job, he seems to have forgotten everything he knows about his friend. He accuses Job of holding himself in higher esteem than he holds God. While this is absolutely false in the case of Job, the attitude that Eliphaz is warning against is unfortunately quite prevalent in today's society. Many have convinced themselves that they are crucial to the success of God's plan, that God 'needs' them and is therefore indebted to them for their service to Him. As Eliphaz points out, such a belief is absurd. God is all-powerful; we exist solely by His grace. We have no power except that which God grants us. Without Him, we do not even exist. Without us, He is still God.

The second flaw in human reasoning that Eliphaz warns against is believing that God will be moved to act against us out of fear of what we will do if He does not. Those who harbor this belief often accuse God of deliberately sabotaging their



lives. They believe they are being 'picked on' so that God can maintain control and keep them from reaching their true potential. Once again, this belief defies comprehension. What could any mortal person possibly do that would in any way affect our omnipotent Creator? If and/or when God moves to chastise one of His creations, it is always done out of love and caring, not hate and fear. God's purpose is never to force us down but rather to equip us with the necessary skills and experiences to grow and thrive in His will and prepare us for life everlasting.

***God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed any thing, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things*** (Acts 17:24-25).

**Thought for the Day:** *To walk through the world uncorrected by God would be to walk through it without His love.*

**Christ Revealed:** Through Job's faithfulness to God throughout his suffering (Job 23:10-12). Christ's faithfulness to the Father is seen as He prayed for the Father's will to be done, not His own (Luke 22:42).

**Word Studies:** 21:2 **consolations** = sympathy; 21:3 **Suffer** = Allow; 21:8 **seed** = children; 21:10 **gendereth** = breeds; **casteth not** = does not miscarry; 21:29 **tokens** = testimony and experience; 24:5 **rising betimes for a prey** = seeking diligently for food; 24:21 **evil entreateth** = cruelly takes advantage of.

**Pray for Staff:** Judy McCrary • **Government Officials:** Rep. Ralph Norman (SC), Rep. Don Beyer (VA), Rep. Deborah Ross (NC), Gov. Josh Shapiro (PA), Sen. Eric Schmitt (MO) • **Country:** St. Pierre and Miquelon (5,716) North America - North Atlantic Ocean • Major Language: French • Religious Freedom • 99% Roman Catholic; 1% Other • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray and intercede for your family (Job 1:5).

**Optional Reading:** Ephesians 3

***My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live. Let mine enemy be as the wicked, and he that riseth up against me as the unrighteous. For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul (Job 27:6-8)?***

Throughout the continuous stream of accusations made by his friends, Job conducted himself with patient integrity. He answered each allegation they leveled, never letting one pass without a carefully measured response. His replies made it apparent that he took great offense to being classified as either **wicked** or a **hypocrite**. Job truly loved the Lord, and it pained him that his friends thought otherwise.

Miriam-Webster defines the word ‘hypocrite’ as “a person who claims or pretends to have certain beliefs about what is right but who behaves in a way that disagrees with those beliefs.” Believers and non-believers alike use it to describe anyone they feel is acting outside of the norm of their professed belief. Labeling someone a hypocrite is a serious charge and should never be done lightly. While it is true that nearly all of us display hypocritical tendencies at times, for most, it is just a momentary human weakness and does not reflect our overall relationship with God. True hypocrites, however, are not to be taken lightly. They are dangerous to both themselves and to others. Through their words and actions, they undermine the work of God. ***He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me (Mark 7:6).***

In his latest reply, Job contrasts the heart of the hypocrite with the heart of the believer. Job states that the hypocrite lives a life devoid of hope, while the believer knows that God is in control of his life, giving him a reason for hope both in life and in death (Rom. 15:13). The hypocrite only has the illusion of belief, an illusion that cannot support the weight of hope. A life without hope will always be restless and searching, filled with a low-level misery that the hypocrite will not

be able to understand or define.

A hypocrite works hard to maintain their public persona. They know all the right things to say but are still empty inside. No matter how pious they appear, they can find no pleasure in Christ because they don't really know Him. They want the earthly prestige His name brings, but they refuse to allow Him access to their hearts. As a result, their lives don't reflect God's love, goodness, or mercy. ***If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth*** (1 John 1:6).

What could motivate a person to live this way? Perhaps they seek the professional and social advantages that a church membership may bring, but they still want to live their lives only on their own terms. They may even believe their actions are 'good enough' to carry them through. They do not realize what a dangerous game they are playing. Fooling oneself into thinking it is possible to be 'right' with God without first developing a personal relationship with Him is a grave and potentially fatal mistake.

***But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction*** (II Pet. 2:1).

**Thought for the Day:** *Only in God is our life given purpose. Only in His Word can that purpose be found.*

**Christ Revealed:** Through Job's compassion for others (Job 29:15-17,21-41 25). Jesus was moved to compassion when He saw great crowds in need of healing and feeding (Matt. 14:14; 15:30-39).

**Word Studies:** 27:22 **fain flee** = desire to flee; 29:14 **diadem** = turban.

**Pray for Bible Pathway Printer:** Pollock Printing, Nashville, TN • **Country:** St. Vincent and The Grenadines (102,918) Caribbean • **Major Languages:** English, French Patios • **Religious Freedom** • 75% Protestant; 13% Roman Catholic; 12% Other (Hindu, Seventh-Day Adventist, Other Protestant) • **Prayer Suggestion:** Intercede in prayer for your friends (Job 42:7-10).

**Optional Reading:** Ephesians 4

***If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail; Or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof; (For from my youth he was brought up with me, as with a father, and I have guided her from my mother's womb;) If I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering; If his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate: Then let mine arm fall from my shoulder blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone (Job 31:16-22).***

In the first chapter of the Book of Job, the Lord revealed His opinion of his servant, Job. ***And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil (Job 1:8)?*** Throughout our reading, we have discovered bits and pieces of why the Lord held Him in such high esteem. We know that Job praised God, even from the depths of despair, ***And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD (1:21).*** We also know that Job served God faithfully, obeying every command that He gave and living fully within His will. ***My foot hath held His steps, His way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of His lips; I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food (23:11-12).*** Today's reading gives us an even more in-depth look at the character of Job.

Eliphaz had suggested in his last lecture that Job's sin might well be of a covetous nature. He implied that the reason Job could find no mercy for himself in his time of need was because he had failed to show mercy to others. As Job answered to that charge, he revealed to us a life that had been openly and selflessly lived. Job had not hoarded his riches, concerned only with his own welfare; instead, he had shared all he had with

the poor, paying particular attention to the plight of widows and orphans. He had seen to it that the naked were clothed and the hungry were fed.

***Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world*** (James 1:27).

Over a millennium before the coming of Christ, Job lived the life of a true servant leader. His behavior typified the Savior to come. If we are looking for a human role model to emulate that will help us better understand the service that Jesus desires of us, we need to look no further than Job.

***Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: Naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me*** (Matt. 25:34-36).

**Thought for the Day:** *When we live for the Lord, living selflessly is automatic. It is impossible to be filled with His love and not feel an overwhelming need to share it with others.*

**Christ Revealed:** Through the ridicule and affliction which Job suffered (Job 30:10-11). Christ was afflicted and spit upon. After Pilate delivered Jesus to the Roman soldiers, they beat Him, hit Him with an open hand and spit on Him; and then they crucified Him (Mark 15:15-20; Is. 50:6; 53:2-5; Matt. 27:26-31; John 18:22; 19:1-3).

**Word Studies:** 30:2 **whereto** = how; 30:4 **mallows** = plants of the salt marsh; 30:14 **wide breaking in of waters** = waters gushing through a wide break in the wall; 30:27 **My bowels boiled** = My heart is continually troubled.

**Pray for Staff:** Judy McCrary • **Government Officials:** Rep. Blake Moore (UT), Sen. Elizabeth Warren (MA), Rep. Adam Schiff (CA) • **Country:** Samoa (218,764) South Pacific Ocean • **Major Languages:** Samoan, English • **Religious Freedom** • 57.4% Protestant; 19.4% Roman Catholic; 15.2% Mormon; 1.7% Worship Centre; 5.5% Other Christian; 0.7% Other 0.1% None/Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** Delight in the Word of God; prayerfully meditate upon it for daily guidance (Ps. 1:2).

**Optional Reading:** Ephesians 5

***At this also my heart trembleth, and is moved out of his place. Hear attentively the noise of His voice, and the sound that goeth out of His mouth. He directeth it under the whole heaven, and His lightning unto the ends of the earth. After it a voice roareth: He thundereth with the voice of His excellency; and He will not stay them when His voice is heard. God thundereth marvellously with His voice; great things doeth he, which we cannot comprehend*** (Job 37:1-5).

After multiple rounds of debate, Job and his three friends had reached an impasse and fallen into hopeless silence. Job was weary and aggrieved, grudgingly reconciled to a fate he still could not comprehend. ***When I looked for good, then evil came unto me: and when I waited for light, there came darkness*** (Job. 30:26). His friends were sanctimonious and sad; they had tried their best, but they had been unable to convince Job to admit his sin or repent before God. ***So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes*** (32:1). It was then that Elihu, the youngest and least accomplished of Job's friends, began to speak.

Elihu's words poured out of him, driven by a righteous fury he could no longer contain. ***Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the kindred of Ram: against Job was his wrath kindled, because he justified himself rather than God. Also against his three friends was his wrath kindled, because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job*** (32:2-3). Unlike the three elder counselors, he offered no explanation for Job's suffering, nor did he accuse him of concealing vile, unrepentant sin. Elihu focused on Job's openly transparent, ongoing sin of attempting to justify himself before God and demanding that the Almighty account for His actions.

Though Job had defended himself against the thinly veiled attacks from his older three friends, he offered no reply to Elihu. No doubt the truth stung, and he had no way to refute it. And even though Elihu, in his youthful exuberance, had brashly appointed himself the ***daysman*** (mediator) that Job had sought (9:33), Job knew that Elihu had no more authority in that regard than any of

them, despite the genuinely righteous nature of his words.

***And now men see not the bright light which is in the clouds: but the wind passeth, and cleanseth them. Fair weather cometh out of the north: with God is terrible majesty. Touching the Almighty, we cannot find Him out: He is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: He will not afflict. Men do therefore fear Him: He respecteth not any that are wise of heart*** (Job 37:21-24).

The storm clouds that gathered over the latter half of Elihu's speech reinforced his message as nothing else could. Scripture has given us enough insight into Job's lifelong relationship with God to infer he would have recognized the Lord's approach. Still reeling from the weight of self-realization brought about by Elihu's admonishment, Job likely looked towards the coming of the Lord with profound relief but also no small measure of trepidation. God had come—but was Job as ready to face Him as he had first thought?

***Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah*** (Ps. 46:10-11).

**Thought for the Day:** *Tribulation inspires many to complain to God, but we must take care. It is a slippery slope from decrying our misery to finding fault with His actions.*

**Christ Revealed:** As the One who watches how we live and what we do (Job 34:21). The Lord keeps His eyes on ***the righteous*** (1 Pet. 3:12).

**Word Studies:** 34:36 **wicked men** = evil men; 36:8 **holden** = held fast; 36:16 **no straitness** = no restraint or restriction; 36:23 **enjoined** = appointed.

**Pray for Government Official:** Justice Clarence Thomas (US Supreme Court), Rep. Nick LaLota (NY) • **Country:** San Marino (32,742) Enclave in Italy • Major Language: Italian • Religious Freedom • Roman Catholic • **Prayer Suggestion:** The Lord is a shield for you in times of trouble (Ps. 3:1-3).

**Optional Reading:** Ephesians 6

***Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow? Or will he harrow the valleys after thee? Wilt thou trust him, because his strength is great? or wilt thou leave thy labour to him? Wilt thou believe him, that he will bring home thy seed, and gather it into thy barn? Gavest thou the goodly wings unto the peacocks? or wings and feathers unto the ostrich?*** (Job 39:10-13).

From the very start of his ordeal, the one thing Job desired above all else was an audience with God. ***I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore Thou contendest with me*** (Job 10:2). He was desperate to discover what he had done to elicit God's wrath—to know why God's judgment had come upon him. Although at first hopeful that his friends could shed some light on his situation, he soon realized they had no answers, either. ***For now ye are nothing; ye see my casting down, and are afraid. Did I say, Bring unto me? or, Give a reward for me of your substance? Or, Deliver me from the enemy's hand? or, Redeem me from the hand of the mighty? Teach me, and I will hold my tongue: and cause me to understand wherein I have erred*** (6:21-24). Job's only hope lay in God; as beaten down and weary as he was, he still cried out to Him. ***Oh that one would hear me! behold, my desire is, that the Almighty would answer me, and that mine adversary had written a book*** (31:35).

Now, in the midst of the storm, the Lord made His presence known. ***Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou Me*** (Job 38:1-3). The time Job had been longing for had arrived, but instead of laying out his defense as planned, Job found himself speechless, humbled before the overwhelming power and might of God.

To Job's question of 'why,' God offered no answer. God never even directly mentioned Job's ordeal. Instead, He chose to reveal Himself to Job in all His terrible greatness—His power, His majesty, His wisdom, His omnipotence. He extolled the wonders of creation, affirming His complete dominion over all,



and challenged Job to demonstrate mastery over any aspect. Job had said, ***Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him: but I will maintain mine own ways before Him*** (13:15); God revealed the foolish nature of such a claim. Job's desire to approach God as he would a beloved and trusted brother with whom he had a conflict to resolve was predicated upon the false assumption that Job possessed the knowledge, intellect, experience, and wisdom to defend himself against, debate, or negotiate with God. The longer God spoke, the clearer Job's folly became.

***Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being His counsellor hath taught Him? With whom took He counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of judgment, and taught Him knowledge, and shewed to Him the way of understanding (Is. 40:13-14)? Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in (Is. 40:21-22).***

**Thought for the Day:** *We cannot even conceive of the intricacies of God's plan; to demand that He explain our part in it is the height of hubris.*

**Christ Revealed:** As the One who ***laid the foundations of the earth*** (Job 38:4). By Christ, God created our universe (Heb. 1:1-2). ***All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made*** (John 1:1-3).

**Word Studies:** 38:9 **swaddlingband** = wrapping; 38:12 **dayspring** = dawn; 38:31 **Pleiades** = the seven stars that stood for the 7 influences of spring; **bands of Orion** = storms; 39:9 **unicorn** = wild ox; 40:4 **vile** = insignificant; 40:21 **fens** = marshes.

**Pray for Staff:** Ryan McCrary • **Government Officials:** Rep. Haley Stevens (MI), Rep. Shontel Brown (OH) • **Country:** Sao Tome and Principe (190,428) Central Africa, Gulf of Guinea • **Major Languages:** Portuguese, Forro • **Religious Freedom** • 70.3% Catholic; 3.4% Evangelical; 2% Apostolic; 1.8% Adventist; 3.1% Other (Including Muslim); 19.4% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray aloud with your voice – God hears (Ps. 3:4).

**Optional Reading:** Philippians 1

**Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook? or his tongue with a cord which thou lettest down? Canst thou put an hook into his nose? or bore his jaw through with a thorn? Will he make many supplications unto thee? will he speak soft words unto thee? Will he make a covenant with thee? wilt thou take him for a servant for ever (Job 41:1-4)? Behold, the hope of him is in vain: shall not one be cast down even at the sight of him? None is so fierce that dare stir him up: who then is able to stand before me? Who hath prevented me, that I should repay him? whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine (Job. 41:9-11).**

Chapter 41 of the Book of Job illustrates the ineffectiveness of man in relation to the power of God by first hypothetically pitting man against another of God's creations. There is no clear consensus amongst Biblical followers as to an exact identification of the Leviathan described here, but all agree that it would have been a creature with which Job would have been familiar. Through a series of rhetorical questions, God established Job's complete inability to contend with the fearsome creature. He then went on to remind Job that **whatsoever is under the whole heaven** was His creation and under His control. If Job could not stand against a mere creature, how could he expect to stand against that creature's Master? And if God had all the power (which He clearly did), then how could Job presume to demand anything? **Who hath prevented me, that I should repay him?**

The Book of Job makes for difficult reading because it challenges our worldview in ways that we don't like to contemplate. It takes our concept of 'fair play' and turns it on its head, emphasizing our weak and dependent state of being and underscoring the fact that, without God, we are nothing. We do not exist as His equal but rather as His possession. He owes us nothing, and we have no way of earning anything because we have nothing that He needs. Every action He takes is just, because God DEFINES justice. Blessed or cursed, our responsibility to Him remains the same. **Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy**

**soul, and with all thy mind** (Matt. 22:37).

God owes us nothing, but He has given us everything. **For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life** (John 3:16). The Book of Job ended with the restoration of his blessed life (Job 42:12-13). For all who **believeth in Him**, God has promised the same—a gift of love, not obligation; mercy, not justice. **And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away** (Rev. 21:3-4). In the meantime, we are blessed to have been given an earthly lifetime in which to serve Him. In that, let us find our peace and joy.

**Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost** (Rom. 15:13).

**Thought for the Day:** *God's mercy aims to save us from ourselves; those who view Him with suspicion or blame have a long road ahead of them.*

**Christ Revealed:** Through Job's praying for his "friends" (Job 42:10). We are reminded that **it is Christ . . . who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us** (Rom. 8:34).

**Word Studies:** 41:13 **discover the face of his garment** = strip off his outer coat of armor; 41:17 **sundered** = separated; 41:23 **flakes** = folds; 42:6 **abhor** = loathe.

**Pray for Staff:** Gilbert Palafox • **Government Officials:** Justice Sonia M. Sotomayor (US Supreme Court) • **Country:** Saudi Arabia (27,345,986) Middle East • Major Language: Arabic • Any religion other than Islam is prohibited • 100% Muslim • **Prayer Suggestion:** Offer up your prayer to God, your King, who will hearken to your prayer (Ps. 5:2).

**Optional Reading:** Philippians 2

***I will praise Thee, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all Thy marvellous works. I will be glad and rejoice in Thee: I will sing praise to Thy name, O Thou most High. When mine enemies are turned back, they shall fall and perish at Thy presence (Ps. 9:1-3).***

Although the underlying message of Job (that God is present and involved in every single aspect of our lives, good AND bad, and that He will never, ever desert us) is one of the most comforting and uplifting messages to be found anywhere in God's Word, it is still an emotionally taxing book to read and study. Perhaps that is why, in His wisdom, God has blessed us by placing the Book of Psalms directly afterward in His compilation of His holy Word into one complete text. Psalms is a book unlike any other contained in God's Word. Each chapter stands alone as a personal missive to God, the words flowing unchecked from the psalmist's heart to God's ears. The psalmists' emotions run the gamut from the highest of highs to the lowest of lows, but one constant runs throughout each stanza. God is great; in all things and at all times, He is worthy of praise.

David wrote the 9th Psalm as a psalm of celebration and praise in the midst of earthly trials and setbacks. He opens with a promise of unconditional praise to God. He vows to ***shew forth all Thy marvellous works and be glad and rejoice in the LORD***. David does this because he loves God and believes with all his heart that God is worthy of praise. He is not offering thanksgiving for a specific event in his life; rather, he is referring to the greatness of God that is reflected in all of creation. David is confident that God will prevail no matter what turn his life takes.

David continues by praising God's handling of his enemies. ***When mine enemies are turned back, they shall fall and perish at Thy presence***. It is interesting to note that he is offering this praise while still being hard-pressed on all sides by his enemies. ***Have mercy upon me, O LORD; consider my trouble which I suffer of them that hate me, thou that liftest me up from the gates of death: That I may shew forth***

***all Thy praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion: I will rejoice in Thy salvation*** (Ps. 9:13-14). David is unafraid of what is happening in the here and now because he lives with the assurance that God is already victorious. ***These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*** (John 16:33).

A remarkable transformation occurs when we live with complete and total trust in God. Our fear of the unknown dissipates and is replaced by an unshakable feeling of absolute peace that never changes or fades, regardless of the circumstances surrounding us. Like David, we can live our lives with the understanding that as members of the body of Christ, we have nothing to fear and everything to look forward to.

***Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost*** (Rom. 15:13).

**Thought for the Day:** *We can live without fear, not by accepting the unknown, but by understanding that, to God, all is clear.*

**Christ Revealed:** As the Son of God (Ps. 2:7). ***God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life*** (John 3:16; Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5).

**Word Studies:** 2:2 **Anointed** (One) = Messiah (Hebrew) and Christ (Greek); 5:6 **leasing** = lies.

**Pray for Staff** • Kevin Jennings • **Country:** Senegal (13,635,927) Western Africa • Major Language: French • Religious Freedom • 94% Muslim; 5% Christian (Mostly Roman Catholic); 1% Indigenous Beliefs • **Prayer Suggestion:** Begin each morning with prayer (Ps. 5:3).

**Optional Reading:** Philippians 3

**H**elp, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men. They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak. The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things: Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us? For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him. The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever. The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted (Ps. 12:1-8).

Sometimes, while studying God's Word, we come across a passage that is so seamlessly applicable to today's world that we must stop and remind ourselves just how long ago it was initially recorded. The Twelfth Psalm, included in today's reading, falls perfectly into this category.

**Help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men.** At the time David penned these words, he was surrounded by a society of man in full bloom. Worldly rhetoric ruled the day, and progress was richly celebrated as they shed the religious 'superstitions' of the past. It didn't seem to matter to the majority that the concept of foundational truth and Godly wisdom had fallen by the wayside, because there was always someone around to validate and expound upon the new progressive ideal. **They speak vanity every one with his neighbour.** The pervasive belief was that they were truly in charge of their own destiny, and no one, not even God, had any right to tell them otherwise. **With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?**

To David, it appeared that every man lived as he saw fit, working towards his own agenda and seeking to manipulate those around him to his advantage. **With flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak.** The poor and needy were

at particular risk. Discounted by a society that measured worth by accumulated power, prestige, and wealth, such individuals had been reduced to pawns in the ongoing jockeying for position by the privileged.

For those of us reading today, David's words paint an all too familiar landscape. It is easy for us to empathize with his obvious frustration with the direction of the world. We share in his confusion as to how society has reached this point. We shake our heads in utter bemusement at how completely others have been taken in by the lies of the enemy and how clueless they are to the fact that they are being manipulated and deceived when, at least to our eyes, God's truth is still shining bright for all to see.

Yet even as we commiserate with his frustrations, we can take joy in his certitude that God's Word is immutable and cannot be altered or negated by popular opinion or majority rule. ***The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.*** As long as our focus remains on Him, He will enable us to see and know His truth. God's Word will stand long after the lies perpetrated by man have been forgotten.

***Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away*** (Matt. 4:35).

**Thought for the Day:** *No matter how much time passes, we will never advance past our need for God's corrective teachings.*

**Christ Revealed:** In the prophecy that God would not allow His **Holy One** to see decay (Ps. 16:10). This foretells the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:25-27; 13:35-39). When Jesus spoke His Revelation to John, He declared: ***I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death*** (Rev. 1:18).

**Word Studies:** 10:5 **puffeth at** = makes light of; 10:13 **contemn** = defy; despise; 11:3 **foundations** = principles of society based on the Word of God.

**Pray for Staff:** Jennifer Palafox • **Government Officials:** Rep. David Scott (GA), Ashley Hinson (IA) • **Country:** Serbia (7,209,764) Southeastern Europe • Major Language: Serbian • Restricted Religious Freedom • 84.6% Serbian Orthodox; 5% Catholic; 3.1% Muslim; 1% Protestant; 1.1% Atheist; 0.8% Other; 4.5% Undeclared/Unknown • **Prayer Suggestion:** Glorify the person, character, and attributes of God as you pray a prayer of praise (Ps. 8:1-9).

**Optional Reading:** Philippians 4

**The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb (Ps. 19:7-10).**

Many verses in Scripture refer to the Word of God in terms of pleasurable food or nourishment. Here, David claims that God's Word is **sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb**. Jeremiah later proclaimed: Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and **Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by Thy name, O LORD God of hosts** (Jer. 15:16). In each case, our need for the Word is stressed. Just as we need food to survive physically, so too do we need God's Word to survive spiritually.

When a baby is born, his immediate need is to drink milk. Only in this way, with this very specific food, will he be able to grow and thrive. Similarly, when we first turn our lives over to Christ, we have an immediate and all-consuming need to partake of the Word of God. **As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby** (I Pet. 2:2). Scripture provides us with everything that we need to grow and thrive in our faith—all the 'vitamins and minerals' needed for a healthy spiritual life are contained within it. Our need for the Word does not lessen as we mature in our faith, but how we partake of it will change. Instead of 'drinking' it in, we will take the time to thoughtfully 'chew over' each chapter and verse, internalizing it and allowing it, along with the work of the Holy Spirit within, to transform us.

Perhaps the greatest Biblical reference to our need to consume the Word of God is given to us by Jesus Himself when he rebuked the devil: **but He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God** (Matt. 4:4). He made it quite clear that our physical needs were secondary to our



spiritual, and that they should be ignored at our own peril. ***For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul*** (Matt. 16:26)?

***Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*** is now recorded for us, neatly compiled in a book we have entitled the Bible. In a world containing millions upon millions of books written on every conceivable subject, the Bible stands alone. It is the only book that can truthfully claim to be the unaltered Word of Almighty God. This Book, and this Book alone, is able to quench our spiritual hunger and nourish our very souls. Don't deny your need; open your Bible today!

***And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*** (I Tim 3:15-17).

**Thought for the Day:** *We can survive in the world on our own, but we can only truly live with God.*

**Christ Revealed:** As the One to whom the Psalms refer when they speak of the nails that pierced His hands and feet on the cross and the parting of His clothing (Ps. 22:16,18). ***When they had crucified Him, they parted His garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take*** (Mark 15:24; also Matt. 27:35; Luke 23:34; John 19:18).

**Word Studies:** 18:2 **horn of my salvation** = my strong deliverer; 18:26 **froward** (first use) = crooked; **froward** (second use) = opposed; 18:45 **close places** = for- tresses or strongholds; 22:5 **confounded** = put to shame.

**Pray for Staff:** Tiffany Parisi • **Country:** Seychelles (91,650) a group of islands in the Indian Ocean • **Major Languages:** Seychellois Creole, English, French • **Religious Freedom** • 76.2% Roman Catholic; 10.6% Protestant; 2.4% Other Christian; 2.4% Hindu; 1.6% Muslim; 1.1.% Non-Christian; 4.8% Unspecified; 0.9% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Let your prayers express gratitude to God for His wonderful works (Ps. 9:1).

**Optional Reading:** Colossians 1

**U**nto Thee, O LORD, do I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in Thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me. Yea, let none that wait on Thee be ashamed: let them be ashamed which transgress without cause. Shew me Thy ways, O LORD; teach me Thy paths. Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me: for Thou art the God of my salvation; on Thee do I wait all the day (Ps. 25:1-5).

David loved God with his whole being, and he celebrated that love, injecting it into every aspect of his life and projecting it for all the world to see. **Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven** (Matt. 5:14-16). David humbled himself before God, surrendering himself fully into His care in good times and bad. **Unto Thee, O LORD, do I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in Thee.**

David did not come before God with delusions of personal righteousness—he knew that without God, he was nothing. But he did not approach God with timidity or hesitation, either. **Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need** (Heb. 4:16). David boldly laid claim to the grace and forgiveness that the Lord promised His children. **Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to Thy mercy remember Thou me for Thy goodness' sake, O LORD** (Ps. 25:7). He rejoiced in the certainty of God's love, secure in the knowledge that God was transforming him from the inside out. **Shew me Thy ways, O LORD; teach me Thy paths. Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me: for Thou art the God of my salvation.** David was content to be a work in progress; upheld by God, he was washed clean of shame and regret. He knelt before God but stood tall against the world, knowing that whatever the Lord willed would come to pass. **For the LORD God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint,**

**and I know that I shall not be ashamed** (Is. 50:7).

**If ye shall ask any thing in My name, I will do it** (John 14:14). Once we are reborn in the body of Christ, we are enveloped in a cocoon of security and freedom that is impossible for those on the outside looking in to understand. Humble before God, freed from worldly chains and the weight of unrepentant sin, we are filled with peace and confidence. It doesn't matter what our life was like before or how much the storms rage around us; we know that God is in control. If we stumble, He will catch us. If we stray, He will lead us back. The confidence we feel is not brought about by arrogance or self-pride but rather is a gift from God. It is because of this gift that we can now approach him boldly, as David did, and lay claim to His promises.

**What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall He teach in the way that He shall choose. His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth. The secret of the LORD is with them that fear Him; and He will shew them His covenant** (Ps. 25:12-14).

**Thought for the Day:** *It is precisely because we are unworthy of God's grace that we must accept it with such enthusiasm; anything less would imply a belief that we could continue without it.*

**Christ Revealed:** As our **Shepherd** (Ps. 23). Christ called Himself **the Good Shepherd** and vowed to lay down **His life for the sheep** (John 10:11).

**Word Studies:** 26:1 **slide** = waver, fall; 26:2 **reins** = desires and thoughts; 26:4 **dissemblers** = pretenders, deceitful ones; 28:2 **Holy Oracle** = Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies; 28:3 **mischief** = evil.

**Pray for Staff:** Judy McCrary • **Government Officials:** Rep. Virginia Foxx (NC) • **Country:** Sierra Leone (5,743,725) Western Africa • Major Languages: English, Mende, Temne, Krio • Religious Freedom • 60% Muslim; 10% Christian; 30% Indigenous Beliefs • **Prayer Suggestion:** Trust the Lord; He will never forsake you (Ps. 9:10).

**Optional Reading:** Colossians 2

**Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah** (Ps. 32:1-5).

There is nothing in this world quite as crippling as guilt. It begins in our brain as an emotional response and soon spreads throughout our system, the inner turmoil manifesting as physical symptoms. As we read in the 32nd Psalm, David was no stranger to this painful phenomenon. During a time when David refused to face his own sins and sought instead to keep his transgressions hidden, he was physically bowed under the weight of his guilt. As it ate away at him, he grew feeble and pained. His strength bled away, and he groaned continuously as he tried—and failed—to continue living in the shade of God’s displeasure.

Though there is nothing in the psalm to positively identify the nature of David’s sin, most Biblical scholars agree that it was written in response to the guilt David suffered following his dalliance with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah, and the relief that he experienced once he quit running from his guilt and confessed his sin to God. It is believed that this *Maschil* (song of instruction) was written as a fulfillment of the promise David made to God in his psalm of confession and repentance for those devastating sins. **Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto Thee** (Ps. 51:12-13).

David illustrated the stark contrast between the way he felt while hiding his sin away and the way he felt once he had confessed and received forgiveness from God. His words made it clear that God’s forgiveness did not simply lessen

his guilt; it cleansed his soul, leaving him once more righteous in the eyes of God. Although his earthly consequences remained (II Sam. 12:14-18), David's communion with God was restored, and joy filled his heart. ***Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart*** (Ps. 32:11).

To receive forgiveness from God, we must first be honest with ourselves and Him about our transgressions. God already knows of our sins, but if we are not willing to openly admit our guilt to Him and instead try to hide it, we will suffer just as David did. In order to truly enjoy fellowship with God, we must strive to continuously walk in the light—not perfect, but forgiven.

***If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*** (I John 1:6-9).

**Thought for the Day:** *As a believer, it is paramount to not only forgive others but also to accept forgiveness yourself.*

**Christ Revealed:** In the prophecy that not one of His bones would be broken as recorded concerning His crucifixion (Ps. 34:20). These things were done, that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken (John 19:36).

**Word Studies:** 31:4 **privily** = secretly; 31:6 **lying vanities** = all other gods; 31:8 **shut me up** = given me over; 32:2 **guile** = deceit; 32:3 **roaring** = complaining; 35:12 **spoiling** = determined to take my life; 35:15 **abjects** = slanderers.

**Pray for Staff:** Jennifer Palafox • **Country:** Singapore (5,567,301) Southeast Asia • Major Languages: Mandarin, English • Religious Freedom • 33.9% Buddhism; 14.3% Muslim; 11.3% Taoist; 7.1% Catholic; 5.2% Hindu; 11% Protestant; 1.7% Other (Sikh, Zoroastrian, Jain, Jew); 16.4% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Sing praises to the Lord; tell others what He has done (Ps.9:11).

**Optional Reading:** Colossians 3

## *Become part of the vision*

*Jesus fed the 5000 with just five loaves and two fishes. There are multitudes of people in this world still hungering for His Word.*

*Thousands of souls die each day with no knowledge of the saving grace of our Father in Heaven.*

*As Christians, God has commissioned us to tell of Him and witness to the unbelievers that they may know Him. God is leading Bible Pathway Ministries to send out an additional 5000 Bibles and devotionals monthly, starting in January 2024. For this project to become a reality, I must ask in Jesus' precious name for your financial support in this endeavor. The estimated cost for this mission is \$250,000.00.*

*We are stepping out in faith and preparing the first shipment, trusting that God will make it possible. And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him (1 John 5:14-15).*

*"God's Holy Word has surely been  
inspired of God and not of men;  
No power or eloquence of man  
Could ere convince God's wondrous plan.  
Withstanding all the tests of time,  
It stands unchanged, unique, sublime;  
Proving to every tongue and race,  
God's wisdom, mercy, love and grace.  
So hammer on, ye hostile hands  
Your hammers break, God's anvil stands."  
M.E.H.*

**NOTES**

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