

June 2020
Daily Devotional

DO NOT MERELY LISTEN
TO THE WORD,
AND SO DECEIVE
yourselves.
DO WHAT IT SAYS.

— *James 1:22* —



Vistoso Community Church

Foreword

At the beginning of the month we are going to finish our reading in Ephesians, and at the end we will finish our study in the book of Genesis.

In between, we are going to investigate prayer, as one of the disciplines of the Christian Life.

In fact, we are going to spend quite a bit of time this month on prayer. Its placement in Ephesians would seem to indicate its role in spiritual warfare, and it most certainly is a discipline of the Christian Life. It is a discipline in that the Scriptures emphasize its role and it will not happen in our lives unless we choose to develop it as part of our daily walk with the Lord.



I encourage you to set aside part of every day—even if it is the first mile of your daily walk, your first 15 minutes on the treadmill, or time with your spouse following a meal—to pray for the needs of your extended families, our fellowship, and the lost in your circles of concern.

In His grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Redig". The signature is written in a cursive style with some loops and flourishes.

Kevin Redig

All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NKJV (1992 edition) or the NIV (1984 edition).

Finishing Ephesians

Monday, June 1: Read Ephesians 6:18-20

We have finished our investigation of the armor of God—or nearly so. Why have we spent so much time to methodically work our way through it? One theologian answers this way:

Nothing is more fatal than to start in the Christian life with the notion that now that we are Christians we have finished with all our difficulties and problems The New Testament rather gives the impression that because we are Christians we must expect attacks upon us in a way that we have never known or realized before. But thank God, we are not only told that we have to wrestle and fight in this way, we are also told how we can be enabled to do so successfully.

Martin Lloyd-Jones

In keeping with this observation, consider that, although the metaphor regarding armor has run its course, the discussion of spiritual warfare has not!

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me. . .

Ephesians 6:18-19

So let's take up prayer, along with the armor of God, via the following introduction:

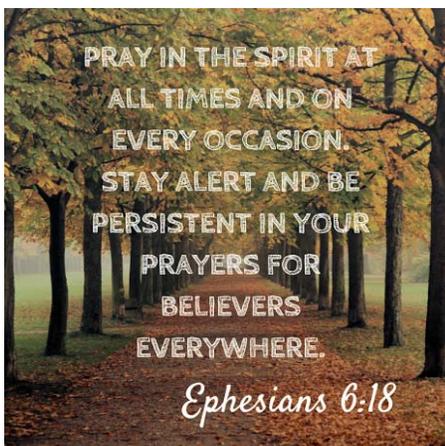
- To pray is to communicate with God. Note in the above Bible verse that we are told to do so all the time and in all circumstances.
- There are many kinds of prayer: praise, thanksgiving, intercession (for others), and supplication (for self).

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Finishing Ephesians

Monday, June 1: Read Ephesians 6:18-20
(Continued)

- To pray *in the Spirit* is a reference to being in fellowship with God, tuned to His will as revealed in His Word, and trusting in the Holy Spirit to intercede on our behalf with *"groans that words cannot express."* (Romans 8:26)



- To be alert in prayer is to make prayer a regular habit—ideally at a regular time. If we don't, we will find ourselves always trying to *catch-up* with our prayers!
- Remember that prayer is personal and needs based. How healthy it is to get our eyes off of self and onto the needs of others.

Allow me to share my own paraphrase of Ephesians 6:18:

Talk with the Lord—as a habit and in all circumstances. Do so with praise, thanksgiving, intercession, and in particular petition. Make sure to be filled with the Spirit and trusting in the Spirit's own prayer ministry on your behalf. Pray as an ever-vigilant watchman who does not grow weary. Pray for the saints, in general and by name, for you know that your brothers and sisters are undergoing the same trials and temptations that you are.

The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

James 5:16

Finishing Ephesians

Tuesday, June 2: Read Acts 6

Let's delve deeper into prayer by considering:

- Appending the admonition to pray at the end of the armor of God metaphor is no accident or change of subject. Rather, it keeps us from treating the armor in a mechanical manner. We need to be in vital and on-going communication with our Creator, bringing everything to Him in prayer as part of relying on the various pieces of our *spiritual armor*. That's why scripture says *pray continuously*. (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- A study of the life of Jesus demonstrates that He places a premium on prayer that does not seem to be part of today's Christian practice!

But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Luke 5:16

(See also: Mark 1:35, Matthew 14:23, Luke 6:12, 22:41-44)

- If Jesus, who was from the Father and led by the Holy Spirit, needed to withdraw to pray, is it conceivable that we could possibly need to do less? Of course not! Perhaps Luke 18:1 reminds the coming Church to trust more in the Lord than secular strategies:

Then Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

- The many commentators who claim there is only one offensive weapon in the armor of God have completely overlooked prayer! We are concerned about missionaries around the world and bring them before the Sovereign God of the Universe. Why? Because He can act anywhere at any time! When it comes to leading His Church, the Lord Jesus Christ is on the offensive. There is great need to wield the sword of the Spirit and pray both individually and corporately!

Finishing Ephesians

Wednesday, June 3: Read James 4

Taking up where we left off yesterday, let me try to clear up one area of confusion regarding prayer:

“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” Mark 11:24

We all too often treat this verse as if it is the only guidance in the Bible on prayer, as well as a *blank check* to obtain whatever we want. Our reading in James provides some immediate boundaries—our motives:

When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives. . . James 4:3

I John provides much more subtle guidance:

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. I John 5:14

This is really a parallel to asking in *Jesus' Name*. The idea is that we ask after first aligning ourselves with the will of God. This is an essential step in coming to Him in prayer.

Finally, keep praying for the saints—always:

. . .praying always . . .in the Spirit. . .with all perseverance and supplication for the saints. . . Ephesians 6:18

God has determined to move His hand in response to the prayers of His people to accomplish His purposes to His glory. So, pray as much as possible in keeping with the known will of God, doing so from a perspective of divine viewpoint while making the case for God's glory, reputation, and will. For we have been promised:

The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. James 5:16

Let us be both well-armored, as well as prayerful warriors!

Mission and Disciplines

Thursday, June 4: Read Acts 16:25-34

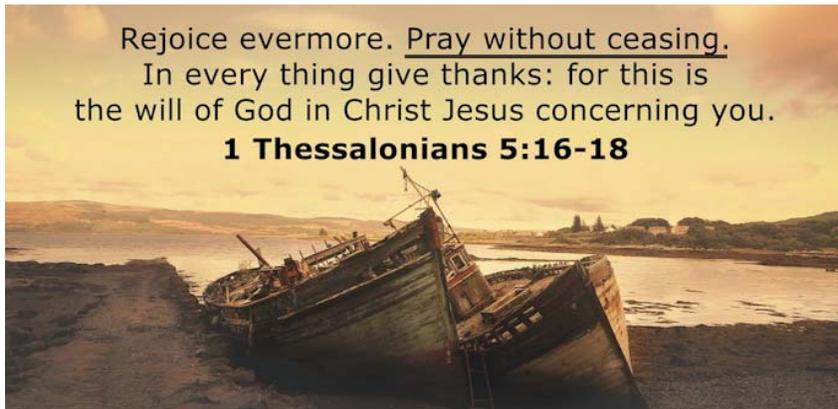
From Ephesians, we are returning to our study of the Mission and Disciplines of the Christian Life. Let me remind you that we have one singular mission—to make disciples! That includes both the lost turning to faith in Christ as well as assisting those who are saved to grow in grace and knowledge. Further, there are many disciplines associated with the Christian life. In the same way a soldier is not ready for his mission of close combat unless he has mastered such disciplines as marksmanship and carrying a heavy pack, neither is the Christian ready to disciple without a daily time of maturing his or her own faith through prayer, worship, and a number of other disciplines. That's what the coming devotional lessons are about, a reminder of our mission and a closer look at some of the disciplines that enable us to achieve our mission.

First, let's consider prayer as another of the disciplines of the Christian Life and, in doing so, add to what we have already considered from our reading in Ephesians. I am sure you have heard a message on I Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing."

Continued on the next page.

Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing.
In every thing give thanks: for this is
the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18



Mission and Disciplines

Thursday, June 4: Read Acts 16:25-34
(Continued)

We sometimes try to obey this admonition as if it were a stand-alone command. Consider that, if we were fully engaged in the mission of making disciples, sharing Christ



with neighbors and grandchildren, and abiding in Christ on a daily basis, praying without ceasing becomes the most natural thing in the world to do. Furthermore, your prayers aren't so much going to be about you, but about that lost neighbor, needy grandchild, and a host of other mission-focused needs. Prayer isn't something meant to stand in isolation, it is part of being in the battle

to win souls and help them grow.

I read recently of a missionary agency that interviewed 50 candidates for missionary work. Only three of them had regular prayer and devotional times. Contrast that with what you find in Scripture when Moses, Jacob, Daniel, and many others wrestled with God in prayer, sometimes through the night, because of God's call on their lives.

I am suggesting that we are not really prepared for our mission of reaching others unless we improve our facility with prayer. Robert Murray M'Cheyne said it this way:

*What a man is on his knees alone before God,
that he is, and no more.*

So here is our simple approach: We are going to spend the next few days looking at one of the model prayers that has been preserved for us in Scripture. Our hope is to learn both how to pray and how to think about the content of our prayers.

Mission and Disciplines

Friday, June 5: Read John 13

In II Thessalonians 1:3, Paul warms up to the subject of prayer by saying:

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.

We tend to give thanks for material well-being and comfort. Paul gives thanks for evidence of faith and brotherly love. Now, there is nothing wrong with giving thanks for physical blessings. I am simply suggesting that we give thanks for things we value, but have we extended our thinking to match Paul's in that we value manifestations of faith and love among God's people? As a simple point of application, give thanks for simple indications of faith on the part of others and ask for others to grow their faith when you know they are facing difficult situations.

As for a love that is increasing among us, consider our fellowship. We have people from all parts of the country, all kinds of work experiences, and even many different denominational backgrounds. This is not usually a recipe for unity! How is it, then, that we can have unity, fellowship, and shared ministry? In part, it is because this is a natural outworking of being followers of Jesus Christ.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34-35

This is what makes it so wretched when there is dissension in a church, the process of discipleship is short-circuited and witness to the Lord compromised. So here is a second point of application, pray for God to increase our love for one another within this fellowship. And, give Him thanks when it is manifest, for this is the stuff of revival!

Mission and Disciplines

Monday, June 8: Read II Thessalonians 1

We find our model prayer in Verses 11-12. Paul and his team are praying for a small body of Thessalonian believers:

With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of His calling, and that by His power He may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

What is it that Paul has in mind? It is what he has just mentioned in the previous ten verses: the faith and love of the Thessalonian believers, their steadfast perseverance in the face of persecution, and their faith in the certain coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. So what is the substance of Paul's prayer that can be a model for us? He is praying for this body to be found worthy of God's calling. There are many aspects to this calling, but let me use II Corinthians 5:15 as a very good summary:

. . .those who live (as the result of being born again) should no longer live for themselves but for Him (the Lord Jesus Christ) who died for them. . .

Paul is praying that this group of believers would be found, by God, to be living for Christ. The word translated *count worthy* has its origin in the market place. It means to get an amount of commodity equal in value for the money paid. It means when each of our lives is put on the divine scales, it will balance out with God's call to live for Him. Wow! Any kind of personal introspection would make us realize that at times we fail. What a challenge! On the other hand, what a great prayer request for believing children, grandchildren, and our church fellowship—that God would find them and us measuring up!

Mission and Disciplines

Tuesday, June 9: Read Ephesians 1

I hope you have been considering, since yesterday, the challenge of living a life that God Himself will find to have *measured up*. Actually the idea in the text is to be of equivalent weight. In our day, we might use the similar idea of measuring up.

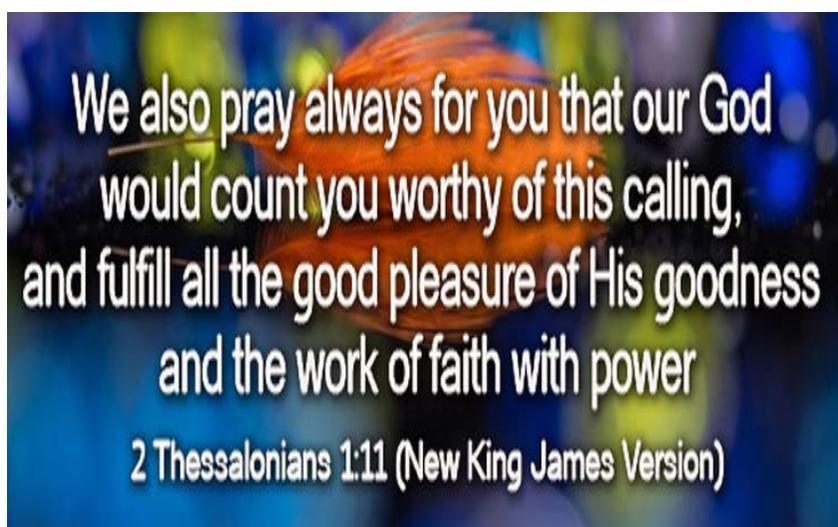
Just a couple of very practical things for today:

- We need to be very clear on exactly who is the arbiter of whether or not we have *measured up*. Who gets to decide? All too often, I get the impression that we think that we get to decide! The text in II Thessalonians 1:11 sets us straight. It is God alone who is going to decide:

. . .**that our God may count you worthy.** . . .

That being the case, this is its own matter for prayer when spending time with the Lord. Ask Him if you are living up to your calling in Christ. He will let you know.

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Mission and Disciplines

Tuesday, June 9: Read Ephesians 1
(Continued)

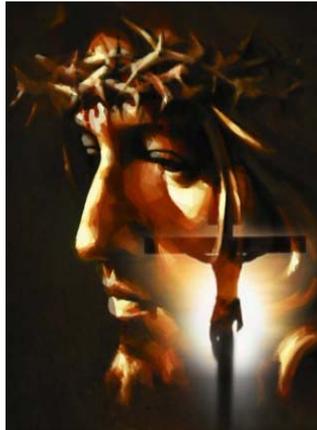
- Now to our reading in Ephesians 1. Part of our calling, who we are in Christ, can be found in Ephesians 1:4-f. These verses describe the identity of every child of God, and include the fact that *in Christ*: We are holy and blameless, adopted as sons, accepted in the Beloved, redeemed, forgiven of our sins, and any number of other spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ.

Here is what might be considered one of the great paradoxes of the Christian life: it is God's intent that we mature into what we already are in Christ. Hebrews 10:14 says it this way:

...by one sacrifice, He has made perfect forever, those who are being made holy.

Perfect, yet being made holy. If we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are perfect and yet we need, through the Word of God and the Spirit of God, to have our lives transformed so we would become like Him. Now you see a truly important aspect of prayer. We are not to pray that our problems would go away but, rather, for the grace to live consistently with our identity in Christ. When we are living consistently with our identity in Christ, our problems may actually be part of God's answer.

Who needs this kind of prayer? Each of us, our extended families, and our church fellowship need this kind of prayer. What a measure of God's glory we would reflect to our community should we manifest our true identity in Christ!



Mission and Disciplines

Wednesday, June 10: Read Ephesians 2

Do you see the truth that this II Thessalonians 1:11-12 prayer is more *packed* than we thought? Not only have we introduced prayer to live *worthy* of our calling, but now we move on to two related phrases: "*every good purpose*" and "*every act prompted by faith.*" What are those about? I can show you the source of good purposes:

. . .for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Philippians 2:13

I can also show you the source of works that would be prompted by faith. We are:

. . .created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10

Do you see this? All too often we think that God saved us and now it is up to us to live the Christian life as best we can. On the contrary! If we are walking in the Spirit, then God is going to be at work with respect to the purposes that well up within. We are going to be prompted to exercise faith in the carrying out of certain works, and all this by the God who dwells within us as He manifests Himself through us. Do we do this in our own strength? Absolutely not! I Thessalonians 1:12 tells us that it is by His power!

This opens a mighty new prayer front for us that we would put ourselves in a position (in fellowship with God, walking in the Spirit, trusting in the truths of His Word) so that His power would bring to fruition that which He has put into our hearts and has led us to do. Purpose and works brought to fruition. This is a mighty prayer for God to finish what He has started. What a great focus for our fellowship as we seek to finish well and bring glory to God. God's glory will be the focus of our next devotional.

Mission and Disciplines

Thursday, June 11:
Read II Corinthians 3

As we move into II Thessalonians 1:12, Paul says "*We pray this so that. . .*" The word translated *so that* is a conjunction that indicates purpose. Paul is telling us the purpose or intent behind his prayer. It is so that the name (think reputation) of the Lord Jesus Christ would be glorified in the life of each believer. To glorify means to elevate and then to point to that which has been elevated.

Put the last few days together. When we appropriate the power of God to live a life worthy of His calling, when we fulfill those purposes for which He has gifted and enabled us, and when our faith leads us to complete acts far beyond our own abilities, then we are showing the world what God can do through those who will trust and follow after Him. This brings glory to God! Let it never be said of this church fellowship that we labor for our own glory, but rather that we labor to give glory to our Lord and Savior.

This would be a fine place to stop this prayer, but there is one more extraordinary thing. Verse 12 goes on to say:

. . .that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him. . .

How could this be? Did not God firmly say, "*I will not share My glory with another. . .*" in Isaiah 42:8? He did, but for those who are following after Him, living the *worthy* life we talked about, consider this:

. . .and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. II Corinthians 3:17-18

God will not share His glory with a competitor, but will manifest it in the life of His followers! We are glorified in Him!

Mission and Disciplines

Friday, June 12: Read Job 31

For the past few days, we have been discussing II Thessalonians 1:11-12 in the hope that we might use it as a model prayer. It has wide applicability, but it is particularly compelling in terms of family. Perhaps you are wondering, how do I use this as a model? Consider this example, using a hypothetical granddaughter named Katie.

Heavenly Father, in light of Jesus' soon return, I pray for Katie's walk of faith and perseverance through trial. Specifically, I pray that her walk would measure up to Your calling on her life. Teach her to trust You and to walk in the power of the Spirit that the works You have prepared for her before the foundation of time would be accomplished for her blessing and Your glory. And Father, as she walks with You, I trust you to transform her into the woman You want her to be, a woman who brings credit to Your name and reflects Your glory to all who know her. As Paul prayed for those on his heart, I pray for the one You have put on my heart, in Jesus name!

There is an infinite amount of variation from these verses, but the point is simply to show you how using this as a model can focus your prayer efforts for others.

There is one more topic regarding prayer to consider in the next few days. There are times when those going through a very difficult time will say to me, "I have given up praying." This happens when the trials have been both prolonged and severe. At times we all wonder if God is really listening and whether He can really reach into our existence and act. (See Job 31:35-36) We are potentially one crisis away from facing this kind of challenge. So how do we prepare? One way is to ask and answer the question—"Prayer, why bother?" More on Monday.

Mission and Disciplines

Monday, June 15: Read Jeremiah 33

We raised the question yesterday: Prayer, why bother? We aren't going to be afraid of dealing with this question, for Christianity is at its best when dealing with hard and seemingly hopeless situations. If God could find a way to save us, He is not going to have any difficulty dealing with the hard questions we might bring to Him. Consider the following as a partial answer to this question:

- Throughout Scripture, prayer is interwoven in the lives of God's people. God expects us to call to Him, and He promises to answer in a remarkable and profound way:

"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know."

Jeremiah 33:3

- Crying out to God is not the problem. What we need to do is to make sure it is the cry of the believer in distress, even the cry of a discouraged believer, but not the turning away of a skeptic.
- How do we avoid feeling as if God has forsaken us? There is something that every child of God must know, and must settle in his or her thinking: God loves His own!
- Every child of God is accepted in the Beloved, that is, accepted in Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:6) We are grounded in the love of Christ. (Ephesians 3:17)

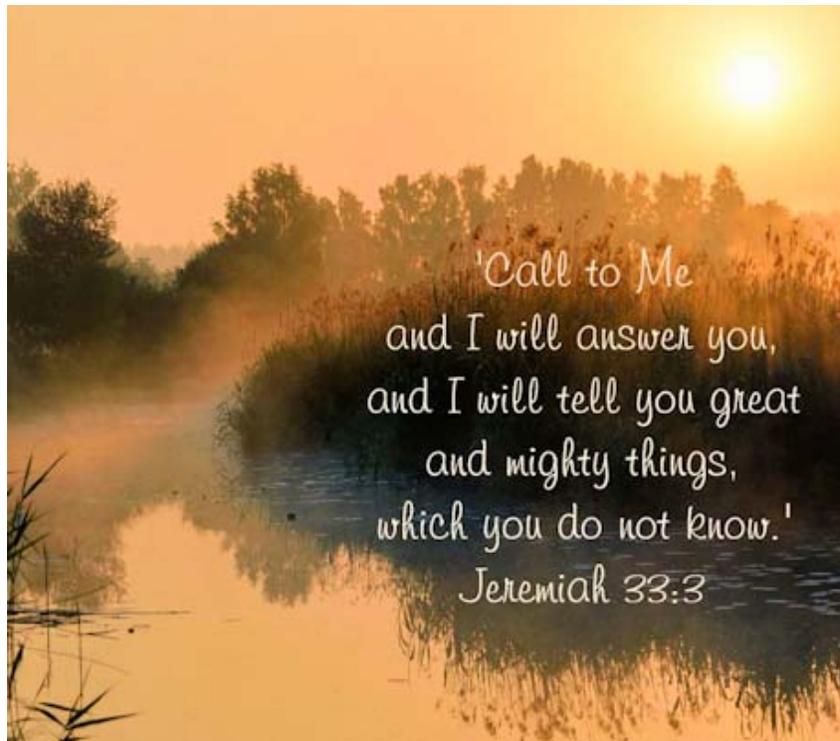
The love of God is wide enough to cover every circumstance we will ever face, long enough to cover every day

Mission and Disciplines

Monday, June 15: Read Jeremiah 33
(Continued)

we will ever live, deep enough to cover every pit in which we find ourselves, and high enough to keep us seated with Christ in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 3:18)

Best of all, once we come to realize this, we can count on the fact that God never changes. There is no shadow of turning in Him. (James 1:17) That means the love of God for His children is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. (Hebrews 13:8) We'll continue with this discussion tomorrow.



Mission and Disciplines

Tuesday, June 16: Read Job 42

We'll continue where we left off yesterday, answering the question: Prayer, why bother?

Sometimes we feel like events are completely outside of anyone's control. We think that maybe it is fate or the cosmic juggernaut just grinding on. I know why we sometimes feel like that, but how does that line up with the Word of God?

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have what we asked of Him.

I John 5:14-15

Obviously, we are not meant to conclude things are outside of God's control. But, that scripture immediately raises another question: How do we know what is according to His will? The easy answer to that is: Anything that clearly lines up with His Word is in His will. But how about things that are not Biblically black and white, such as praying for healing for a sick neighbor, that job for a family member, and a host of other items that we do not find explicitly stated in the scriptures? My advice is to pray for what the Lord seems to put on your heart and remember as one theologian put it, prayer doesn't change the plans and purposes of God but it does move His hand. And what a privilege to be involved with the plans and purposes of God.

One final thought, sometimes, we realize that we are in the wrong for doubting God's understanding of our situation and doubting His ability to act. Like Job, we have reached the point of wondering if God is even listening. Like Job, after being questioned by God in Chapters 38-42,

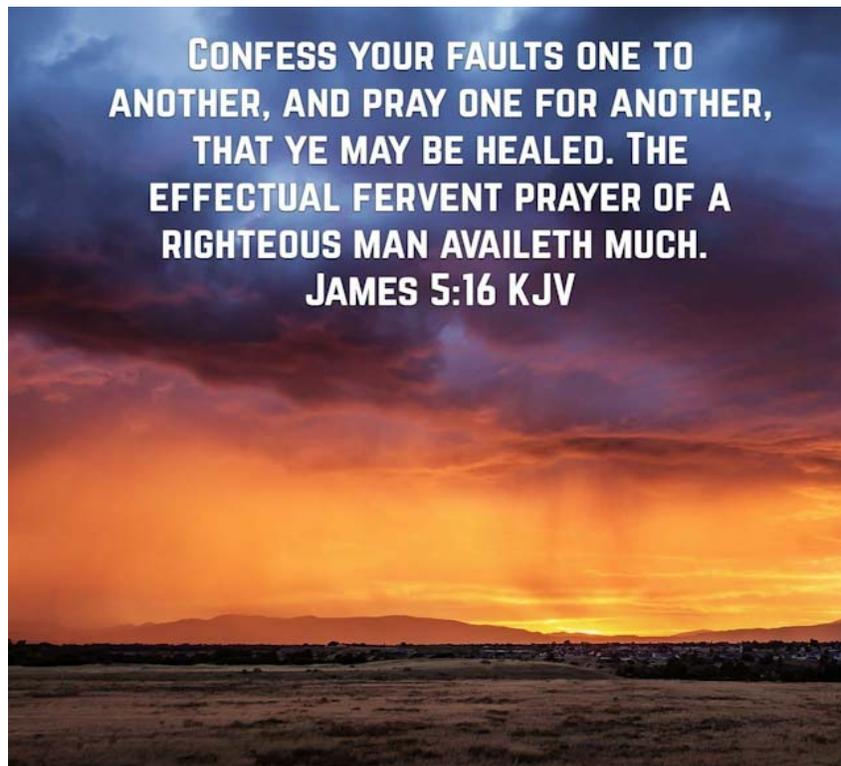
Mission and Disciplines

Tuesday, June 16: Read Job 42
(Continued)

We suddenly realize we have sinned. We have it wrong. God loves us, has everything in hand, and is acting in keeping with His purposes. What are we to do when we realize our error? Why, we pray just as Job did:

"My ears had heard of You but now my eyes have seen You. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." Job 42:5-6

We simply address our unbelief and get back to offering the fervent prayer of the righteous that can avail so much! (James 5:16)



Finishing Genesis

Wednesday, June 17: Read Genesis 42

On the surface, it would appear the great famine that struck Egypt and the surrounding areas was responsible for both Joseph's rise to prominence and his family's relocation to Egypt. More on this in the days to come. But, is there any doubt at all in your mind that God can reach into this world when He chooses, use any and every kind of event, and use any and every kind of people to achieve His ends? There shouldn't be after coming this far in the book of Genesis.

Now to the fascinating narrative of this chapter. Here are a few observations for you:

- Why don't Joseph's brothers recognize him, when he recognizes them? First, they were all older than he was when he was sold into slavery, and adult men change less than children. Nearly 20 years have gone by since Joseph was sold into slavery, he was then a boy and now he is a middle-aged man. Furthermore, he would be dressed as an Egyptian, have the grooming of an Egyptian, and fluently speak the language.
- Did you notice how quickly the guilt of the brothers comes to the surface. (Verses 21-22) It is still right there even after 20 years!
- How about Joseph's behavior? His plan is a little strange, but do you see even a hint of revenge? I don't. It seems more like he wants to see his brothers again, and ultimately get the entire family into Egypt.

Finishing Genesis

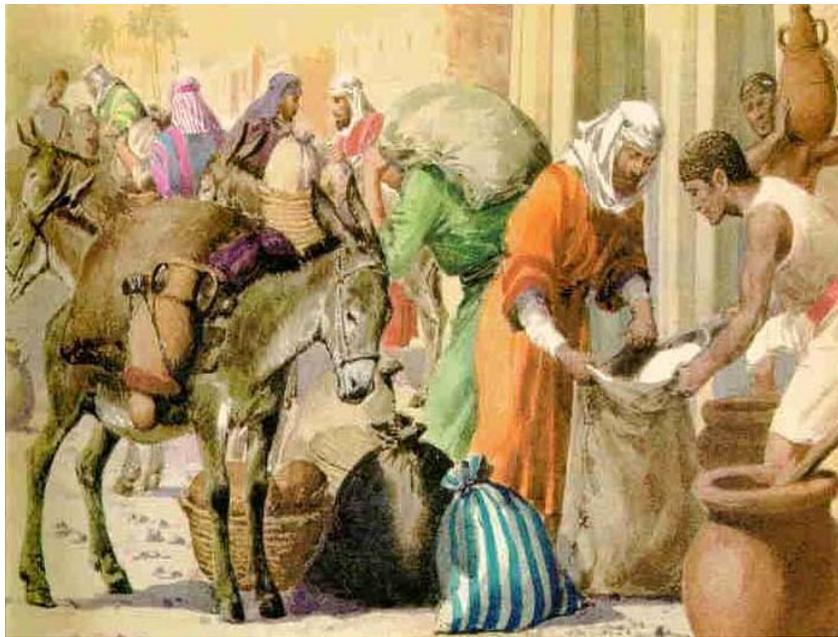
Wednesday, June 17: Read Genesis 42
(Continued)

After making these three points, let me ask a question:
Who really had the worst of things for the past 20 years?

Here is a principle you might want to consider:

*It is better to be shaped by the hand of the Lord;
than to get ahead through scheming.*

In some ways, I think the brothers have been stuck in a rut for 20 years while Joseph has advanced greatly! The Lord can do that for those who trust in Him!



Finishing Genesis

Thursday, June 18: Read Genesis 43

The lack of food in Canaan forces the drama to continue, as eventually Jacob (Israel) is forced to relent and allow his son Benjamin to accompany his brothers to Egypt. They get immediate access to Joseph, are reunited with Simeon, and invited to eat with Joseph, whom they still do not recognize. You can't help but wonder how much longer this can go on. The short answer is for two more chapters.



In the meantime, here are a few things to note:

- Did you notice the words of Joseph's servant?

**"Your God, the God of your father has given you
treasure in your sacks. . ."** Genesis 43:23

It is clear that Joseph's servants know that he worships a God other than that of the Egyptians. Apparently Joseph has not been paganized by his time in Egypt. I hope we would do as well.

Finishing Genesis

Thursday, June 18: Read Genesis 43
(Continued)

- Do you think the brothers have any inkling of the truth? Imagine their surprise, when they are all seated in birth order at the table, and then Benjamin is given a portion five times everyone else's. Is this a coincidence?
- Have you noticed that the interactions within Jacob's family all seem tense and full of conflict?

Jacob seems to still be playing favorites (Genesis 43:8), and his sons' greatest concern seems to be finding their silver back in their sacks. Joseph, however, shows no sign of anger or exacting revenge on his brothers.

You might ask, "Then why the elaborate charade?" Is it possible that, after he realizes his brothers don't recognize him, he is simply gathering as much information about his family as he can? He is taking the opportunity to observe his brothers to see if there has been any change among them. In Verse 34 it sounds as if Joseph had more than ample opportunity to observe his family:

So they feasted and drank freely with him.



Finishing Genesis

Friday, June 19: Read Genesis 44

Everything is going to come to a head in Chapter 44, and then Joseph reveals himself to his brothers in the first few verses of Chapter 45.

Let's get the details that lead up to this momentous event. Things start out well, each brother gets as much food as he can carry, plus his silver back. However, Joseph adds a personal article to Benjamin's sack, and then uses that to, in effect, arrest his brothers. Joseph is willing to let everyone go except for Benjamin. At this point, Judah makes an impassioned plea for his brother's release, even volunteering to remain in his place. This causes Joseph to break down and weep so loudly that even Pharaoh's household hears about it.

But that's a story for tomorrow. For today, why the deception on Joseph's part, in planting one of his possessions in Benjamin's sack? What is he aiming to accomplish? Again, the text doesn't tell us for sure, but there is no evidence that he is being petty, vindictive, or trying to extract revenge. It is almost as if he can't decide how to reveal himself. Consider this, Joseph would desperately like to be reunited with his family and be with them again. Furthermore, while the brothers are thinking in terms of food and short-term survival, Joseph sees things from a much broader perspective.

All of this will be born out in the next few chapters. In the meantime, I think the thing that tipped the scales for Joseph was Judah's impassioned plea to spare their father grief at the loss of his youngest son and his offer to take Benjamin's place. This is not the same brother who sold him into slavery, and sat down to eat lunch while Joseph begged for his life. Things have changed, and Joseph is now ready to move forward by revealing himself!

Finishing Genesis

Monday, June 22: Read Genesis 45

After all the build-up, Chapter 45 is pretty dramatic:

- Joseph, in a moment of great emotion, reveals himself to his brothers.
- They are all speechless and terrified.
- Joseph calms their fears.
- Eventually even Pharaoh gets involved in paving the way for Israel, and the rest of the family, to come down to Egypt.

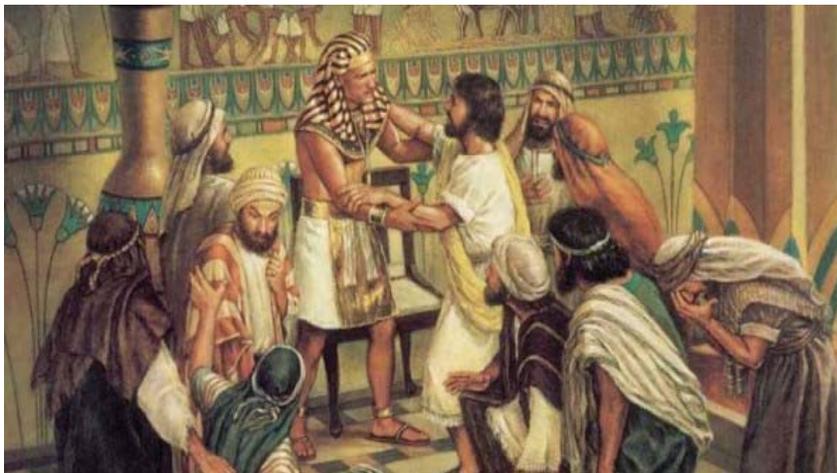
Coming to Egypt both delivers them from the famine, and also gets them out of the evil environment of Canaan.

Consider what Joseph says:

“And now do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. . .But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.”

Genesis 45:5,7

Continued on the next page.



Finishing Genesis

Monday, June 22: Read Genesis 45
(Continued)

Do you think the point of Joseph's statement is: don't worry about your sin, everything worked out for the best? I don't think so, for Joseph knew his brothers' intent was to do him harm. (Genesis 50:20)

Instead, perhaps he understands that, in spite of sin, God can work all things toward His desired ends. For we have already learned the brothers still carried guilt for their sin against their brother 20 years later. Further, Joseph still had to go through much by way of tribulation to eventually arrive at his elevated status.

So, if this were a Christian setting, my advice to the brothers would be to *confess your sin* and then be blessed by being reconciled to your brother. For isn't that what our heavenly Father allows us to do? We can regain fellowship with Him whenever we are willing to confess our sin and trust in the work of the cross to allow God to:



. . .forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

Finishing Genesis

Tuesday, June 23: Read Genesis 46

Chapter 46 portrays the joyous reunion between the father and the son he thought he had lost forever. I refer, of course, to Jacob and Joseph. But don't let the grand reunion overshadow these other very important revelations contained within this chapter:

- Jacob took everything he owned to Egypt and, most importantly, God approved. In fact, He promises to not only go with Jacob, but at some future time to bring his offspring back to the land of Canaan as a great nation.
- Jacob's entire family goes to Egypt, which at this point includes a total of 70 males. Contrast that with Exodus 12:37 which tells us approximately 600,000 men left Egypt 430 years later. This gives us clear evidence that our God is a promise-keeping God.
- The most remarkable aspect of God's plan is contained in Verse 34. The Israelites are going to have their own little enclave within Egypt! They are going to be able to keep their language, customs, and, most importantly, their God. Rather than be influenced by the pagan culture of Canaan, they are going to be able to maintain their own identity over the next 400 years until it is time for God to bring them back to the land that He has promised to give them and only then will they be able to occupy the land as a nation.

I see God, not the famine, as the prime-mover. First, God sent Joseph ahead. Then, He uses the famine to elevate Joseph and cement his position. Finally, the famine prompts family contact and reconciliation. We close with the whole family intact and right where God wants them. Remember, God is just as able to orchestrate events in our day.

Finishing Genesis

Wednesday, June 24: Read Genesis 47

On the surface, this chapter describes a remarkable outcome: This extended family of foreigners, in desperate need, shows up in Egypt and is given their own private area of land, a regular allotment of food, and the exalted status of taking care of Pharaoh's own livestock. When God blesses you, then you are good and truly blessed! However, if we look a little bit deeper we will find something even more remarkable. Did you notice the text is very specific to say in Verses 7 and 10 that "*Jacob blessed Pharaoh?*" Perhaps you are thinking, "What's so remarkable about that?" To grasp the significance of this, we have to understand that in the ancient world:

And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater. Hebrews 7:7 (Referring to Genesis 14)

By the world's standards, Pharaoh was by far the greater. He was king of one of the mightiest nations on earth with immense resources at his disposal. Jacob, on the other hand, was the head of a little rag-tag family collection that wasn't even a minor player on the political scene, forced into Egypt to keep from starving to death, and with almost no resources. How in the world could he be the greater? The answer is that he is greater in the plans and purposes of God, in terms of receiving the Lord's favor.

I can prove it to you. Do you know the name of the Pharaoh whom Jacob blessed? Probably not! It was Sunusert III. But you do know Jacob's name because you know the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For, to be associated with the one true God is to allow you and me to bestow a blessing upon anyone with whom we will share the good news that Jesus saves! To be in the Kingdom of God is also to be *the greater* by virtue of association with the Lord Jesus Christ. What a mighty privilege!

Finishing Genesis

Thursday, June 25: Read Genesis 48

This is the first time anywhere in the book of Genesis that I have the sense that Jacob is really in fellowship with the Lord. God has been faithful to Jacob, but Jacob has not been faithful to the Lord. But now as you read his recollection of how God has watched over him and blessed him, and the moving blessings he prays upon Joseph's sons, it is almost as if you are meeting a new man, a man who has come into his own for the first time.



I think the reason for this actually lies in the closing verse of the last chapter:

. . . Israel worshipped as he leaned on the top of his staff.
Genesis 47:31

Continued on the next page.

Finishing Genesis

Thursday, June 25: Read Genesis 48
(Continued)

I think Jacob had finally reached the point where he had given up *grasping* and was able to see the completely trustworthy nature of God. He then showed his submission to Him by a moment of wholehearted worship. How did I pull all of that out of the text of Verse 31? First of all, like you, I have been following the development of Jacob since Chapter 25. Second, I am familiar with that great eleventh chapter of the Book of Hebrews which lists noteworthy moments of faith on the part of Old Testament saints. Here is what Hebrews says about Jacob:

By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshipped as he leaned on the top of his staff. Hebrews 11:21

God has selected the most noteworthy moment in the life of Jacob, from the standpoint of his faith, and named it to be the moments we have just covered in Chapters 47 and 48. I am greatly encouraged by this. For, truly, Jacob was a stinker at times. Yet he kept developing and eventually became noteworthy for his faith. If we will keep growing in the Lord, is it not also possible that we will become noteworthy in God's sight for our dependent trust and obedient submission to Him? Praise God for His grace!



Finishing Genesis

Friday, June 26: Read Genesis 49

Jacob's blessing upon his sons just before his death at the close of Chapter 49 contains much that sounds more like cursing, or at least *telling it like it is*, rather than blessing. It will make more sense if we notice the phrase in Verse 1: "*days to come*" is a translation of a single Hebrew word. This word always has prophetic connotations and typically refers to things that are going to happen to a group or nation towards the close of their history. This can be seen in the prophecy regarding Judah in Verse 10, for his progeny are singled out as those who will: . . . *hold the scepter. . . and the ruler's staff.*

Of course, both David and Solomon were in the line of Judah as were the lesser known kings who followed. However, note the caveat in Genesis 49:10:

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until He comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is His.

Not only will future kings come from the line of Judah, but eventually the scepter will settle upon one king to whom the nations will all turn in obedience. This is clear prophecy pointing to the time when Jesus Christ will reign from an earthly Jerusalem as King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:11-16, Psalm 2). This connects with Genesis 12, where God changes from dealing with the entire human race as a whole and, instead, begins to do so with Abraham and his offspring. So, it is not surprising that the promised Messiah is going to come through one of Jacob's sons. Furthermore, perhaps that is the reason that Jacob is adamant about being buried back in the Promised Land. For he knows and believes the promises made to Abraham, including that of land!

Finishing Genesis

Monday, June 29: Read Genesis 50

Joseph comes to the end of his life with a remarkable display of his trust in God. For I am sure you noticed that after Jacob was buried, the brothers became afraid. For they couldn't quite settle in their own minds that Joseph truly had forgiven them, and would not make use of his powerful position to extract his vengeance following the death of Jacob.

As a result, the brothers throw themselves at Joseph's feet, and here is how he responded in Genesis 50:19-20:

"Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."



Finishing Genesis

Monday, June 29: Read Genesis 50 (Continued)

What an example of placing all of the things in our lives, even the unfair or undeserved trials we may have to go through, into the hands of our sovereign God and then trusting Him to use circumstances in order to accomplish His purposes.

As if that is not enough, there is one more display of faith we should note. As the time of Joseph's own death draws near, he extracts a promise:

"God will surely come to your aid. . .and then you must carry my bones up from this place."

Genesis 50:24

Joseph may not have known the full extent of the slavery that would eventually result. But, he did know that the offspring of Jacob would spend 400 years in Egypt, eventually be enslaved, and then be brought out by God Himself. (Genesis 15:13,16) Joseph so believed this promise that he wanted to make sure he went with them, and that's why he extracts that promise. He trusted God to fulfill a promise almost 400 years in the future, while we sometimes wonder if He can deal with tomorrow. Joseph is a great example of faith that forgives and faith that gives hope for the future.



In which of God's promises for the future are you trusting? List them and be encouraged!

Finishing Genesis

Tuesday, June 30: Read Psalm 92

We have looked at Hebrews Chapter 11 a number of times. We often refer to it as the *Hall of Faith*, for it lists examples of times when many of the saints of the past demonstrated faith. It is fair to say that, from God's perspective, it lists those individuals' finest moments, something noteworthy enough to be recorded in Scripture for our example and encouragement. We have read about two of the men listed in Hebrews 11, both of whom died in the closing chapters of Genesis—Jacob and Joseph.

The facts to which I want to draw your attention are these:

- Jacob is described in Hebrews 11:21 as *by faith* worshipping as he leaned on his staff. See Genesis 47:31. Joseph is also said to have given instructions *about his bones*. (Hebrews 11:22 cp. Genesis 50:24-25)
- How old was Jacob when he made the *Hall of Faith*? Check the text and you will see he was 147. How about Joseph? He was 110!

As application, when are we too old to do something noteworthy in the estimation of God? Never! I am convinced of that, not just because of the example of Jacob and Joseph. I am convinced because of the general principles laid out in God's Word, the principles of: power out of weakness, the grain of wheat falling to the ground and first dying, the simple and not the mighty chosen, meekness and humility over pride, and resurrection of life out of death.

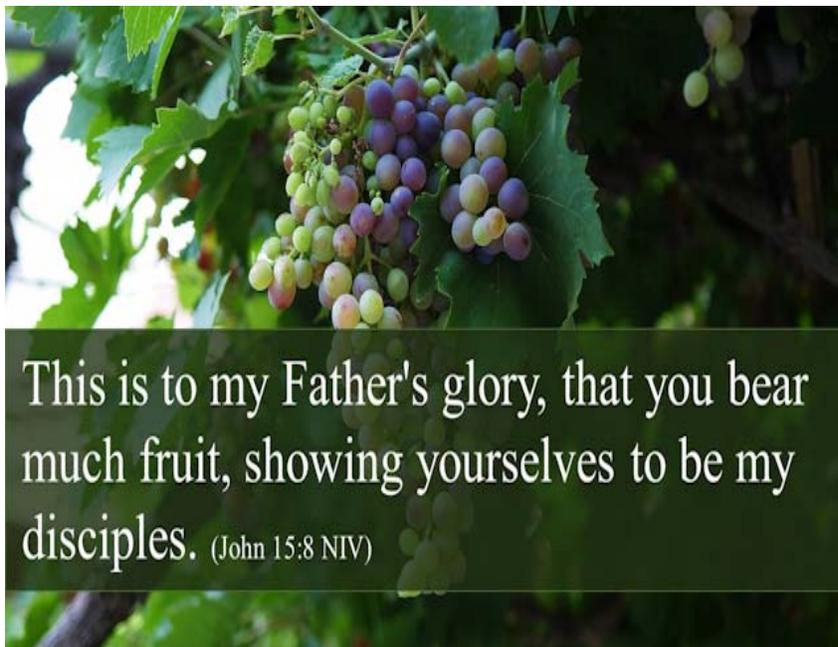
Finishing Genesis

Tuesday, June 30: Read Psalm 92
(Continued)

For some of us, it takes a lifetime until we can come to trust God in the way He desires. But be sure of this, for those who do:

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, "The Lord is upright; He is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in Him."

Psalm 92:12-15



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He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit...*John 15:5*

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