DEEPER

MONTHLY BIBLE READING

THE LINK CHURCH

LINKING PEOPLE TO CHRIST. LINKING PEOPLE TOGETHER.

JANUARY 2025

DAY 1

Gen. 1-2 • Luke 1

Scripture Reading

It's All About God

Genesis 1:1; 2:1-3

TODAY'S FOCUS

"In the beginning God…"
Genesis 1:1

The opening chapters of the Bible describe the creation of heavenly bodies, rocks, plants, animals, and people. Everything we see and all that we know and experience come from God. He spoke, and it came to be. And all of it together, God said, was "very good."

It all begins with God, not with our birthdays, anniversaries, or graduations. Not even our languages or cultures come before God. God is the source and sustainer of everything good every day. This God of the Bible, who is the Father of Jesus Christ, keeps us and guards our coming and going (Psalm 121:8). Today those who take him seriously will gather to worship this God.

For many people, life is about freedom and choice, about what we do, how we do it, and with whom. If that's true, do we really want a God who is so close, who watches our every step?

This is where Genesis begins.

The rest of the story tells us what we have done with God's closeness and his goodness. It's about God driving us away and bringing us back to himself. As we read Genesis this month, we'll see what happens among Eden's trees and inside Canaan's tents. We'll read of graves and journeys. We'll find that it's all about the God who will make everything very good again, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Prayer

Father, open our hearts to your closeness in our lives. Help us to honor and worship you in all we do. May we also gather with your people in worship. In Jesus' name,

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 2

Gen. 3-5 • Luke 2

Scripture Reading

I Was Afraid

Genesis 3:1-13

TODAY'S FOCUS

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." Genesis 3:10

Picture the scenario. A child does something that they know they aren't supposed to do. Maybe they broke something they weren't supposed to play with. They knew they were going to be in trouble when a parent found out, so they hid in a closet, or in their backyard, or maybe even in a tree fort,
hoping to escape the consequences of their actions.

Adam and Eve sinned against God. They knew that he had told them not to eat from one of the trees in the garden. But they
gave into temptation and ate the fruit of that tree anyway. Like children afraid of a parent, Adam and Eve hid from God, hoping to escape the consequences of their actions. Adam and Eve were afraid of what God
might say or do to them because of their disobedience.

While there certainly were consequences for their sin—consequences that we still experience today—there was also forgiveness and grace. God continued to care for them. He didn't just leave them to themselves. In fact, from the moment of their sin, God began to shape history toward reconciling Adam and Eve and all of their children to himself.

While God hates sin, he loves us and has gone to extraordinary lengths to bring us back to him.Forgiveness and grace are
God's gifts to his people every day.

Prayer

Gracious God, we sin against you all too often. But your grace and mercy abound in our lives, so we don't need to be afraid. And for that we give thanks.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 3

Gen. 6-8 • Luke 3

Scripture Reading

Play Your Role

Luke 3:19-22

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Herod locked John up in prison. When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too." Luke 3:20-21

Sitting in prison, John likely thought back to all the people he baptized in the Jordan River, most important he would have recalled his cousin Jesus, who came to be baptized too. John must have felt uneasy about baptizing Jesus, for Jesus had no sin to repent of. Yet Jesus insisted that he had to be baptized to fulfill the righteous requirements for the Messiah and to identify with all people. So, with John's help, Jesus was baptized, and everything changed. The heavens opened, and John was astonished to hear the voice of God saying to Jesus, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (See Matthew 3:13-17; John 1:29-34.)

God's plan of changing the world—and our lives—was launched, and John cooperated in full agreement. That was his role from the very start of his life. And even in prison his time was not wasted (see Mark 6:20).

Is the Lord calling you to play the role he's assigned to you? Maybe you are called to help a neighbor in need. Maybe you are called to teach a child to read. Maybe you are called to protest for better living conditions or to speak up for life in all places of death and despair. Maybe you can make a path more straight for someone so that they might hear the gospel. Let your faith in the Master drive out any fear of doing his good will today.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help me to fulfill the role I am assigned in life; spouse, parent, coworker, neighbor, friend. In my role this day, may I be a blessing, for your sake.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 4

Gen. 9-11 • Luke 4

Scripture Reading

A Light for the Nations

Luke 4:14-30

TODAY'S FOCUS

"There were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian." Luke 4:27

Jesus stood in the pulpit of his hometown; everyone knew him and eagerly anticipated what he would say, but why did they get so upset? What was wrong with what he said?

Jesus knew that many of the people there had come to see him perform—as if miracles were magic tricks, not signs that pointed to his anointing as the Messiah, the Savior. So he reminded everyone what had happened in the days of the prophets. Elijah was sent to help a widow—but not a Jewish women And Elisha healed a leper—but he was the commander of an enemy army. Had God extended His grace to the "wrong" people?

Jesus wanted the people of Nazareth to see that the Messiah came to save not just the Jews but everyone. God's grace is for people of all nations. The passage he quoted in Isaiah is about being a light to all nations, not just one nation. That was a shocking message, so Jesus' own people turned on him.

The wideness of God's mercy and the depth and breadth of God's grace may shock us still today. Jesus Christ came to save sinners even those we might not think are worth saving. Jesus' words challenge us to rethink our self-interested agendas. The good news of the gospel is for the whole world. Are we sharing it or keeping it to ourselves?

Prayer

Light of the world, help us not to hide our light under a basket but to shine brightly and clearly with the good news of your salvation.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 5

Gen. 12-14 • Luke 5

Scripture Reading

Faith Journey

Genesis 11:31-12:9

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Go to the land I will show you."
Genesis 12:1

It's di cult to see why God sometimes doesn't make things happen right where we're planted. We might have our life worked out: a career on the fast-track, a new home, good schools for the kids. And then God changes the game plan. Abram may well have wondered about God's instructions to him. His father, Terah, had intended to move to Canaan but never made it that far. When he got to Haran, he settled there instead. Abram lived long enough in Haran to make himself at home. His business ventures had prospered, and he had become "very wealthy" (Genesis 13:2). Living the life of a desert sheik and already 75 years old, Abram wasn't the most likely person to go looking for new adventures. Abram and his wife, Sarai, were also childless. In spite of their prosperity, their future looked bleak with no descendants. Then God showed up and told Abram to go to the land God would show him. Abram wasn't being called to retire in a villa on the Mediterranean. He was called to a faith journey that was part of God's plan to gather his people. Abram obeyed, and he was blessed in ways he never imagined. God's faith journey for you may lead in directions you think are impossible or unreasonable. But in your obedience God will also bless you and others around you.

Prayer

Lord, just when we have life all figured out, you shake us up with something new. Overcome our hesitation. Help us trust in your wisdom on the journey you give us.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 6

Gen. 15-17 • Luke 6

Scripture Reading

Adonai: "Lord, Master, Owner"

Genesis 15:1-6

TODAY'S FOCUS

Abram said, "Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" Genesis 15:2

Calling Abram to leave his homeland, God promised to make him a great nation (Genesis 12:1-2). A while later, God promised to make Abram's o spring "like the dust of the earth," so many that they could not be counted (13:16). But now years had passed, and Abram still had no o spring.

After Abraham met Melchizedek at Salem (see Genesis 14), God appeared to Abram in a vision. This time, before God made a promise, Abram raised the point that he needed o spring to be a great nation.
He doesn't do this in a cheeky way. He addresses God with the utmost respect as Adonai Yahweh, "Sovereign LORD."

Here the Bible combines Yahweh with the Hebrew Adonai, from the noun "adon", meaning "Lord, master, owner." Abram recognizes that God is his "Sovereign," and although he doesn't understand God's plan, Abram shows that he trusts Adonai will keep his promise to make him a great nation.

Just a bit later, when God promises to make his o spring as numerous as the stars of the heavens, we read that Abram believed.
Seeing Abram's wholehearted trust, God credits it "to him as righteousness."

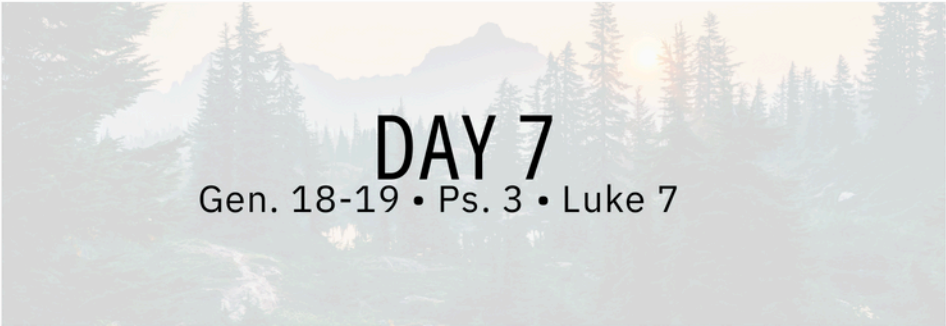
If you know God is King of the universe, do you truly trust him with your life? What can you do today to show faith in your Sovereign Lord?

Prayer

Sovereign Lord, so often we fail to understand your ways. Help us to bow before you and to trust you completely, our Lord and Master.

Amen.

NOTES



DAY 7

Gen. 18-19 • Ps. 3 • Luke 7

Scripture Reading

An Unnamed but Memorable Woman

Luke 7:36-47

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Do you see this woman?" Luke 7:44

In the Jewish culture of the first century, women generally had few rights and were expected not to be seen or heard. Even in the gospel accounts, few women are named. The anonymous woman in today's story crashes Simon's party and makes a scene as she lets down her hair in public. This would have been seen as seductive. Her perfume permeates the air. Her weeping breaks the awkward silence. Jesus knows what Simon
is thinking, so he tells a brief parable about debts and forgiveness. Then he asks Simon
a seemingly obvious question: "Do you see this woman?"

Simon really doesn't see her. He observes the woman's actions but fails to discern
what is happening in the spiritual realm. Jesus understands that this woman is pouring out her deepest feelings of thanksgiving and love toward God. It's a sacred moment of unconditional surrender and devotion to God.

This question reverberates into our time as well: "Do we see this woman?" We often choose to stay neutral, impartial, and detached when it comes to expressing emotion for God. But such a radical outpouring of a ection to Jesus is healthy and pleasing to God.

The truly forgiven Christian pours out his or her love for Jesus. We need the eyes of Jesus to see and honor the beauty of such "great love" when a forgiven sinner shows it.

Prayer

Lord, free us to see the love of others for you and to show our love too, in welcoming them for your sake.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 8

Gen. 20-22 • Luke 8

Scripture Reading

God's Grace in Clothing Form

Luke 8:26-39

TODAY'S FOCUS

"They found the man ... sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind ..."Luke 8:35

Picture the man sitting at Jesus' feet. He once stormed around the cemetery naked. Now he is calm. Jesus has brought God's restoring favor to him and, as a sign of that favor, Jesus has also clothed him!

Long ago God brought his restoring favor to two other people, and he clothed them too- Adam and Eve. They trusted the lies of the serpent instead of obeying the instructions of God. One result of their rebellion was that their nakedness, once a sign of innocence, became an embarrassment. But after God promised a future healing through the o spring of the woman (see Genesis 3:15), he clothed them. It was a sign of his loving favor for two undeserving rebels.

In today's reading we see God, in Jesus, clothing someone againsomeone who experi- enced and ex-pressed some of the ugliest e ects of the fall into sin.

The owners of the pigs that were destroyed by the man's demons weren't very happy about their loss, but they couldn't mistake Jesus' healing touch. They saw the man sitting at Jesus' feet, calm and clothed.

As you put your fresh clothes on today, let them remind you of what God does for rebels. He loves and restores us. Ultimately grace is the garment we wear that allows us to stand clothed and restored in God's presence (see Zechariah 3).

.

Prayer

We praise you, O God, for your restoring favor for all of us who su er the e ects of sin. Clothe us, too, in your grace, dear Father. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 9

Gen. 23-24 • Luke 9

Scripture Reading

A Servant's Prayer

Genesis 24:1-16

TODAY'S FOCUS

"O LORD ... give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham." Genesis 24:12

Our reading for today opens with Abraham calling his most trusted servant to a special task. The servant makes a vow and sets out on a journey to find a wife for Isaac from among Abraham's relatives.

We don't know much about this servant, but we can tell he has seen God at work in the lives of Abraham, Sarah, and now Isaac. Abraham is old, and he wants Isaac to marry. Abraham is trying to arrange for a bride for Isaac, but God is the one who will really provide so that his promises are fulfilled. Before the servant starts any conversations with the young women of the area, he prays to the God of his master and asks God to show kindness to his master. Success for the servant will come by God's taking the next step in this mission.

Why is the name of the servant not shared in this story? Maybe it helps us focus on God as the primary actor in this drama. A servant who prays for success turns not to his own abilities but to the kindness of God.

Not knowing the name of the servant helps us put ourselves in his sandals. How do we define "success"? In this case, success is the completion of the mission by the servant for the master. The master's success is the ulti- mate goal of the servant.
Have you prayed the servant's prayer lately?

Prayer

Master, Creator, make me a servant of your peace. Help me continue to pray and seek for your will to be done on earth, in me, as it is in heaven. In your name, O Lord,

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 10

Gen. 25-26 Ps. 6 Luke 10

Scripture Reading

A Pot of Soup

Genesis 25:27-34

TODAY'S FOCUS

Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright." Genesis 25:31

As Jacob grew up, his life began to take a very di erent course from that of his broth- er, Esau. Not only did Jacob and Esau have di erent interests and personalities, but their parents' favoritism likely fueled their sibling rivalry. And in the back of Jacob's mind, there was probably often a reminder of God's response to Rebekah—a prophecy saying that "the older [brother] will serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23).

Have you ever been frustrated by the feeling that you were not getting what you deserved? Knowing that God intended to bless him, Jacob took steps to secure that blessing for himself. And Esau, whose hunger for soup overruled his common sense, cooperated by selling his birthright.

Perhaps like Jacob, we often see God's blessing as something we should have—or maybe even deserve—and we think we need to seize it or - secure it by making some kind of deal or bargain. But blessings from God are an undeserved gift. They cannot be purchased for any price other than the blood Christ gave for us on the cross. Yet as Jacob's story will show us, it can take a lifetime to set aside our human tendency to struggle against the work of God and to receive his love as a gift.

Pray that God's Spirit will begin to help you learn that lesson today.

Prayer

Gracious God, we often try to seize for ourselves what you delight to o er as a gift. Help us to look today to Christ, who has already paid the price of your blessing for us.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 11

Gen. 27-28 • Ps. 4 • Luke 11

Scripture Reading

Inside and Outside

Luke 11:37-42

TODAY'S FOCUS

"You Pharisees clean the outside ... but inside you are full of greed and wickedness." Luke 11:39

As religious leaders, the Pharisees often challenged Jesus because they felt threatened by his teachings. Jesus taught that spiritual cleansing and renewal took place in a person's heart and showed on the outside in acts of mercy and justice. But the Pharisees taught a religion of mostly man-made rules and ceremonies. On the outside they appeared pious, but on the inside many were filled with sinful thoughts and intentions. Jesus says "Woe ..." to them several times to warn that God's punishment on them would be terrible.

False religion often focuses on the outward rather than the inward. It appeals to people's tastes, senses, and material ambitions rather than to hearts yearning for cleansing and renewal.

True and balanced spirituality calls for God's cleansing from the inside out. It involves daily time in prayer, meditation on the Word, and personal fellowship with God. In this training ground the Spirit of God nurtures believers and prepares them for the challenges of daily life as God's servants in this world. One of the greatest mistakes Christians make is to put more time and energy into outside activities than into inside disciplines. Think of the religious leaders of Jesus' day who went terribly wrong because they emphasized the outside over the inside.

Prayer

Lord, renew us each day and guard us from false or superficial religion. Guide us to grow inside so that we may glow outside with love, truth, and righteousness.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 12

Gen. 29-30 • Luke 12

Scripture Reading

Living Without a Story

Luke 12:13-21

TODAY'S FOCUS

"This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God." Luke 12:21

It's amazing how many people go through life without a decent story. It may look like they "have it all," but without a sense of God shaping the story of their lives, they have a gaping emptiness deep within. The tell-tale sign is an underlying sense of "frantic-ness." This may be masked by external appearances, which can be very misleading.

But once you get to know someone who has little or no sense of God shaping their life story, the more you begin to discover where their underlying restlessness comes from. Without a believable storyline for the future, they feel the need to grab anything and every-thing all at once. They have to have it all. They go through life like famine victims at a buet: trying to grab all they can because they don't know when they might eat next.

They have no way of knowing if their lives are on track, and at some point it shows. Jesus promised a life that is far dierent from that. He urged us not to worry,
trusting that if God arranges life so that even the flowers and the birds are ade- quately cared for, He'll certainly make sure that we enjoy the "abundant life."

Prayer

Lord, we know what you have in store for us—a life of trust in you so that we can't imagine settling for anything less than your best for our lives.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 13

Gen. 31-33 • Luke 13

Scripture Reading

Parting Ways

Genesis 31:22-44

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Jacob was angry and took Laban to task." Genesis 31:36

Most of us learn early, even as young chil- dren, that there are di cult people in the world who cannot be trusted. Jacob's uncle Laban was a person like that. While Jacob's flight from Harran is somewhat devious, it becomes more understandable after we hear what life was like for Jacob in Laban's household.

Even so, Jacob himself was not innocent. Though he had su ered in many ways at his uncle's hands, Jacob himself also lived by trickery. We see too that Rachel could be deceptive, she stole her father's "household gods" but managed to cover that up by lying to her father.

As twenty years of pent-up bitterness against Laban comes out, Jacob makes an important statement: "If the God of my father . . . had not been with me . . ." In small ways, Jacob is beginning to recognize his need for God's presence, his inability to manipulate things for his own advantage.

Has God used Laban's injustice to reveal Jacob's own sin?

Contentious people can be unpleasant to deal with, but God can use such people to remind us of his patience and mercy toward us. God did more than o er us a truce; his Spirit remains with us to protect us from the e ects of others' sins—and our own.

Prayer

Protect us, almighty God, from the designs of people who would harm us. Save us also from our own deceptive ways, for the sake of Jesus.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 14

Gen. 34-36 • Luke 14

Scripture Reading

Death and Mourning

Genesis 35:16-20, 27-29

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath." — Genesis 35:19

Jacob had experienced renewal in his relationship with God, but that did not mean life became easy for him. In the first years after his return home, Jacob experienced grief from the deaths of his beloved wife, Rachel, and of his father, Isaac.

Death is a reality for everyone living in this world. Even our closest human relationships cannot be shielded from its power. Perhaps, as you read this, you have an empty place in your life left by the death of a loved one.
Grief is natural, even for people who have put their hope in God. It signifies that the person who has died was important to us.

But grief does not have the last word.
Jacob continues to live in the hope of God's promise, and he experiences the comfort of human relationships as he shares the grief of Isaac's death with his reconciled brother.

But God has given even greater hope for believers who follow Christ. Because Jesus has died and risen again, we trust that God will also raise those who have died with faith in Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). We may grieve, but we grieve as those who move forward in the hope of God's promise.
May that hope be yours today as well.

Prayer

Father God, give us hope in the face of death. Comfort all who grieve and sorrow, and sustain us with the confidence of your promise through Jesus Christ.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 15

Gen. 37-38 • Ps. 7 • Luke 15

Scripture Reading

Lost and Found

Luke 15:11-32

TODAY'S FOCUS

"There was a man who had two sons."
Luke 15:11

When someone wants to simplify their life, they get rid of things that get in their way—even people, in some cases.

The young man in today's story was not interested in his father, but he was interested in the things he could get from his father. He thought his life would be more exciting if his father was dead. In the culture of that day, it was an insult to ask for your inheritance before your father passed away. But the young man didn't care about that.

The story then takes a surprising turn as the father gives the young man his inheritance. Most fathers would not react in a way like that. They'd probably consider the most reasonable options for such an unreasonable child. But Jesus is making a point that parallels our Father in heaven's lavish love
for us. The father knows his son is lost, and he watches and prays for his return. As a result, the focus of the story isn't really on the son but on the outrageously generous father who waits for his son to come home.

Jesus told this story to tell us about his Father. His Father gave up everything, even his own Son, so that we might be returned
to him. Our Father is overjoyed to the point of being utterly undignified because we belong to him again. He loves us that much. As we come to our senses, we too find our Father running toward us, undignified but overjoyed.

Prayer

Father, thank you for patiently waiting for us to come home to you. As you run toward us, we run toward your arms ready to embrace us.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 16

Gen. 39-41 • Luke 16

Scripture Reading

Real Shrewdness

Luke 16:3-13

TODAY'S FOCUS

"You cannot serve both God and Money."
Luke 16:13

Let's take another look at this interesting story. The manager knew his time was running out. He had blown it, and his job was on the line.

When you get to be 60 years old and you get fired, it's tough to get another decent job. Dig ditches? "I'm not strong enough." Beg? "No way." What, then?

The shrewd manager used his leverage while he still had some. As he cut the debts of his master's clients, they became indebted to him. After all, one good turn deserves anoth- er, right?

In his assessment of this story, Jesus neither ignored the man's wrongdoing nor endorsed a "You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours" way of life. But he made clear that the master recognized the man's shrewdness and commended him for that.

What about you? In this age we are living in, when we know Jesus could return at any time, are you being shrewd with your use of time and money? Are you storing up trea- sures for yourself on earth, or are you help- ing others in Jesus' name, as he calls us to, and thus storing up treasure in heaven?
Soon all the riches and valued things of the world will rot and come to nothing. "You cannot serve both God and Money," says Jesus. Which one are you serving? Ask God for guidance in serving him today.

Prayer

God of wisdom and understanding, teach us how we may serve you well each day. May we, too, be welcomed into your eternal dwellings in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 17

Gen.42-43 • Ps.5 • Luke 17

Scripture Reading

Confrontation: What Is God Doing?

Genesis 42:25-28, 35

TODAY'S FOCUS

Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, "What is this that God has done to us?"
Genesis 42:28

Trembling! What a gift for a seared conscience! For 20 years these men had been slinking along through life, hoping their dirty secret would never be exposed.

But now, as they stopped to rest for the night, one of them opened his grain sack to feed a donkey and got the shock of his life. There lay his silver, staring him in the face. Later, back in Canaan, the jolt reverberated as each brother opened his sack with their father, Jacob, watching. Each one saw their own silver —"evidence" that could be used against them to show that they were not "honest men"! When a truly guilty person wonders if some serious adversity may be a sign of God's prodding them to repent, they may very well be on the right track.

When we are truly guilty but our hearts are still hardened against coming clean, then God, who sees all we have done, may roar at us through some adversity so unnerving that we cannot help trembling. If something like that happens to us, it is a sign of God's grace, a gift leading us back to God.
Each one of us will do well to ask ourselves honestly today, "Is there something I need to confess to God?"

Prayer

Lord, free us to see the love of others for you and to show our love too, in welcoming them for your sake.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 18

Gen. 44-46 • Luke 18

Scripture Reading

Joseph's Brothers: Repentance

Genesis 44:14-17

TODAY'S FOCUS

"What can we say to my lord?" Judah replied... "God has uncovered your servants' guilt." Genesis 44:16

Guilt—real guilt—is priceless. This may sound strange, but it's rare that we are so blessed as to feel deep guilt for our sin.

This happens when we have exhausted our skills of evasion, denial, suppression, blaming, minimizing, rationalizing, justifying, and more—all to avoid facing up to our sin. When all the devices of our crafty hearts are used up or cast aside, the horrible reality of our own guilt meets us head-on. At that eye-opening moment we face the stark, liberating truth. As an old spiritual song says, "It's ... not my father, not my mother ... not my brother, not my sister ... not the elder ... not the preacher ... but it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer."

Over the years we build up a thick wall of immunity to facing our guilt; this is why redemption comes hard.

With great wisdom and love, Joseph con- fronts his brothers: "What is this you have done?" And Judah, knowing they have no other options, asks plaintively, "What can we say to my lord? ... God has uncovered [our] guilt." With cleared vision, they finally see God's hand upon them. With their guilt exposed and bowing low, the brothers surrender.

Prayer

Father, be merciful to me, even if the mercy is severe. Open my eyes and show me my sin. Help me to welcome this rare gift, and guide me to repentance. In Jesus' name,

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 19

Gen. 47-48 • Ps. 10 • Luke 19

Scripture Reading

A Polluted Man

Luke 19:1-10

TODAY'S FOCUS

Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house." Luke 19:9

If you visit Jericho today, you will see two important sites. One is Elisha's spring, where Elisha healed Jericho's toxic water more than 2,800 years ago, making it pure again. The spring stands in a park, marked by colorful tiles. "To this day" the water is pure (2 Kings 2:22). The second important site is in the center of town. It's a sycamore tree in a park. If you visit there, you will be told that while it might not be the same tree Zacchaeus climbed, it's located in the same area where Zacchaeus met Jesus.

Zacchaeus was a tax collector—a traitor to fellow citizens because he worked for the oppressive Roman government, and a thief because he could charge whatever he wanted for taxes and keep the extra money for himself. Zacchaeus was a polluted man. But Jesus saw beyond all that, and he
o ered Zacchaeus a chance to separate himself from everything that defiled him. Zacchaeus showed by his response that
from that day onward he was a changed man.

Jesus can do that with anyone. To those who seek him, he will be found. If people don't know they are lost, Jesus will seek them out. The name Zacchaeus means "clean, pure." How happy Zacchaeus must have been to finally live up to his name!

Prayer

Lord, you came to lift the curse of sin and to cleanse us of our unrighteousness. Where we are dirty, cleanse us; where we su er under the curse of sin, free us,

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 20

Gen. 49-50 • Ps. 8 • Luke 20

Scripture Reading

Whose Portrait Are You?

Luke 20:20-26

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." Luke 20:25

The spies thought that Jesus would have to answer their question in one of two incriminating ways. Either he would have to side with not paying taxes to Caesar, in which case they could report him to the Romans as a trouble-maker; or he would have to side with paying those hated taxes, which would make him unpopular with the local people. Jesus instead requested a Roman coin. "Whose portrait and inscription is on this coin?" he asked. "Caesar's," they said. "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's," Jesus concluded. It probably took Jesus' opponents a few moments to realize that he had slipped from their grasp yet again. They had to recall that there is something that really has God's portrait or inscription on it: us! We bear God's image! (See Genesis 1:26-27.) In essence, Jesus' answer to the spies' tricky question was "Go ahead, give to Caesar the coins that bear his image. But be sure to give to God all that bears his image-your very selves." It was a brilliant answer that satisfied both Roman and Jewish concerns, rendering the devious little trap useless.

Jesus' answer also reminds us of a truth that very few of us explore deeply enough: All that we have and all that we are belongs to God.

Are you giving it all back to him?

Prayer

"Dear God, help us to be the best stewards we can be of the houses, cars, bodies, time, and health you give us-even of our very lives, Lord. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 21

Ex. 1-2 Ps. 88 Luke 21

Scripture Reading

The School of Mistakes

Exodus 2:11-15

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Then Moses was afraid and thought,
'What I did must have become known.'"
Exodus 2:14

Poor Moses! He had thought that killing an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew was a good thing to do. Maybe he had thought that by killing the Egyptian he might endear himself to the Hebrews. Maybe the Hebrews would see that Moses' loyalties were with them even though he had grown up in Pharaoh's household.

But no. The Hebrews didn't trust him, and Pharaoh soon found out about Moses' murder of the Egyptian. Pharaoh then declared that he would kill Moses, and Moses found that he was not so valued a member of Pharaoh's household as he might have thought.

Lesson learned: Taking matters into his own hands was not a good idea. Moses had had quite an education already—both the hardship of his earliest years and the luxury of his growing-up years had shaped him. Now this mistake, the murder of the Egyptian, would become a teacher as well. It would teach Moses to wait on the Lord instead of pretending that he, Moses, was in charge.

Who is in charge of your life?

Are you attempting to take control, or have you turned your life over to God?

Prayer

Father in heaven, so often we want to take charge. After all, our culture often tells us to find life's answers within ourselves. Teach us trust, humility, and obedience to you, dear Lord.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 22

Ex. 3-5 • Luke 22

Scripture Reading

God of Second Chances

Luke 22:54-62

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed." Luke 22:60

Peter loved Jesus passionately. Traditional stories from the early church say that he moved to Rome and recruited many followers for Jesus. In the end, Peter was probably tortured and murdered for this work. But years earlier, when Jesus was about to be tortured and killed, Peter's courage ran cold. Jesus had predicted it hours earlier. He'd said to Peter, also known as Simon, "Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed ... that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers... I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me" (Luke 22:31-34). Even with that warning, Peter stumbled exactly as the Lord had predicted. Three times he denied that he had ever known Jesus. All of Peter's love for Jesus did not put the brakes on his fear or his drive for self-preservation. And as he heard the rooster crow, Peter ran o in shame and wept bitterly. Jesus knew that Peter would fail him, but Jesus also prayed that Peter's faith would not fail. Eventually,
in God's strength, Peter broke through the shame and lived boldly for Jesus. In the same way, Jesus knows that we will fail him. But he also prays that our faith will not fail. Trust that prayer, and know the God of second chances.

Prayer

Thank you, Giver of second chances, for your Son, Jesus, who makes our life new each day. Help us to trust that our faith will not fail, knowing that our Lord prays for us.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 23

Ex. 6-8 • Luke 23

Scripture Reading

"Jesus, Remember Me"

Luke 23:32-43

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Luke 23:42

Three crosses. Three men condemned to die. Jesus is in the middle, the "star" attraction, with criminals on either side. In this way Jesus is portrayed as the king of criminals. As Isaiah had prophesied, Jesus was "numbered with the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12).

This also means that Jesus came to be identified with us. Are we not all guilty? In a sense, the men on either side of Jesus represented the whole human race. All people have taken up arms and rebelled against the Lord and his anointed. We all deserve punishment.

Jesus on the cross evoked two kinds of responses. One says, "aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" The other says, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

The first is an insult that implies, "if You are the Christ, but I really don't believe you are, what are you doing here?" This was not a prayer but a curse.

The words of the second criminal, however —"Jesus, remember me ..."—are a believer's prayer. This man confessed that Jesus truly was a king. He also confessed that Jesus and his kingdom were bigger than death. In response, Jesus promised him new life in paradise.

Death stares us all in the face. And our record is not clean. We need a Savior.
Have you asked Jesus to remember you?

Prayer

Lord, we confess our sin and guilt. We pray for your forgiveness. We pray that you will remember us now that you are in your kingdom. For your name's sake,

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 24

Ex. 9-11 • Luke 24

Scripture Reading

Mission

Luke 24:13-35

TODAY'S FOCUS

"They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem." Luke 24:33

Today, as we review the Emmaus story one more time, we meet two downcast, discouraged travelers returning to their home from Jerusalem. On the way, they are met by Jesus, but they don't recognize him. They are heading home with crushed dreams and lost hopes.

But as Jesus explains the Scriptures to them, their hearts burn, their dreams are reawakened, and their emptiness is filled. Cleopas and his friend receive a new heart and spirit within them, for Jesus is alive. They have an urgent message to proclaim. This cannot remain hidden; the others need to hear the good news.

The travelers experience communion with Jesus as they open their home to him and break bread with him. But the story does not end there. The disciples return to Jerusalem to tell the others that Jesus is alive. Their mission is to return and tell their story to their friends and family.

We are called to do the same—to share with those closest to us the good news of Jesus Christ. This can be a di cult calling. Our listeners may have a hard time relating to us. Yet it is in community that our faith is strengthened.

As we leave the Lord's table, we proclaim that death does not have the last word. We are part of the resurrection community.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, may your Spirit reignite us to share your power at work in our lives. May we gladly "tell the old, old story" of you and your love. In your name we pray.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 25

Ex. 12-13 • Ps. 21 • Acts 1

Scripture Reading

The Passover

Exodus 12:1-13

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." 1 Corinthians 5:7

The scenes in our reading for today are quite graphic, and they may be shocking if you haven't encountered them before. By painting the blood of a lamb on the doorposts of their houses, the enslaved people of Israel were spared from a plague of death. Seeing the blood on their doorways, the Lord passed over them. But the plague took the lives of all the Egyptians' firstborn sons. There was wailing throughout Egypt because the hard-hearted Pharaoh would not listen to God's plea through Moses: "Let my people go!"

The Jewish Feast of Passover has been celebrated every year since that day long ago. And it's no coincidence that Jesus' last supper with his disciples was during the Passover feast. He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I su er. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:15-16).

At that supper, Jesus showed his disciples that the bread and wine of the meal symbolized his body and blood, given and poured out for them. And on the next day he gave up his life to be sacrificed as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). As the ultimate Passover Lamb, Jesus freed us from being slaves to sin (John 8:34). Because he took on the punishment for our sin, the judgment for sin has passed over us. Believing in him, we have new life to live with joy and trust in the Lord forever!

Prayer

O God, help us to share the love and mercy of Christ, the Passover Lamb, our Savior.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 26

Ex. 14-16 • Acts 2

Scripture Reading

Life Together

Acts 2:42-47

TODAY'S FOCUS

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship ... and to prayer." Acts 2:42

If you are looking for a summary of what it means to live as a communion of Christian believers, you find it in this passage. The church gathers to worship, study Scripture, and o er prayer to God. The church gathers to remember God's blessings and fellowship with Christ around his table. The church reaches out and enfolds new members into church life. What the church was doing only days after Pentecost is what the church still does today.

But perhaps the most amazing reality is the sacrificial sharing that happens when ordi- nary folks follow Jesus. Luke tells us: "All the believers were together and had everything in common." Is it really possible to experi- ence this kind of "communion of the saints"?

The answer is yes. This doesn't mean that the early church rejected the idea of private property. After all, Peter later told Ananias and Sapphira that the money from the sale of their land was theirs to dispose of as they wanted (Acts 5:4). Yet the church did something a pagan world never imagined. People with plenty shared with those whose cupboards were empty. In the Christian community, everyone's needs were met!
Such lavish giving is in response to the lavish love of the church's Lord, Jesus Christ.
Lavish giving is still a mark of God's grace today.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, give us the grace to follow your example of generous giving. And may all who receive our gifts see your love and care in the blessings they receive.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 27

Ex. 17-20 • Acts 3

Scripture Reading

Seeking Guidance

Exodus 18:9-26

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said." Exodus 18:24

The book of Deuteronomy says there has never been another prophet like Moses (Deut. 34:10-12). Moses spent forty days on a mountain speaking with God. He spent so much time in God's presence that his face began to glow (see Ex. 34:29-30).

You might think Moses received all his advice and the answers to all his questions directly from God, but that was not always true. In today's verses we read that Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, gave Moses good advice for making his job more manageable. In this situation God didn't tell Moses directly but used another person to bring this idea.

God regularly speaks to us through other people. Sometimes, he puts people in our lives who give us wise advice. At other times, he gives us people who set an excellent example of handling tense moments with grace. God has regularly chosen to work within communities.

We like the idea of being "self-su cient." We don't want to need help from other people. But God calls us into a community of believers. We grow nearer to God as we enjoy fellowship with others. It is helpful to realize that God can speak to us, lead us, encourage us, and caution us when we make it a priority to develop relationships with other Christ-followers who are willing to speak the truth to us in love.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, we praise you for the gift of fellowship. Work in me so that I may o er your insights to others and be ready to receive your wisdom as well.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 28

Ex. 21-22 • Ps. 12 • Acts 4

Scripture Reading

Holy Disobedience

Acts 4:13-22

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God." Acts 4:19

Common sense teaches that to live in peace with others, we have to be tolerant and flexible. Most of the time we have to learn to compromise in order to live in harmony with others. But, for Christians, certain things can never be compromised, and one of those things is obedience to God's Word.
The Jewish leaders couldn't deny that Peter and John had done an amazing miracle in Jesus' name, but the leaders didn't want them to mention Jesus' name in public. But then what good would it do to be silent, scared disciples of Christ?

Peter and John brushed aside the religious leaders' threats. They follow Christ's order to be his witnesses not only in Jerusalem but also in all Judea, Samaria, and the rest of the world (Acts 1:8). Peter and John were not saying that Jesus' followers had to become religious extremists and start holy wars. But neither were they saying we have to be religious cowards who shy away from spiritual responsibilities.

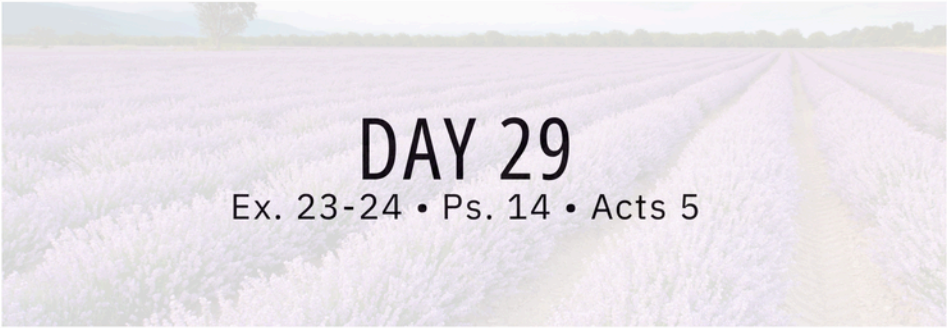
Today, many Christians do not dare to live out or talk about their faith in public. Under the cover of common sense, many of us minimize our witness for Christ. Are you afraid, or are you a bold Christian who will not flinch under the pressures of secularism and political correctness?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, give us the strength and wisdom to live out our faith today and defend it if challenged. Help us to spread the message of spiritual freedom in your name.

Amen.

NOTES



DAY 29

Ex. 23-24 • Ps. 14 • Acts 5

Scripture Reading

What Makes it Possible?

Acts 5:29-42

TODAY'S FOCUS

"The apostles ... [rejoiced] because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name." Acts 5:41

In his book Safely Home, Randy Alcorn tells the story of a persecuted Christian who loses everything because of his faith in the Lord Jesus. When he returns to his native country after receiving a Ph.D. from Harvard University he can only find a low-paying job because he is a Christian. Shortly before he dies as a result of terrible beatings, he tells a close friend that he feels unworthy to give his life for Christ.

What makes such humble obedience possible? How could the apostles rejoice after they had been beaten because they were followers of Jesus Christ? How could the apostle Paul, while chained to a prison guard, write, "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4)? How could James write, "Consider it pure joy ... whenever you face trials of many kinds" (James 1:2)? How can a man who has been on a sickbed for more than ten years say to me, "God is so good!"?

There's only one answer: the grace of God! Without God's grace no one could press on in the face of life's trials. Because of God's grace we can be sure that even in our darkest moments we will not give up because he holds on to us. As the Lord himself told Paul, "My grace is su cient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9). As we grow to trust our Lord completely with our lives, we keep growing in the experience of his grace.

"Faith is your grip on God. Grace is God's grip on you. When you lose your grip, He doesn't lose His."
— Cindy Trimm

Prayer

Father in heaven, we thank you for your amazing grace. You refuse to let go of us even when we are tempted to let go. Help us to keep trusting in you always.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 30

Ex. 25-27 • Acts 6

Scripture Reading

The Ark of the Covenant

Exodus 25:10-22

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the covenant law, I will meet with you. . . ." Exodus 25:22

To learn about the ark of the covenant, we need to look to the authority of the Bible. We won't find the right information in movies like Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark, or in other stories or legends. Some translations of the Bible call the ark a "chest" so that young readers won't confuse it with Noah's ark, which was huge (Genesis 6:15). Others call the cover "the mercy seat" because God is described as enthroned there between the cherubim (angels; see 1 Samuel 4:4). Other translations call it "the atonement cover." And once a year the high priest would enter the Most Holy Place and sprinkle blood on the cover of the ark to make atonement for the people's sin.

Forgiveness and mercy were central to God's relationship with his people. And to this day Jews celebrate the Day of Atone- ment (Yom Kippur), as one of their most holy days.

In the ark were the Ten Com-mandments of God's law. The law shows us how to honor God with our lives, but we always fall short. So we need atonement and forgiveness. When Jesus, our ultimate High Priest, shed his blood for us, he made the ultimate atonement, fulfilling the requirements of the law "once for all" (Hebrews 10:10). God is indeed forgiving and merciful.
Have you experienced God's holiness and mercy in your life?

Prayer

Holy and merciful God, thank you for making a way for us to be forgiven and to live in your presence—through the blood of Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

NOTES

DAY 31

Ex. 28-29 • Acts 7

Scripture Reading

Ascension: The View From Above

Acts 7:51-60

TODAY'S FOCUS

"I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." Acts 7:56

The Greek word for "witness" gives us our English word martyr. Giving up one's life is the cost some followers pay for obeying their ascended Lord.

Stephen was about to pay that ultimate price. And his death for Christ was provoked by his witness to the heavenly meaning of the ascension. "I see heaven open," said Stephen, "and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

These words drove the religious authorities into a blind rage. They understood the meaning of the vision.

Jesus, the very one they thought they had eliminated, now rules the universe. Seated at the right hand of the Father, the ascended Lord welcomed this first martyr of the Christian faith into heaven. I need to keep this vision of Christ's lordship before me, and so do you. Without it, I lose courage and conviction. Everywhere around me, voices claim that all religions are the same, that the Christian faith is nothing special, and that it's no big deal if we don't obey Jesus. Then I stand with Stephen and see the way things really are. Christ ascended for his coronation. He is Lord of the universe. And he governs all things with a special eye on his people, his witnessing servants.

That's a vision that inspires me to step forward and claim every square inch of this world for his reign.

Prayer

Lord, when my obedience is compromised, renew my vision of your presence at God's right hand. May your lordship inspire complete devotion to kingdom service.

Amen.

NOTES

THE LINK
CHURCH
LINKING PEOPLE TO CHRIST. LINKING PEOPLE TOGETHER.