

Mar/Apr 2013

# Today

refresh, refocus, renew

ONE  
ANOTHER

ALSO: A LENTEN JOURNEY WITH JESUS

Friends:

When Jesus washed the feet of his followers at the Last Supper, he upset many people. Why?

Normally at a Jewish Passover meal, once all members were seated around the table, the host would begin the ritual by calling family members to wash their hands as a symbol of purification. But at this Passover meal Jesus, the host, embarrassed himself and his guests. Rather than reclining in authority, he put on a servant's clothes. That created some social chaos. Rather than having his guests wash themselves, Jesus actually washed them. Not only that, instead of washing their hands, he washed their dirty, undignified feet! That created personal chaos. "Jesus is touching my feet!" No wonder Peter protested vehemently! (See John 13:8-9.)



But this was how Jesus began concluding his Lenten journey—intentionally serving others as a foreshadowing of the cross. In our devotions for March, we'll join Jesus on that journey as he marches resolutely toward the Last Supper and fulfills his purpose to redeem this world lost in sin.

By serving others to the point of embarrassment, Jesus also shows us what it looks like to be his followers. As he touched his disciples' smelly, filthy feet, Jesus explicitly said this is a model for us—"Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34). So in the month of April, we'll explore how we love God by loving one another.

May you be refreshed, refocused, and renewed in God's Word!

—Steven Koster

# Today

Mar/Apr 2013

refresh, refocus, renew



**“A Lenten Journey  
with Jesus”  
George Vink**



**“One Another”  
Steve and Deb Koster**

**Managing Editor:** Eleanor Lamsma  
**Executive Editor:** Steven Koster

TODAY (USPS 185-140),  
Volume 63, Number 2,  
published bimonthly by  
ReFrame Media, a division  
of Back to God Ministries  
International, at 6555 West  
College Drive, Palos Heights, IL  
60463. Periodicals postage paid  
at Palos Heights, Illinois, and at  
additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address  
changes to Today, 6555 W.  
College Dr., Palos Heights, IL  
60463.

Copyright © 2013, Back to  
God Ministries International.  
Printed in U.S.A.

Unless otherwise noted,  
Scripture quotations in this  
publication are from The  
Holy Bible, New International  
Version®, NIV®. Copyright  
© 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011  
by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by  
permission. All rights reserved  
worldwide.

Cover photo by Superstock.

**re**FRAME MEDIA

# this month

## A Lenten Journey with Jesus

**George Vink**

**Visalia, California**

This month, as the season of Lent carries on toward Easter, we have an opportune time to join Jesus as he “resolutely set out for Jerusalem,” knowing what awaited him there. As we follow Jesus’ story recorded in the Bible, we’ll watch and ponder as he heals, teaches, and shares his life with his disciples.

Jesus knew that his purpose for coming to live among us was part of God’s plan to redeem this world lost in sin. God the Father gave his one and only Son, Jesus, to die in our place so that we could be reconciled with him and have eternal life. Let’s follow alongside him this month to see all he did to bring us closer to God and to full life as God intended us to live it—forever!

*George Vink is a recently retired pastor, having served churches in British Columbia, Montana, Michigan, and California. He and his wife, Shirley, are enjoying traveling in their retirement, and they are seeking God’s will on where and how to spend the years to come. Some of that time is spent with their four married children and ten grandchildren, who live in various parts of the United States and Canada.*

## A RESOLUTE JESUS!

*As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*  
—Luke 9:51

Maybe you have heard the pessimistic observation “Resolutions were meant to be broken.” Did you make any resolutions last month, as the new year began? If so, how have you done with those? Some people resolve to lose some weight, or to be more kind to a difficult person, or to be more faithful in Bible reading. But it’s hard to keep resolutions. Most of us don’t.

Today’s reading tells us that Jesus “resolutely set out for Jerusalem.” For him, it was more than an improvement program; Jesus was fully aware that suffering and death on a cross awaited him. He knew he had to die in our place to pay for our sins. And he was determined to accomplish his mission. Later we read, “Jesus went . . . teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem” (Luke 13:22). He was resolute about doing his

Father’s will, even if it meant rejection and death.

Jesus also faced rejection along the way. Because he was headed to Jerusalem, he wasn’t welcomed in a Samaritan village. What a tragic rejection based on national identity! The disciples reacted as we might have done, but Jesus rebuked their desire for revenge. He came to redeem, not to destroy. Later he said, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). So he continued on to Jerusalem, to fulfill his purpose for our sake.

Jesus, thank you for your willingness to go to Jerusalem, to pay the price to save us. Help us to follow wherever you lead us, no matter what the cost. In the Spirit’s power we pray. Amen.

## RESOLUTE FOLLOWERS

*"No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*  
—Luke 9:62

Leaders know that it's easier to begin a ministry than to sustain one over a long period of time. The initial enthusiasm launches people with a great deal of excitement, but determination is needed to maintain and finish a project.

On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus met a man who said spontaneously, "I will follow you wherever you go." But the man did not know where Jesus was headed and what would be involved. Speaking of himself as "the Son of Man," Jesus made clear that following him would bring hardships that most people would want no part of.

Then Jesus said to another man, "Follow me." But the man scrambled for excuses, saying he first had to bury his father. In that day, that meant looking after his ailing father (and other family members) at least until the father

died. If the father had already died, the man would already be in mourning and would not have been able to join the curious crowd around Jesus that day.

Then, in his response to another man, Jesus indicated that there can be no turning back in service to him.

Jesus taught that following him calls for total commitment. He's our example. Knowing what lay ahead, he set out and stayed faithful to the end. Being fit for service involves more than good intentions.

Dear Lord, we are grateful that you call us to follow you. Help us to realize what's involved and to be determined to finish, faithful to the end, no matter what's involved. In your name, Amen.

## DISTRACTED FOLLOWERS

*Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She . . . asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?"*

—Luke 10:40

Sunday, the day of worship for Christians, is a good day to be reminded of our need for priorities. Wherever possible, followers of Jesus will gather to focus on the God who has revealed himself in his Son, Jesus Christ. It's a need we have in a world of distractions, and we're wise to gather together to praise God and hear his Word.

Our passage today tells about Mary and Martha. Imagine the scene. Jesus is in the main gathering room, teaching the truths of the kingdom, explaining how God calls everyone to live. The disciples interject with their questions, and Mary is taking it all in. In the meantime, hostess Martha has been preparing a meal of tasty meat, bread, and vegetables—all by herself. She's frazzled. She's about to explode!

Lamenting her lonely task, Martha complains to Jesus,

"Don't you care . . . ?" Jesus surprises us with his answer. He recognizes Martha's concerns and her being upset, but, instead of agreeing with her, he commends Mary's choice of listening to the words of her Lord. Mary has chosen the better thing to do, and Jesus promises it will serve her well.

We need to choose, each week, what is the better thing for us to do. Distractions abound, but followers of Jesus who get distracted from worshiping with God's people miss an essential activity.

Dear Lord, help us to prioritize our time, making sure we gather with your people for worship and to hear you speak. Amen.

## PERSISTENT PRAYERS

*"Yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need."*  
—Luke 11:8

Christians talk and write too much about prayer. It would be better if, like the disciples, we'd watch and learn as others pray. Today's Bible reading shows that Jesus had no problem having his disciples watch him pray. It must have been the way that Jesus prayed that made one disciple urge him to teach them to pray.

Jesus responded by teaching them to pray what is now known as "the Lord's Prayer." (See also Matthew 6:9-13.) But we can be assured that Jesus' praying was not limited to the brief petitions here. Prayer is an integral part of our relationship with God. Jesus made that clear by adding the illustration of a dialogue between friends. In light of this, we should understand that praying to our Father as boldly as we would approach a friend probably surprised the disciples as well as many other followers.

A friend's boldness is based on the depth of the friendship, and we can trust our heavenly Father to be closer than a friend. Similarly, if we have a need and approach our earthly fathers, we know they'll provide as they are able. So too our heavenly Father will give us what we need—and often, much more that is good for us. Mainly, though, it's our needs that God will provide, not our wants—and we can trust that. So we may be bold and persistent as we talk with our Father in heaven. Jesus says so!

Father, thank you for Jesus' example and teaching. Help us to grow closer to you, knowing you are our Father and you care for all our needs and concerns. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## GREATER THAN JONAH

*"They repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now something greater than Jonah is here."*  
—Luke 11:32

People love to see something amazing. Miraculous signs by Jesus, such as healing the sick and driving out demons, amazed everyone (Luke 11:14). Crowds come when impressive things happen. But the crowds listening to Jesus were in for a surprise. He wasn't just going to do miracles so that people could be amazed.

In Jesus' time, miraculous signs were understood as proof that someone was a true prophet. And Jesus used them to show people that the kingdom of heaven was present among them, in him (John 10:37-38). But he wasn't about to use miracles for people's entertainment, or just because they demanded proof that he was their promised deliverer (Messiah). The purpose of the miracles was to help people believe in him. That's what they really

needed: to believe in him as the Savior. But if they weren't ready to believe, no additional miracles would help. In effect, Jesus said they could wait till they were given "the sign of Jonah." This referred to Jonah's being "buried" for three days in the belly of a fish. So too, Jesus would be buried in the belly of the earth, after dying on a cross (see Matthew 12:39-40). Then he would rise to life again and walk out of his tomb, the risen Savior!

Jesus rightly became frustrated with people's expectations and lack of belief. How have we responded to Jesus today? Do we believe in him and serve him faithfully?

Dear Jesus, give us the power to live in a way pleasing to you as we learn from you. Amen.

## KINGDOM PRIORITIES

*“Your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.” —Luke 12:30-31*

Jesus’ words in our reading today are probably among his most assuring as well as his most challenging. After a warning about selfishness, Jesus told his disciples not to worry about food and clothing. But we know we can’t just sit back and watch food and clothing drop like manna from heaven. Even birds don’t have food delivered to them. They work hard to gather their food.

Jesus also reminds us that by worrying we will not add “a single hour” to our lives. He’s teaching about trust and faith. We need to make sure that serving God’s mission is our priority. In doing so, we need to trust that God will provide as we work, and we need to have a faith that expresses itself in concern for his kingdom’s causes.

When we accept Christ’s invitation to follow him, we commit

ourselves to making his kingdom the priority in our lives.

God knows our needs, and he will provide. Knowing that, we need to make sure that our primary concern is to glorify him and love others as ourselves—and certainly not to pursue our selfish wants.

Our heart commitment always reveals itself in the priorities we pick—daily. Doing so, we’ll grow in grace and show others the way of the kingdom.

Lord, help us to see people’s needs and help in whatever ways we can, in line with your will. Give us a vision of your kingdom and its priorities on helping people to truly live—in you. In your name, Amen.

## JESUS FACING HIS “BAPTISM”

*“I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed!”*  
—Luke 12:50

As we journey with Jesus to Jerusalem, there are lessons to learn and warnings to heed. After giving some strong words about watchfulness and readiness, Jesus shared his feelings about what was facing him. There was great suffering ahead!

Jesus used the imagery of fire to portray judgment. It was common to think of using fire for refining precious metals, for cleansing in the process of removing impurities, or removing the good from the bad. In the picture Jesus was using here, it meant separating the wicked from the righteous. But first he had “a baptism to undergo”—and that was a picture of dying and then rising to new life (often symbolized by going under water and coming up out of it).

This baptism Jesus spoke of would include the suffering of rejection and humiliation, the

agony of hanging on a cross, and finally death. Naturally, this caused him distress. But he faced it resolutely until on the cross he could say, “It is finished” (John 19:30).

Now we need to accept and believe in his accomplished salvation, realizing that doing so may cause division in our families, among friends, at work, and in our communities. Accepting Jesus’ gift by faith will lead to experiencing our own “baptism” as we face an unfriendly world. But he has promised to be with us! (See Matthew 28:20.)

Lord Jesus, thank you for your willingness to endure a baptism beyond words. We thank you for providing our salvation. Help us to be faithful. In your name, Amen.

## THE SAVIOR'S SORROW

*"Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing."*

—Luke 13:34

Surprise, surprise! Some Pharisees came to Jesus to warn him. They didn't want any trouble in their area. Trouble in their territory would affect their status, their prized positions. So they urged him to "go somewhere else."

But Jesus wasn't about to be rushed, or to bend to the Pharisees' wishes. He was journeying toward Jerusalem. He had to go there. He knew that death awaited him there, and he had ministry work to do along the way. His mission included driving out demons and healing people as he headed resolutely toward Jerusalem.

Knowing he'd be killed there as other prophets had been, Jesus spoke of his love for his people. He used the image of a hen who gathers her chicks under her wings. It's a perfect picture of protection. I recall

seeing hens do that on a farm whenever a dog would come too close to the chicken coop.

Jesus' lament shows his sorrow for sinners—Jerusalem's children. Their unwillingness to accept him would lead to judgment and desolation. Then, using words from Psalm 118, he pointed to the day when the enemy will be defeated. There will be rejoicing for all who have accepted Christ's offer of protection, the offer of salvation in his name.

Today is the day to repent. Unlike the Pharisees, do not tell Jesus to go away!

Jesus, thank you for your willingness and commitment to go to Jerusalem to die. Thank you for your compassion. Amen.

## COUNTING THE COST

*“Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. . . . Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”*

—Luke 14:27, 35

Traveling with Jesus is not the same as following Jesus! Large crowds gathered around him and even traveled with him, but he called for them to be more involved. If people were going to be Jesus’ followers, they needed to know what they were doing! They needed to listen carefully and to count the cost of commitment. Jesus underscored this by saying, in effect, “Listen up! What I’m saying is important!”

Being a follower of Jesus Christ calls for sober self-denial as well as a willingness to always put Jesus first. Using strong exaggeration, Jesus demands our loyalty to him over our concerns for self or family or anything else. Cross-carrying is not for the feeble. It requires constant dedication and committed obedience. Christ followers are called to finish what they have started.

Half-finished towers are a sign of not planning ahead and counting the cost. They even result in ridicule.

Like a committed soldier able to finish the fight, Christ’s followers must be willing to give it their all. Jesus says we must “give up everything.”

The person who wants to follow Jesus must know that to be useful and effective for the kingdom of God means counting the cost and remaining committed to the end!

Dear Jesus, we hear your challenge and realize that we can serve only in the strength you provide. Empower us to be committed to your kingdom. Amen.

## A FAITHFUL FATHER

*"His father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."*

—Luke 15:20

As a father of sons, I confess to favoring this powerful parable. It brings the gospel home! Jesus told this story so that we could learn more about his Father—the God of love, patience, and forgiveness. He's also the God who "so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son" (John 3:16). He's the heavenly Father filled with compassion for his lost children.

It's a loving father who'll provide an inheritance that is normally given only upon death. It's a patient father who watches for a wayward child to return home. It's a forgiving father who restores a son's dignity with a robe, ring, and sandals—signs of sonship, of belonging. It's a joy-filled father who celebrates with feasting and dancing.

God's love for us is demonstrated further as we see the father reaching out patiently to an

angry older brother. He wants him to join the family party. After all, "this brother of yours was dead and is alive again." There's reason to celebrate—all the children are home!

Whether we've been lost or always at home, our heavenly Father delights in calling us his children. Our God is a faithful Father to his Son, Jesus, and to all the brothers and sisters invited to join the grand, eternal celebration of his love and forgiveness. Do you hear his call?

Heavenly Father, thank you for your Son, who has prepared the way home for us. Give us a spirit of thanks as we share your invitation with others. In Jesus, Amen.

## GREATNESS IN THE KINGDOM

*“Whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”*  
—Matthew 18:4

It should not surprise us that the disciples approached Jesus with a question about greatness. People in many cultures around the globe have the same obsession today.

To answer their question, Jesus called a little child to stand in their midst. And he underscored his point with “Truly I tell you . . .” (a “Listen up!” expression). Then he explained that they needed to change and become like children—not childish, of course, but recognizing that they need God’s care and provision constantly. To be childlike is to be trusting, truthful, and teachable. And unless they became that way, they wouldn’t even be part of God’s kingdom. Kingdom life is about service and humility. No one has a reason to think they are greater than another.

Childlike, kingdom members accept God’s love, and, knowing

the joy of being loved, concentrate on being loving. Trusting in God’s love, they also know God is working all things for good (Romans 8:28).

Like a child, a truthful person needs no pretentiousness. It’s all a matter of being humble and honest, admitting that we can be weak and sinful and need God’s help always.

Finally, humility means being teachable. Children are curious; they want to learn. Similarly, there is no end of learning about faithful discipleship.

Dear, patient Jesus: thank you for teaching us about following you as members of your kingdom. Help us to be trusting, truthful, and teachable. Amen!

## NOT LISTENING AGAIN?

*He took the Twelve aside and said . . . "On the third day [the Son of Man] will be raised to life!"*  
—Matthew 20:17-19

On the journey to Jerusalem Jesus predicts that his death will take place there. It will include betrayal and condemnation by the religious leaders of his people. Those who should be welcoming him as the promised Messiah will instead sentence him to suffering and death, handing him over to mocking, flogging, and crucifixion by the Romans.

Then Jesus also predicted that he would rise again! But it seems that after hearing the predictions about Jesus' suffering and death, the disciples somehow tuned out. It's as if they missed hearing the promise that "on the third day" he would be "raised to life!" When the time came and Jesus died on a cross, the disciples were a despondent group of followers wondering what had happened. They scattered in fear, leaving the burial and preparations to others. (See

Matthew 26:56; 27:45-28:10.) There was no expectation of Jesus' coming to life again!

Are we any different? We hear dire economic warnings or a doctor's frightening diagnosis, and we forget Jesus' words: "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). We experience ridicule or rejection and forget that God's Word warns that we may be called to share in Christ's sufferings (John 15:18-20; Romans 8:17). Facing them, let's remember Jesus was raised to life. We serve a risen Savior!

Lord Jesus, thank you for the assurance that you are with us, whatever we face. Give us peace of mind that you are in control of your world. We pray, confident of your care. Amen.

## THE WHY OF HIS COMING

*“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* —Matthew 20:28

With their mother’s help, James and John managed to rile their fellow disciples with a curious request. They wanted to have the most honored positions when Jesus set up his kingdom. What a misunderstanding of the kingdom of God!

Jesus used this selfish request to teach about his suffering and his purpose for coming. “You don’t know what you are asking,” he said. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” Clueless, they answered, “We can.” Considering the suffering that “cup” actually involved, we cringe at their arrogant response. How dare they?

It’s no surprise that the other ten disciples were indignant with James and John. What an attitude of self-promotion instead of serving!

Jesus quickly called them all together and gave a talk on serving instead of superiority, suffering instead of status. Can you imagine Jesus pointing a finger at each of them as he taught?

Only Jesus could drink the cup of suffering that was called for with his coming. And yet, even Jesus prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me” (Matthew 26:39). But he submitted to the Father’s will and drank it—for our sake.

What a servant! What a Savior!

Lord Jesus, thank you for showing us the way of serving, even when it includes suffering. Grant us the determination to be servants in your kingdom, not status seekers. To your glory, Amen.

## WHERE ARE THE OTHER NINE?

*Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?"*  
—Luke 17:17

Suffering from leprosy, the ten men cried for mercy from a distance. Although Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, he noticed these people in need. Asking no questions, he said simply, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." According to custom, the priests would determine if they were healed.

The ten men obeyed, and along the way they noticed they were healed. It was obvious. Can you imagine their excitement? What would have been lifelong banishment was over! They were cleansed, and now they could be part of the community again. They could go home!

Our lesson comes from the example of "the foreigner." He saw his healing and hurried back, praising God with excitement, not caring what anyone thought. He was loud. He was ecstatic. After all, he

was healed! Throwing himself at Jesus' feet, the Samaritan did what we expected from all ten who had been healed. He took the time to thank his healer.

Yet where were the other nine? Jesus' question prompts us all to think about our thankfulness. The thankful Samaritan was healed physically and spiritually, as Jesus pointed out: "Your faith has made you well." Healed from the deadly disease of sin, we need to ask, "How do I express thanks for my healing?"

Well, how do you?

Lord Jesus, healer of our disease of sin and other illnesses, how can we thank you enough for the gifts of your life and love? Receive our gratitude for your amazing salvation. Amen!

## LOOKING AT OURSELVES

*"The tax collector . . . would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'"*

—Luke 18:13

The people to whom Jesus told this story were very familiar with Pharisees and tax collectors. Here Jesus teaches that we do not get right with God on our own merits. There's no room for confidence based on what we have done, no looking down on anyone. It's always by grace—based on God's mercy.

The Pharisee, at prayer, proclaimed his good deeds and then pointed his finger, saying, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people . . . —or even like this tax collector." He was full of himself! By his way of thinking, he didn't even need God's mercy.

Then Jesus described the vastly different prayer of a person who saw that he needed mercy. Tax collectors were seen as traitors, leeches on society, people to be avoided. And this was not someone claiming any self-

earned righteousness! Without pretensions and with an aching heart, the man pleaded for God's mercy.

Pride sees no room for mercy, no need for forgiveness. Grace has no place when we're full of ourselves. Jesus declared the tax collector justified.

Jesus' parables make us look at ourselves. With whom do we identify—the Pharisee or the tax collector?

What does Jesus hear when we pray?

Lord Jesus, thank you for making us look at ourselves. Help us also to see how we pretend to be better than some of our neighbors. We need your grace. Amen.

## LETTING IT ALL GO

*Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." —Mark 10:27*

It's good to be reminded that we can't earn our way into heaven. An eager rich man came to Jesus and asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" He wanted to *do* something! Jesus reminded him of God's commandments, and the man figured he had that covered. "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said.

But then Jesus showed that keeping the law is impossible for us. This man, for example, had missed the heart of the law—that is, to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:30-31). Though he may have focused on the do's and don'ts of the law, the man had missed the heart of it—and had broken the whole thing.

Jesus could see what was lacking in the man's life, so he prescribed the cure. The man's

problem was his attachment to wealth, and that was preventing him from living totally for God.

As the man heard Jesus tell him to do what he just couldn't do, his face paled and drained of life. What a picture of sadness. If he didn't let go, his wealth would sink him. For this man, his riches were like cement shoes in deep water—deadly!

Being possessed by our possessions—no matter how much we have—makes us unable to accept God's gracious love. Salvation is possible—but only with God. And we can't earn it; it's a gift of grace!

Lord, help us to realize that full life is possible only by your grace, and that we can be faithful only if we give up everything for you. Amen.

## SEEKING AND SAVING

*"Today salvation has come to this house . . . For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*  
—Luke 19:9-10

On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus passed through Jericho. There a tax collector, who had often cheated his own people out of tax money for the oppressive Roman Empire, climbed a tree to see Jesus. God's Spirit must have been working mightily in Zacchaeus's heart to make him run and risk embarrassment by scrambling up a tree.

Noticing him, Jesus summoned Zacchaeus. And the short swindler came at once. Then Jesus announced that he would visit with this man at his home, a gesture of being on friendly terms. The people in the crowd muttered. Why would Jesus want to be the guest of such a despicable sinner?

Without knowing all that was said, we hear Zacchaeus respond to Jesus by acknowledging him as Lord, giving away half of his possessions, and

making restitution to anyone he had cheated. Zacchaeus's life was changed! Salvation had come to his house!

Lost sinners become sons and daughters of the King. Cheaters and prostitutes, crooked bankers and unfaithful spouses—Jesus came to find them all. He has to be with them. That's why he came.

When Jesus is welcomed and received, changes take place. Cheating stops, lying ends, relationships are restored, and the poor are cared for. Jesus came to save those who are lost.

Has Jesus come to stay in your heart? Is he a welcome guest at your house?

Lord, thank you for making room in your kingdom for sinners—even me! In your name, Amen.

## A FOCUSED LORD JESUS

*"If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' say, 'The Lord needs it.'"*  
—Luke 19:31

Jesus has almost completed his journey to Jerusalem. He has focused on his mission and is still resolute as he prepares to enter the city (see Luke 9:51). In today's Bible reading we find Jesus giving unusual instructions to arrange for his ride into Jerusalem.

Notice that this is no weak Jesus who becomes a victim of circumstances. He has a mission, and he's in charge. His command is simple: "Go . . . you will find a colt . . . Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' say, 'The Lord needs it.'"

And that is enough. Jesus identifies himself as Lord, able to give commands and expect them to be obeyed. As Lord, he is fully aware of fulfilling a prophecy about riding a colt and proclaiming peace when he enters Jerusalem as King (see

Zechariah 9:9-10). If we pay attention, we can see a Jesus who knows he's Israel's Lord, and as their Lord he can give orders. He brings the message of God's love and salvation for all who believe in him, but he's no pushover. He's on a mission, and he will complete it. What he's about to do, no one but the Son of God himself can do.

Still today, Jesus is not a Savior whom we may mold to our liking. He is "Lord," expecting our acknowledgement and full obedience. Do you honor and obey that Jesus?

Lord Jesus! We have learned the truth about you. You accomplished your mission, and you call us to accomplish ours. O Lord, empower us by your Spirit today! Amen.

## CHRIST'S AUTHORITY

*"By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?"*  
—Matthew 21:23

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem stirred the whole city and roused the people to parade and celebrate, even if they didn't understand the full purpose of his mission. Then he surprised more than a few when he overturned tables and drove traders and money changers out of the temple for setting up shop where people were supposed to have a place for prayer. With the chief priests and the elders, we might also have asked by what authority Jesus was doing these things.

Realizing they were not dealing with just another radical rabbi, Jesus' questioners sensed something bigger happening. They had done the same when John the Baptist gained a following (see John 1:19-27). Responding with a question, Jesus forced them to acknowledge the authority of John's baptism. After a telling discussion, the

leaders showed their own fear of the people and answered, "We don't know." What an admission! Who had the upper hand now? Then Jesus showed his authority by simply stating, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things." And yet it was clear the authority was from God.

As we celebrate Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter in the weeks ahead, it's vital to remember that Jesus proved his authority as the Son of God, sent from heaven. He's the one we need to believe and follow!

Lord Jesus, inspire us to honor your authority always. Give us the courage to proclaim your authority and your victory over sin and death—to God's glory. Amen.

## THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER

*They counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.*

—Matthew 26:15-16

Have you ever been betrayed by someone you trusted, perhaps even a friend? Using words like *trust*, *betray*, and *friend* brings out emotions, especially if you must answer yes to this question.

Jesus experienced that kind of pain. John 13:21 describes it: “Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, ‘Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.’” Jesus knew Judas’s heart of deception. He knew Judas would betray him as soon as he had the opportunity.

Was Judas motivated by money? We learn in another passage that he was “keeper of the money bag” for Jesus and the disciples, and that “he used to help himself to what was put into it” (John 12:6). When Judas asked the religious leaders, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?”

was it silver he had in mind or something bigger? They counted out thirty pieces of silver, and Judas began watching for an opportunity.

As a disciple, Judas had heard Jesus teach about trust and friendship. They’d traveled together for three years as Master and disciple. Judas had watched Jesus heal people and calm a stormy sea. What happened?

Whatever motivated him, Judas betrayed his Master. But Jesus was faithful, motivated by love for us and his Father. He won’t betray us; he’s a trustworthy friend. Let’s trust him as well.

Lord Jesus, help us to trust and follow you, no matter what the cost, with you as our example. In your name, Amen.

**BELIEVE IN GOD AND IN ME**

*"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*  
—John 14:6

Jesus was dealing with deeply troubled disciples. Knowing he would soon be arrested and condemned to die, he told them he would be with them "only a little longer." And he added, "Where I am going, you cannot come." For these devoted disciples, that was troubling!

Jesus followed this with a new command to "love one another." Still, Peter wanted to know more and claimed he would lay down his life for Jesus. Then Jesus predicted that Peter would actually disown him.

Sensing their troubled hearts, Jesus comforted them. He was leaving in order to prepare places for them—rooms in his Father's house. He said, "You know the way." But Thomas objected, saying, "Lord, we don't know where you're going, so how can we know the way?"

Jesus responded with an amazing "I am" statement, underscoring exactly who he was, in a way like God did for Moses many years earlier (Exodus 3:14). Let there be no mistake: Jesus is Lord, one with the Father. And he's the only way to the Father and to full, eternal life (see John 10:10).

Jesus came to reveal God the Father's love (John 3:16). And we find comfort in his words: "Believe in God; believe also in me." He's our only way to our heavenly Father. That's why we read these comforting words at bedsides and gravesides. Hold on to them!

Lord Jesus, thank you for responding to your troubled disciples with these words of comfort about our future home with you. Help us to share this good news with others. Amen.

**“I AM HE”**

*“I am he,” Jesus said. . . . “Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”*  
—John 18:5, 11

As we’ve traveled with Jesus to Jerusalem, we’ve seen that he is not a pawn on a chessboard moved about by an unseen force. He is the Son of God on a mission! And this mission will bring him to intense suffering and death on a cross and then to victory over death—all for our sake!

Today’s reading follows an intense time of teaching and prayer on Jesus’ final evening with his disciples. Just a little while earlier, he prayed fervently for himself, his disciples, and his future followers (John 17). What follows is an encounter with Judas, his betrayer, and some officials and soldiers sent by the ruling religious leaders.

Reminding us of who’s in charge, John writes that “Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him,” approached the soldiers and asked, “Who is it you want?”

When they said they were looking for Jesus, he stated boldly, “I am he!” And as the King spoke, they all fell to the ground!

After another round of questioning Jesus said with authority, “I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go.”

Jesus had a cup of suffering and death to drink, and nothing would prevent him from taking it, for the sake of all whom he would save. He submitted to his Father’s will (Luke 22:42). Knowing our Father’s will, we must also submit and obey.

Dear Jesus, again we are amazed at your willingness to suffer and die for our sake. Empower us to do your will, wherever and whenever we can. In your name, Amen.

## THE LORD'S LOOK

*Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered . . . .*

—Luke 22:60-61

Following Peter into the courtyard, it's more important to focus on Jesus' love than on Peter's failure. Failure feels so final, and a fall like Peter's can seem fatal. But falling down doesn't mean staying down.

At the high priest's house, Peter drew close to the fire in the courtyard and sat among the people there. Accusations and denials followed. Wanting to be close to Jesus, Peter had placed himself in a vulnerable position. After the third denial, as Jesus had foretold, a rooster crowed. Peter had fallen hard!

But let's focus on the Lord's look. It's deliberate: "the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter." But did his eyes condemn Peter? I don't think so. Jesus knew Peter's daring and impetuous nature, just as he knows us. We want to do right, but we mess up. We often deny

Jesus also by making promises and then breaking them without thinking. Jesus' eyes on Peter would have shown hurt, but also love and compassion.

The Lord's look was the look of God's redeeming, restoring love. Peter had fallen, but Jesus also looked and found him. He's still doing the same with us.

At another fireside later, Jesus met with Peter again and asked three times, "Do you love me?" (John 21:4-17). Then he restored Peter to a life of service. He still does that with us too!

Lord Jesus, thank you for your look of love for Peter and for restoring him later. Help us to know the extent of your love today. In your name, Amen.

## THE WHOLE WORLD?

*The Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!" —John 12:19*

Walking through Moscow's Red Square, I recalled the extravagant display of might seen on television many years earlier when the Soviet Union displayed its weapons there. Tanks and missiles paraded for all the world to see. That was quite a difference from Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a donkey!

Crowds waved palm branches and cried, "Hosanna!"—a shout calling for salvation. Jesus' ride into Jerusalem that day was not a display of military power. An old prophecy predicted that Jerusalem's righteous king would come riding "on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9). But the peace he proclaimed was not merely political; it was about making it possible for us to have peace with God.

Crowds love parades, and if a performer of miracles is leading the parade, they'll be there. But,

did the Pharisees get it right when they said the "the whole world" was following Jesus? Not really. Does the whole world today follow eagerly after Jesus, who died on a cross?

King Jesus endured this parade because it fulfilled God's Word, but he knew the suffering he would soon face. He came to die in our place, the only way to bring the peace he promised.

There's a whole world needing the Savior, who was rejected by the whole world but approved by God. Is he your Savior?

Lord Jesus, we rejoice with all who acknowledge you as Savior and Lord. May our lives testify to the truth that you have made salvation possible for us. In your name we pray. Amen.

**IT'S A HOUSE OF PRAYER, BUT . . .**

*"Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"*

—Mark 11:17

Once again, we learn from Jesus—not only from what he said, but also from what he did. God's temple was a symbol of God's presence among his people, and the religious leaders had allowed the courts of the Gentiles to be filled with vendors and money changers. They were providing helpful services by selling animals for use in the temple sacrifices and by providing currency exchanges for travelers from all parts of the empire. But they were robbing people of a place to pray and offer worship to God with praise and offerings. And all this was in the part of the temple where God welcomed people from all nations.

So Jesus drove the buyers and sellers and money changers out of there. Just imagine the scene! Can you see Jesus overturning tables, hear the changers and

dove sellers yelling, their coins scattering and doves fluttering with feathers flying?

Jesus wasn't smiling as he banned this merchandise traffic. He was rightly angered by the exploitation of his Father's house. And he was determined to make this a house of prayer for all nations, as God had intended it to be.

The church today should be a place of prayer and worship for God's people from all nations as well. Is yours?

Father God, thank you for Jesus' teaching by his words and actions, showing us what is most important. May our churches today honor you in everything they do, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## GIVING GOD HIS DUE

*Jesus said to them, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."*  
—Mark 12:17

Jesus was teaching in the temple courts. He was popular with the people, but the religious leaders were out to arrest and kill him. Some were sent to "catch him in his words," hoping to find some fault they could use against him. They approached him with flattering words about integrity and his truthful teaching.

Then they posed a question that they hoped would get him into trouble with the Romans: "Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?" But Jesus wasn't about to be trapped. He knew their hypocrisy.

He asked to see one of their coins, and he used it to teach about meeting our obligations to authorities (see also Romans 13)—and recognizing that "what is God's" is a whole lot more. All that there is, is the Lord's—"the earth . . . and everything in it, the world, and

all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1). That includes you and me and everyone else today, as well as in the past. We're all God's!

Thus we are all called to give of who we are and what we have to God. It's stated this way in an ancient confession: "I belong—body and soul—to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1). And as God's Word puts it, "Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God" (Romans 12:1). Giving God his due still means honest giving and tax-paying.

Father, thank you for being our creator and provider. Help us to honor you in all that we are and have, so that we may honor you in all we do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## A FOLLOWER'S GRATITUDE

*"She has done a beautiful thing to me. . . . She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial." —Mark 14:6-8*

With his arrest, trial, and crucifixion drawing near, Jesus reclined at a meal, aware of those seeking to kill him. In this episode a woman anointed Jesus with expensive perfume as an expression of gratitude to him. "Some of those present" were quick to react. Without waiting for her to leave, "they rebuked her harshly." John specifically identified Judas raising this complaint, hiding his hypocrisy behind a concern for the poor (John 12:4-5).

Notice Jesus' confrontation. "Leave her alone," he said. He knew God's plan. The cross was just ahead. He knew he would soon face death and probably a criminal's burial, which would mean no anointing of the body. Therefore, her act was "a beautiful thing."

Jesus wasn't dismissing the need to care for the poor, but

preparation for his burial was also appropriate.

Notice that Mark concludes the account with Judas's arranging to betray Jesus. In contrast, the woman's lavish sacrifice serves as an example of expressing gratitude and devotion to him. Here we see the difference of attitude in someone saved by grace and in someone on a power trip, seeking selfish success!

What motivates us? When we have new life in Christ, how do we express our gratitude?

Dear Jesus, thank you for rebuking those who were more concerned about themselves than showing you gratitude. Empower us to express our gratitude by serving others in your name. Amen.

## A BELOVED'S BETRAYAL

*He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" —Luke 22:47-48*

Jesus had been agonizing in prayer and struggling with having to face so much suffering in his sacrifice for our sake (see Luke 22:39-46). He was with his disciples in a garden on the Mount of Olives when Judas came, leading a small crowd of religious officials and soldiers to arrest him and put him on trial.

Though Jesus' victory over sin and death were certain, battles were still being waged. We see this in Judas's kiss of betrayal as if it were a friend's kiss of greeting. No wonder Jesus asked Judas, ". . . with a kiss?"

In today's reading, the evil seen in Judas's betrayal contrasts with Christ's healing touch. We learn that the kingdom does not come by the sword, but with deeds of love and mercy. Even in this chaotic scene, Jesus takes the time to show kindness, healing the servant's severed ear.

Jesus motivates us to be like him. His gracious touch moves us to offer a gracious touch, a word of encouragement, or a visit to a lonely soul. His love motivates us to forgive.

The contrasts remain: Jesus went from there to the courts of the Jewish leaders and the Roman governor and eventually to the cross. But he walked out of the grave. Darkness did not defeat him. Love won out, as it does whenever we do right. Darkness does not reign. The victory of life is secure in Christ, now and always!

Jesus, thank you for your love, mercy, and kindness. Help us to be more like you. In your name, Amen.

## A CONFIDENT CHRIST DIES

*Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.*

—Luke 23:46

In his words from the cross, Jesus demonstrated that he knew how to live, because he knew how to die. We hear it in the first word he uttered in this saying: "Father . . ." Then, in effect, the faithful Son confidently declared, "I'm coming home!"

In those days, the words Jesus used were often taught to children as a bedtime prayer: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (see Psalm 31:5). They signify entrusting all of one's being to God for safe-keeping. What a comfort it is to be able to entrust our whole lives and all our joys and concerns to God!

And Jesus said these words not secretly or silently but with a loud voice. He was saying, in effect, "Father, I'm coming home. My mission is complete. I love you. I trust you. As always, I commit my spirit to you."

Doing the same, we can live and die in the confidence of knowing we will go home to our Father when he calls. We can say confidently, in words adapted from an old confession, "My 'only comfort in life and in death' is 'that I belong . . . to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ'" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1).

Jesus ended his time on earth with confidence in the Father. Can you do that too?

Thank you, Jesus, for showing your confidence in the God and Father of us all. May we live in the assurance of his love always. In your name, Amen.

## FEARFUL FOLLOWERS

*Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders.*  
—John 19:38

Joseph and Nicodemus made quite a pair: Joseph was a member of the temple leadership, but was afraid to reveal his trust in Jesus. Nicodemus, fearful of fellow Pharisees, had visited Jesus secretly to ask questions. But together they risked being found out by asking for Jesus' crucified body.

Fearing for their lives, Jesus' other disciples had scurried off. What a gloomy Sabbath the next day must have been for them! It had all happened so fast, and now their leader, whom they'd thought would deliver them, was dead.

Joseph and Nicodemus acted quickly to honor Jesus' dead body "in accordance with Jewish burial customs." Using a large quantity of aloes and myrrh, they wrapped the body properly and placed it in Joseph's unused tomb. Their

burial ministry showed devoted commitment.

We're not told how these two men later served Jesus. But we can be glad they graciously did what they could, even though they'd previously been afraid to reveal their loyalty to him.

It's important for us to learn that we don't need to be afraid to let others see our love for Jesus. In fact, we're called to do so. The apostle John wrote, years later, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18). Do you know that perfect love?

Father God, as we wait today to celebrate Christ's resurrection, empower us to be bold in our witness. May we not be afraid to speak out for you. Amen.

## BLESSED BELIEVERS

*Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

—John 20:29

Being a disciple is more than an intellectual experience! It's more than knowing a lot of biblical teachings. It's a lifestyle—a way of living—involving emotions. That certainly was the case on that first Easter Sunday!

Imagine it: you've watched your leader's awful crucifixion and heard him cry, "It is finished" (John 19:30). You were afraid, like others, and you abandoned him. But now Mary Magdalene is shouting, "I have seen the Lord!" What emotions do you think you would have?

Then, later that day, the disciples say that Jesus visited with them. But you weren't there, so you missed it. Now it's a week later, and you're with the other disciples. Suddenly, Jesus is standing there too and saying, "Peace be with you!" Then he turns to you—Thomas! And he says, "Put your finger here . . .

Reach out your hand . . ." He's open to being touched, and even adds, "Stop doubting and believe." What an incredible experience!

Thomas declares his belief: "My Lord and my God!" And Jesus responds with an affirmation, and with an added blessing for believers who have not seen him but do believe.

Can you also confess that the risen Jesus is your Lord and God? What a blessing it is to be able to share that today!

Lord Jesus, today we celebrate your being alive and in the world today. We are so grateful for your finished work of salvation. Help us to share it freely. Alleluia! Amen!

# this month

## ONE ANOTHER

**Steven and Deb Koster**

Mark Twain said, “Most people are bothered by those passages of Scripture they do not understand, but the passages that bother me are those I do understand.” In other words, aiming to live by even the most basic commands in the Bible can be overwhelming.

In marriage preparation classes, we encourage couples to start with the stuff that is clear: love one another, forgive one another, care for one another, encourage one another, bear one another’s burdens. We encourage people to look at the ways God has called us to interact with all of the “one anothers” in our lives.

It is very clear that God cares deeply about our relationships.

Once we begin to understand our relationship with our Creator and Redeemer, the next step is to love our neighbor. Jesus tells us in Matthew 22:37-38 that the first command is to love the Lord with all our heart and soul and mind. And from that flows the second one: our love for God must overflow to our neighbors.

May you be encouraged this month to let Jesus’ love flow into all your relationships. He has the power to change hearts.

*Steven and Deb Koster have a passion for marriages, families, and spiritual growth in the home. Steven is the editor of Today and the director of ReFrame Media, the English-language outreach of Back to God Ministries International. Deb leads Family Fire, ReFrame’s family resource at FamilyFire.com and on Facebook. The Kosters have three children.*

## AVOIDING ADVANTAGE

*“Do not take advantage of each other, but fear your God.”*

—Leviticus 25:17

Buying a house or a car can be scary. The financial stakes are high, and we want to be sure the seller is not hiding something or shading the truth. In Leviticus 25, God is talking about business. Through Moses, God instructs his people on the buying and selling of the gifts he has given them. The key, says God, is to avoid taking advantage of one another and to fear God. How we treat one another matters to God and reflects our relationship with him. We can't love God without also considering what's best for others.

Still, it can be easy to take one another for granted. Kids think their mom is always available to run a forgotten lunch or gym bag to school. Spouses make assumptions about who should pay the bills or have dinner ready. We expect that others will always be there to meet

our needs, and we take them for granted.

Or we expect that people get what they deserve. If they won't try harder or don't know better, they deserve to pay a higher price or go without.

But God tells us to treat others well because of him. We may not think that others deserve our consideration or have earned our respect, but God's love for us compels us to see others through his eyes.

Who needs a new look from you today?

Lord, help us to see others through your eyes and to treat them respectfully because of you. Give us the grace to get past our selfishness and to honor you in our relationships. Amen.

## HELP TO STAND

*If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.*

—Ecclesiastes 4:10

Returning from a week-long cycling trip, Steven badly wrenched his ankle on our own front steps while unpacking the car. What a welcome home! In a moment he went from feeling athletic to hobbled. How quickly things change! Yet he was well cared for as he recovered. Family, friends, and neighbors all lent a hand to help.

God does not intend for us to live in isolation. He places us within families and communities and encourages us to help each other. If someone falls, a friend can help. In dark times, it's a comfort to know someone is caring and praying for us. A kind word or a friendly greeting can be the encouragement needed to get through a difficult day. A brief phone call, text, or email can be the blessing through which God speaks. A community that genuinely

cares about one another reflects the love of God.

Like the friends of a paralyzed man who carried him to be healed by Jesus (Mark 2:1-12), or the people in Philippi who helped the apostle Paul when he was in prison (Philippians 2:25; 4:10-20), we all are given the opportunity to lift up one another. How are you doing on carrying your corner? Do you bless those in your family and in your community? Do you allow others to help you and carry you when you need it?

Lord, help us to care for one another and demonstrate your love in our world today. Help us to allow others to help. Let us be a community that reflects your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## MEMBERS OF ONE BODY

*Having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.*

—Ephesians 4:25 (ESV)

Paul reminds the Christians in Ephesus that they are no longer who they were. They are new creatures, renewed in Christ!

They used to find it acceptable to be selfish and greedy, but now they are different. They used to find it acceptable to tell lies, but now they are different. They used to think of only themselves, but now they are members of one another.

When we become believers in Christ, he makes us into new people, and Paul calls us all to live into our new identity. We are different, and that should show in the way we live!

One of the differences is speaking the truth. We no longer deceive; we no longer put “spin” on the truth; we no longer blur the edges to our advantage at the expense of our neighbor. We speak the truth. We ask

for the truth. Truthfulness is a marker of what it looks like to be one of Christ’s renewed people.

And in Christ’s world, treating our neighbor truthfully only makes sense, since we are members of one another. Lying, stealing, and cheating a neighbor is not only no longer our nature; it damages the body of which we are a part. We belong to each other. We are not our own, but belong to Christ. May we live each day deeper into that reality!

Christ Jesus, we seek to be the new people you have renewed us to be. Help us to always speak the truth in love and live as your children. In your name we pray. Amen.

## COMMEND HIS WORKS

*One generation commends your works to another, they tell of your mighty acts.*  
—Psalm 145:4

The psalmist calls on each generation to commend God's works to the next. It's a precious gift when grandparents can be actively involved in the lives of their grandchildren. This is even more true when they share their legacy of faith with the next generations! Grandparents have a unique role and can be very influential in their grandchildren's lives.

We watched how Deb's grandma lived her life—being gentle with others, prayerful over all of us, generous in her support of church ministries, and steeped in God's Word. We listened to her many stories of God's care and provision for her and her family. It shaped us as young people.

Sometimes we are shy about sharing what God has done for us. We don't want to rock the boat with others or make our-

selves vulnerable to criticism. But our stories of God's faithfulness carry the power of the gospel. They show how God loved us even when we did not deserve it and how he has walked beside us through good times and hard times. We may not have a dramatic story like Paul on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9), but we can tell about the caring God who never lets go.

Don't miss opportunities to tell your stories. Talk about how God is at work in your life!

Lord, give us the words to share our stories of how you have been faithful in our lives. Help us to inspire the next generation to walk with you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## SPEAKING WITH PSALMS

*[Speak] to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord.*

—Ephesians 5:19

When our children were little, we used to distract them in the car by singing songs. If music soothes the savage beast, we figured it was worth trying with cranky toddlers! Singing together in the car brought unity to the vehicle that had been in chaos before the music started. We still love to play music in our home and to praise God as we go about the activities of the day.

There is a unity in joining our voices together to praise God. Though we may have experienced conflict with fellow church members, we can join together in worship and be united in bringing praise to God. At the foot of the cross, we speak with a shared voice. Joining in worship is a way for us to draw closer to God and each other.

What music is your heart making today? There are days when

the songs of our hearts are heavy and discouraged and we struggle to see how God is working in our lives. The book of Psalms has songs expressing all types of emotions—from anger and sorrow to joy and triumph. (See, for example, Psalms 3-9; 22-24; 98-104.)

Whatever music your heart is playing today, let the Lord hear it. He wants to hear songs from our hearts even when we want to hide them because they seem too painful. Share with each other the songs of your heart!

Lord, help us to join in song to you in all the times of our life, both good and bad. May we join with those around us and glorify your name. In Jesus, Amen.

## COMPASSION AND FORGIVENESS

*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.* —Ephesians 4:32

Jesus had compassion on people, often seeing them as sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36). He taught his followers to love their enemies and pray for those who persecuted them (Matthew 5:44). He even gave up his own life so that we, who had sinned against God and were his enemies, could be forgiven (Romans 5:8-11).

Likewise, God calls us to have compassion and to forgive. If we start from a place of compassion, where we have empathy for our brother or sister, we will see better how the world looks from where they are standing. If we can sense what it's like to have their struggles and their pain, that will guide us toward forgiveness.

Forgiveness does not mean pretending someone hasn't hurt us. Sometimes the hurts we experience are extreme and devas-

tating, and we can carry scars throughout life.

But if we hold on to anger, it will wear us out and lead us to hurt others. Forgiveness sets us free from anger and bitterness, allowing us to let go of our desire for vengeance. The relationship may never be restored, but we can begin to see those who hurt us as God sees them—broken people in need of grace.

Can you forgive others and trust that God will provide justice? Is there someone who needs your compassion and forgiveness?

Lord, teach us to forgive, as you have forgiven us. Help us to have compassion for one another and to let go of any anger we might have. Heal us all for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## IRON SHARPENS IRON

*As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.*

—Proverbs 27:17

Do you ever notice how people act differently after years of marriage? Constantly having to consider another person can make our wilder side grow a little gentler and give our compassion more depth.

We all have some rough edges that need smoothing and polishing. We all have a few things to learn about wise living.

The proverb quoted above talks about this process in terms of metal working, which is not the gentlest process. We cringe at the sound of metal scraping on metal. We are used to our rough edges and are not always eager to let them go. To lose our jagged edges, we must have a willing spirit that is open to being taught.

Are you willing to be shaped by your Christian community? Marriage is one place where we share deeply of ourselves. In a

good marriage our partner will lovingly challenge us to live out our beliefs. Likewise, we value friendships in which we are loved enough to be corrected. True friends will speak the truth in love and help us become the people God intended.

Often it can feel risky to challenge another person. We don't want to make waves or risk hurting a friendship, so we miss opportunities for growth and deeper relationship. Do we care enough about our relationships to take the risk of correcting with love? How are you growing in your relationships?

Lord, help us to have a teachable spirit so we can continue to grow in you. Give us courage to correct one another in the context of your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**SERVE HUMBLY IN LOVE**

*Serve one another humbly in love.*

—Galatians 5:13

Servitude is not a glamorous concept. Who in their right mind would sign up for a life of servitude? And yet that is what God has in mind for his people. God knows how service to others will bless us as well as the community around us.

Service is a great way to put aside our self-centeredness and notice how we are connected, even indebted, to others. When we start seeing the genuine needs of others, it deters our own sense of entitlement. None of us became the people we are alone, but by the sacrifice and investment of many others from our earliest years. And that doesn't take into account what Christ has done for us.

Serving others not only reveals the bonds between us; it reflects the love of God. When we notice service to us, and when we serve others, we experience

God's grace. It points people to Christ. Jesus modeled grace that goes way beyond our understanding. He emptied himself for us, though we deserved nothing. His example calls us to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21). In our "me-first" culture, God calls us to put others first. What a challenge!

Are we looking out for others the way we look out for ourselves? Can we put their needs ahead of our own? How are you serving in your community?

Lord, teach us how to serve one another. Help us to put the needs of others first, as you did for us. Show us ways to use our gifts to bless others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**BITE, DEVOUR, DESTROY**

*If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*  
—Galatians 5:15

Did your father or mother ever yell from the front seat, “Stop fighting! Don’t make me pull this car over!” It’s an attempt to interrupt a situation that is getting out of control—and maybe even dangerous, if the driver is distracted.

Like a frustrated parent, Paul was not at all happy about how things were going in the Galatian church. Paul saw how destructive the situation had become and how the people were hurting one another. You can hear the frustration in his voice as he warns them that their behavior is on a dangerous path.

I wonder what Paul would say to our churches today. Would he see love and care for one another? Or would he see petty arguments and bitterness toward one another?

How much grace do we show to our neighbor? Does biting and devouring characterize our relationships? If so, Paul wants us to realize that is a very dangerous path.

Earlier in this chapter Paul says that what really matters is “faith expressing itself through love” (Galatians 5:6). It all comes back to the action of loving each other, even those we disagree with. We need to stop destroying through biting and devouring. We need to express our faith through loving one another. This is the pathway that really matters!

Lord, teach us how to put your love into action. Give us a spirit of love and compassion that drives away bitterness and envy. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

## PROVOKING AND ENVYING

*Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.*

—Galatians 5:26

When our children were young, they struggled to understand why one child should have a birthday when the others wanted presents too. With all three kids' birthdays within six weeks of each other, we had to ensure fairness to avoid a lot of jealousy at that time of year!

As fallible human beings, we all fall into the traps of being conceited, provoking each other, and envying one another. When things go well, we give ourselves credit for how we have handled things. When things do not work in our favor, we brood in anger, envying others for what we think we deserve. These emotions are destructive to others around us as well as to ourselves.

After describing the struggles of the sinful nature, Paul reminds us that our sinful nature has been crucified and should no longer be the source of our be-

havior. Instead, the fruit of the Spirit should be evident in all of our lives, permeating our relationships.

We avoid conceit and envy when we focus on being filled with the Spirit. Let "love, joy, peace, forbearance [patience], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" be the way that we relate to one another.

Are you cultivating the Spirit's fruit, or are you hanging on to conceit, anger, and envy? God wants to cultivate these virtues in your life so that others will be blessed and find him too!

Lord, help us to let go of our sinful nature and learn to live a Spirit-filled life. Make your fruit evident in our lives so that others may be blessed. Amen.

## CARRY BURDENS

*Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*  
—Galatians 6:2

From a young age, children struggle to be independent: "I can do it myself!" We idolize independence and self-sufficiency. We value people who can "pull themselves up by their own bootstraps." We pride ourselves in being "better" than others around us.

But Christ has a different idea about how we should interact with one another. We should be caring for one another and involved in each other's lives.

This connectedness means we care enough about our neighbors to find out what burdens they carry. In communities where we may not even know the names of our neighbors, God nudges us to hear the concerns of their hearts. Do you have an awareness of the struggles of others around you? Just caring enough to ask is a good first step. Often a listening ear

is the best way to begin carrying a burden together. Genuine empathy is a healer.

A next step may be prayer. Everyone needs prayer, and few people refuse an offer to be prayed for, even if they have little faith of their own. Pray over one another and lift each other up before God!

And maybe you can lift a burden by lending a helping hand or an act of service. Or maybe you're the one in need. Can you, in Christ's name, allow others to serve you?

Christ's law is fulfilled when we can reach out with genuine compassion and care for each other.

Lord, help us to care for each other. May we show your love and lift others up in prayer. Amen.

## PUT ON NEW CLOTHES

*Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self. —Colossians 3:9-10*

Do you ever feel as if your family might win the award for “most dysfunctional dinner gathering”? Every family has a story of a mealtime spoiled by a relational meltdown, featuring lost tempers and stony silences. Welcome to the challenge of sinful people trying to be family to one another—it’s difficult for us broken individuals to live in community!

Our old, selfish, sinful nature gets in the way of healthy relationships, leaving them characterized by selfishness, lies, anger, and resentment. Yet Paul encourages us to set our hearts on things above. He calls us to remove the habits of our old nature that weigh us down and hurt others.

God has a better plan for our lives. We don’t need to meet all the expectations and rules of others. But we do need to show love. We need to let Christ re-

make and refine us day by day. It is both his gift and command to leave that broken sinful nature in our past and increasingly reflect his giving, loving, acceptance to the broken people in our lives.

Only when we show more of Christ’s love and less of ourselves will we be able to work toward healing in our relationships. The new self gets renewed daily with knowledge of the Creator. We can’t reflect Christ if we don’t know what he looks like. Are you spending time getting to know your Creator day by day?

Lord, help us every day to look more like you and to share your likeness with the people around us. May they come to know you better because they spent time with us. Amen.

## TEACH AND ADMONISH IN WISDOM

*Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom. —Colossians 3:16*

Have you ever had a dear friend correct you? Even a gentle rebuke can be hard to hear, even when it is given in a context of love. No one likes to have their faults pointed out and their rough edges scraped off. We don't want to believe that our words or our actions could hurt someone else.

Yet it is a mark of Christ's community that we teach and admonish. We should not be shy about sharing God's love and advice with one another. We need to care enough to confront bad behavior and be willing to receive correction ourselves.

When we correct, we need to be certain that love drives us to speak the truth (Ephesians 4:15). A mentor once told us that confrontation in relationship is healing, but confrontation outside relationship is condemnation. Speaking the

truth can be hateful, whether it's behind-the-back gossip or in-your-face humiliation. Admonishment should happen in love, relationship, and prayer.

When we are corrected, we need a teachable spirit that marks a disciple of Christ. We should let the Word of God dwell richly in us. This is not an occasional casual visit with the Bible, but a call to have God's Word at home within you.

Are you ready to be taught or corrected?

Lord, teach us how to correct one another in a loving way. Make us a community in which we love enough to hold one another accountable. Give us receptive hearts to hear correction that will draw us closer to Jesus. Amen.

**WAIT**

*So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together.*  
—1 Corinthians 11:33

The Corinthian church, much like our churches today, struggled with divisions. They wouldn't even wait for everyone to gather before taking communion. Celebrating the Lord's Supper could have been a unifying time for them, sharing together their identity as people saved through Christ's body and blood. Instead, the Lord's table became a symbol of greed and selfishness.

We fall victim to the same "me first" attitudes. In our own families, which God gave us to provide nurturing community, we find bitterness and divisions driving us apart. We argue over petty issues and manipulate things to get our own way. We have a lot in common with the Corinthian church! What would Christ see if he visited your family or church? Are you a community that cares for oth-

ers, or do you look only after your own needs?

We are forgiven by Christ's grace. There's nothing we can do to earn God's love—he gives it freely. And being a people embraced by God, Paul tells us to live like the redeemed people we now are. Come together and worship together, says Paul, but not in a selfish way. Be a community that looks after one another. Let's look beyond our own needs to the needs of others. Can we step up and be the kind of community that shows genuine compassion for each other?

Lord, teach us to care about one another. Give us the courage to set aside our own agendas and to put others first. In the name of the One who gave up his own life to save ours. Amen.

**RESTORE, ENCOURAGE, AGREE, BE AT PEACE**

*Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace.*

—2 Corinthians 13:11

After a long and sometimes stern letter to the Corinthian church, Paul ends with four commands on how the believers should treat one another. Be restored, be encouraged, be of one mind, and be at peace. Paul calls for unity in the church.

Often we settle for living with broken relationships. We get frustrated with others and vow to keep them at arm's length. Sometimes we talk more about someone than to their face. God calls us to strive for full restoration with one another.

There may be times when full restoration is not possible. The other party may be unwilling to move toward restoration. In Romans 12:18 Paul writes, "As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." We are not told that we need to make others live at peace with us. The

only behavior we can control is our own.

And we can make the effort to reconcile relationships rather than let them fall apart. We can make a call, drop a note, or make an effort to talk about the strain in the relationship. Even though others may not reciprocate, at least we will know we have tried.

But sometimes we will be surprised by a person's response. Making an effort to reconcile may bring unanticipated healing. It can be a moment in which everyone experiences God's grace.

Lord, give us the courage to reach out in love to those who have hurt us. Grant restoration where that is possible. Amen.

## SPUR ON

*Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.*  
—Hebrews 10:24

Some years ago, during an unhappy conflict at work, a wise coworker told me that having things go my way was not the point. Working together to do good things for others was more important. Doing it my way might be better, but not at the cost of accomplishing nothing. Those were hard but encouraging words to hear.

God has great plans for our lives that are beyond our imagining. How surprised we can be to discover gifts we have within us! God seems to use us best in areas where we might think we do not have strengths. That irony helps us see that the work God does through us is his, not ours. Those can also be areas in which doors close and windows open—and we step out on a new path to serve him.

Christ is already the victor over all that is wrong with the world.

He invites us to follow him and to challenge each other to leave comfortable habits for new forms of ministry. As parents, we might use the image of holding out our children's crowns and challenging our children to grow into them. As a church, we can help others see gifts and talents of which they may not yet be aware.

Tell someone how excited you are to see how God is planning to use their gifts and talents in his kingdom. Point out how God is equipping them for service. Encourage those around you in their spiritual growth and ministry!

Lord, make us encouragers of one another. Give us the courage to step out in faith to explore new paths of service. May we use our talents to serve you. In Jesus, Amen.

## MEET AND ENCOURAGE

*Let us . . . not [give] up meeting together . . . but [encourage] one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

—Hebrews 10:24-25

Have you had a child in your family ask, “Do I have to go to church?” Sometimes it’s hard to wake kids up on Sunday mornings. Sometimes other worthwhile activities compete with worship time. Sometimes we just value worship less and opt to sleep in. Sometimes disillusionment makes us hesitate to face our friends.

The writer of Hebrews saw people struggling with getting together for worship. He wanted them to know that meeting together is worth prioritizing. Praising our Creator and Redeemer is in our bones and part of the way God made us.

Joining together in worship draws us closer not only to God but also to each other. Connecting spiritually with our families as well as our church family solidifies our relationships. In marriages, shared spiri-

tual practice is the best predictor of long-term stability. Teens learn spirituality from their parents. Families that pray together stay together. Nothing you do for kids is wasted!

Take the whole family with you to church. Pattern good spiritual habits. Let your kids know that church is where they discover their true identity—that they belong to God and will always be his, even long after their parents are gone. Be passionate about worship so that it rubs off on those around you. Rejoice with the psalmist: “Let us go to the house of the LORD” (Psalm 122:1)!

Lord, connect us with other believers and make us a community that glorifies you. In Jesus, Amen.

## DEVOTION AND HONOR

*Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.*  
—Romans 12:10

In writing to the Christians in Rome, Paul paints a picture: Does it make sense for one part of the body to hurt another? Would you intentionally bite your toe, or poke your eye, or break a rib? Of course not!

Likewise, we all belong to each other—we are knit together by the Holy Spirit as Christ's body. Being devoted to and honoring one another should be obvious in the same way that caring for our fingers and knees and teeth is obvious.

*Love* is an action word; we see love enacted in our care for one another. If you sprain your wrist, don't you put your arm in a sling and take it easy for a few days? If someone is hurting or angry, shouldn't we take time to listen and even give up our own agenda to show we care? If someone is loudly opinionated, can you understand their need

to be heard even while you disagree? Can you stay connected even though they are wounded?

Our culture says we should honor only those who earn the privilege. Only the fittest deserve respect. But God calls us to respect others ahead of our own interests. Christ, not clinging to his honor as God, emptied himself to the point of death on the cross (see Philippians 2:5-8). And he did it for each one of us.

Devote yourself to Christ's body. Honor one another. Put others first, and so show the love of Christ!

Lord, make us devoted to one another. Help us to put the needs of others first so that your love may be seen through us today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## LIVING IN HARMONY

*Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*

—Romans 12:16

Paul's letter to the Romans is filled with theology. In the early part of the book, Paul spends a lot of time explaining who God is and what he's done for us. Then Paul wrestles with "So what?" questions. He gives many commands as he shows how God's love should affect our lives: Be joyful, patient, faithful, generous, hospitable. Bless, mourn, rejoice—in support of even your enemies.

Our God is a relational God, and he wants us to experience the blessing of being connected. We were never meant to be independent, self-sufficient, or isolated. In John 17, Jesus himself prays that we will have unity. He asks God to make us one, just as he is one with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. God calls us to live in harmony with one another—even those who are different from us.

And when people live in unity, others notice. Harmony is a powerful witness to the rest of the world. Years ago, after moving to a new town, our family naturally drew close to a congregation whose people showed up to help us paint and clean and move into our home. People willing to make our mess their mess were people with whom we naturally wanted to be involved in ministry.

Christ's church is diverse. It's full of people not like you or me, just as notes in a chord are not all the same. Can we work toward harmony?

Lord, forgive us for the sin of pride. Make us people who live in unity with those who are not like us. In Jesus, Amen.

## JUDGMENT OR FORGIVENESS

*Let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.*

—Romans 14:13

To people outside the faith, Christians often seem like hypocrites who look on the rest of the world in condemnation. We are seen as critical and self-righteous. And sometimes it's true. Sometimes our rejection and derision make Christ look bad. We condemn those who have heard only judgment and long for grace. We disapprove of people who have made poor life choices. We wish common sense were a little more common. Our impatience with others for whom Christ died shows how much we need him too.

Sometimes we have been hurt, and our hearts cry out for justice. We want to take judgment into our own hands. Part of forgiveness involves allowing God to take care of justice. We may need good boundaries with those who are still broken, and God ordained civil authori-

ties to restrain crime—but God alone is the judge.

Practically speaking, looking scornfully at our neighbor makes it difficult to share our witness. If we Christians shared the truth of how we have fallen down, the world might receive us better. Admitting our brokenness would allow Jesus' restoration to shine brighter. If we approached each other as fellow sinners pointing the way to be forgiven, maybe more sinners would follow Christ.

How can you show grace today?

Lord, forgive us for judging one another. Teach us how to share our brokenness and to point others to Christ. Amen.

## CHOOSE TO BE ACCEPTING

*Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.*  
—Romans 15:7

We long for acceptance in our relationships. From childhood, we seek our parents' approval even as we wish for independence. As adults, some of us may still hear a parent's criticism ringing in our ears. We search for unconditional love in various relationships or continually strive to achieve yet more. We want somehow to earn love and acceptance.

We all delight in affirmation from others. Everyone wants to know that even with all of our faults, we are still appreciated, loved, and valued. We want others to accept us as we are without trying to change us.

Yet only God is able to love us unconditionally all of the time. We are loved—warts and all—and we were loved while we were still sinful. God loved us so much that he gave his only

Son for us (John 3:16). That's how God sees us.

God calls us to see others through his eyes. He calls us to accept others the way he does—as dearly loved, broken children of God who are created in his own image. God loves us as we are, and he challenges us to live into a life worthy of our calling.

Accepting each other and loving each other in spite of our faults will benefit one another, but, more important, it will bring praise to God. When Christians care for one another, God is glorified. Are you ready to praise God by seeing others the way he does?

Lord, give us your eyes to see one another as your precious children. Keep making us more like Jesus, we pray. Amen.

## LOVE EACH OTHER

*Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

—1 John 4:11

When our children were little and woke up during the night, sometimes we each would lie still, faking sleep, hoping the other would be the first to get up to tend to them. Every drop of sleep was precious. It was such a delight to have my spouse say, "Just sleep, I've got this."

Such an act of selfless love gives a hint of Christ's love. In response to God's tremendous love for us, we are called to demonstrate this love to one another.

Jesus is our model for how we ought to love one another. He loved us enough to leave heaven to take on our earthly form. He loved us enough to stand up to all the temptations of the devil. He acted as the servant in the house washing his disciples' feet (see John 13). Jesus loved us enough to die in our place

even while we were broken and sinful. Such awesome love!

When we were married 25 years ago, a soloist sang for us "I Could Never Promise You." It may not sound like a great wedding song, but it makes a good point. We are broken people who can never love each other perfectly. It is only Christ in us that allows us to keep our promises to love each other fully. If we want to be people who love like Jesus, we need to stick close to him. We can't imitate Christ if we don't know him!

Lord, words are not enough to thank you for the love you have shown to us. Help us to follow your example and to love others in your name. Amen.

## JUSTICE, MERCY, COMPASSION

*This is what the Lord Almighty said: "Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another."*

—Zechariah 7:9

In girls' club, the leader asked the question from Micah 6:8: "What does the LORD require of you?" In unison the girls responded with the next part of the verse: "To do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God." They had memorized this as their theme verse. Justice, mercy, and walking with humility are the behaviors that God is looking for in all of us. It's a deeply biblical theme.

God calls us, as a matter of worship, to act justly in our day-to-day lives, not being swayed by who has power and who does not. We honor God by showing not only impartial justice but also mercy and compassion. God himself clarifies that we are to seek justice for those who are not socially powerful—the single mother, foster children, immigrants, the poor. God declares, in effect, through

Zechariah: "I don't even want your worship if you are taking advantage of and not defending the weakest among you. You're worshiping only to make yourselves feel better, not to honor me."

Those are strong words. The suffering of people in another neighborhood—much less others around the globe—can be invisible. Enacting justice and showing mercy require us to care for our brothers and sisters. Ask God to show you ways to care for the marginalized. What acts of mercy are you doing for your family and community?

Lord, help us to show mercy, and make us lovers of justice, so that we can make an impact in this world for you. Amen.

## ENCOURAGE AND BUILD

*Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*  
—1 Thessalonians 5:11

Have you ever been around a positive person who makes others smile? Such people can brighten even the dreariest of days. On the other hand, negative people can leave us feeling drained and discouraged.

Paul had a missionary friend named Barnabas, whose name means “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36). No wonder Barnabas was a leader in the church and a welcome companion to Paul. Surely Paul valued his encouragement when they were rejected and even beat up on their mission journey together (Acts 13-14).

Here Paul, like Barnabas, encourages the Thessalonians to be wise, sober, and unafraid of the dark times they lived in. They could wear faith, love, and hope as armor, encouraged and strengthened in Christ for any challenges that might come.

Think about words of encouragement that have inspired you. At a retreat, a friend spoke of how someone had described her as a leader, though she didn't see herself that way. That inspired her to become more active in her church and to grow into her gifts.

Sometimes we take people for granted and don't see the ways they are gifted. We forget to thank others for the ways they bless our lives. Does your family know how much you value them? How can you be a source of encouragement in your community? Who in your church could use an encouraging word to grow in their gifts?

Lord, make us a people who encourage one another and bring out the best in those around us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## OFFER HOSPITALITY

*Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.*

—1 Peter 4:9

Our family loves biking across Iowa in the summer. We've been on many organized rides, but the people of Iowa offer some of the best hospitality. Farmers greet us from their driveways and chat about the day's adventures. The towns make it a festival with food, games, and music. When 10,000 riders roll into a town of 3,000 people, it can't be business as usual, and rather than treating us like an interruption, their warmth comes through!

Still, not everyone is happy to have so many cyclists disrupt their town. One day we came across a church that had a sign that said, "Let the little children come"—and directly underneath it was another sign saying "Keep off our property." Our kids joked about the discrepancy and took photos of the signs. It was disappointing that

a church sent an unwelcoming message. How ironic that a church was the least welcoming place in the community.

Hospitality is about making someone feel welcome. It means making it easy for someone to spend time with you without feeling as if they are intruding. It means a warm welcome and a comfortable setting in your presence. It means knowing that our homes, churches, and time are gifts to be shared. They don't have to be perfect or beautiful, but just open. We can share these blessings so that people know we care!

Lord, teach us how to practice hospitality. Connect us with people who need to experience your love through us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## GIFTS FOR GLORY

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

—1 Peter 4:10

Our family loves to attend concerts, plays, and sporting events. It's thrilling to see the performance of skilled professionals. Sometimes we might be jealous, wishing, "If only I had their athleticism, or musical gifts, or intellectual strength, or charming people skills . . . then I would be complete!" It can be easier to see someone else's talents than to see our own.

But instead of longing for the gifts God has given someone else, we need to see that God wants us to use the gifts he has given us. He made us, forgave us, and adopted us. And now he both gifts and calls us to glorify him.

God has given you something, and he calls you to use it for his kingdom! A pastor friend of ours is fond of saying that none of us feels adequate for the jobs before us, but maybe we should

step up and fill in until the perfect person comes along. Along the way, we may discover gifts and talents that we never knew we had!

God has gifted us to serve others and to care for one another. God doesn't want his gifts hoarded or ignored; he wants us to channel our talents into serving others in his name.

How can you use your time, talents, and treasures to bless others? Thank the Giver of your gifts by using your gifts to serve him each day!

Lord, thank you for the ways you have gifted each one of us. Grant us opportunities to use our gifts to bless others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## HUMILITY

*Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."*

—1 Peter 5:5

As Peter gives final instructions at the close of his letter, he addresses both old and young, leaders and followers, shepherds and sheep. Leaders should lead out of generosity and not for gain, he warns, because the flock belongs to God. Followers should follow with a teachable spirit. All should wear humility visibly, as if it were clothing. Humility should be like a uniform that God's people wear.

Humility starts with an acknowledgment of our complete dependence on God. When the Heidelberg Catechism asks, "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" the answer shows our dependence: "I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ." We rely completely on Jesus for our salvation and our very existence. What a relief that it

does not depend on our own strength!

That humility should shape how we treat one another. We all belong to God, so we have neither an authority of our own nor a right to profit from other people.

That same ancient catechism draws out the implications of our dependence: "Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him."

May we in humility serve God by serving one another!

Lord, make us people who acknowledge our dependence on you. Grant us humble hearts to serve. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## PRACTICING PATIENCE

*Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged.*  
—James 5:9

After a challenging move to a new house, we found ourselves feeling lonely. The kids missed all their friends, and our living situation was not ideal. All around us were reminders that things were not as we wanted them to be. We found ourselves grumbling like Israel in the desert (see Exodus 16:1-3).

It can be difficult not to grumble and complain about how broken our world is. Every day we see around us the results of sin. We long for God's perfect kingdom, but we live in an imperfect world. We are surrounded by broken people—some sitting around our table and some even looking back at us from the mirror.

Proverbs 19:13 describes a grumbler as being as irritating as “the constant dripping of a leaky roof.” Grumbling and complaining are offensive to the

ear. Living as constant complainers makes us bitter people who are not much fun to be around. When we grumble, we insult God, sour our souls, and push away the people around us.

James urges us to be patient in our interactions with others. If only we could see with God's vision, noticing the blessings he gives us in and through others. We need to realize that the people we are frustrated with also belong to God. Then we might find that the situations that annoy us are the places where God wants us to grow.

Lord, you know our natural tendency to see the worst in people. Train our eyes to see beyond the challenges to the blessings you have in store for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## CONFESS AND PRAY

*Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*  
—James 5:16

I remember a day when I jumped to a faulty conclusion and yelled at our six-year-old daughter for something she did not do. I needed to apologize. Following our family pattern, I found myself saying I was sorry and then sitting on the time-out bench! Apologizing to my child was surprisingly awkward, but it helped establish a trust we still enjoy today as adults. Our relationships will be closer if we can share our brokenness—there is an intimacy that comes from confession.

No one enjoys admitting they are wrong. We hope our spouse or kids or friends will overlook our shortcomings and not call us out for our inconsistencies. We want to preserve the illusion of having our life pulled together. No one wants to say, “I was wrong, and I’m sorry!”

But by avoiding those painful words, we miss the blessing

that follows. When a wound is cleaned, the healing can begin. If we live with sin festering in our life, we miss the healing and wholeness that God has made available to us.

James tells us the next step after confession is also important for healing—we must also pray for each other. It’s hard to be angry with someone for whom we are honestly praying. By asking God to work through each other to advance his kingdom, we might find we can forgive as we have been forgiven.

Gracious Lord, grant us the courage to admit our failings and to confess them to one another. Help us to forgive each other and to pray for those whom you have placed in our lives. Amen.

## WASH FEET

*“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.”*  
—John 13:14

Jesus set an example for us when he washed the feet of his disciples—an example of servant leadership. Washing the feet of one’s guests was not the job of a leader, host, or rabbi, but the chore of a servant. But Jesus took on that role to show his followers how they ought to care for one another.

In our family’s multiple moves, we’ve had many friends and loved ones come and help us get settled in our new surroundings. Unpacking boxes and scrubbing floors is hard work, but they did it to show their love for us—and their sacrifice gave us a glimpse of how God loves us. They loved us enough to get dirty and to strain their backs lifting furniture. But Jesus’ love comes from a much deeper sacrifice. He gave everything for us.

Sacrificial love for each other is the flavor that God wants

our relationships to have. We should forgive as we have been forgiven. Forgive, help, sharpen, teach, admonish, accept, encourage, confess, and pray for one another. This is the kind of people we are now.

We love sacrificially because Jesus called us to love as he loves. We love not just when it is comfortable, but even when it’s challenging.

Are you faced with a sacrifice that you are not excited about making? How might God stretch you and grow you through that experience?

Lord, we are so humbled by the way you sacrificed yourself for us. May we follow your example and live sacrificially with those around us. In your name we pray. Amen.

Meet the rest of the ReFrame Media family.



kidscorner.net  
facebook.com/kidscornerradio



familyfire.com  
facebook.com/familyfire



thinkchristian.net  
facebook.com/thinkchristian



radarradio.net  
facebook.com/radarradio



walktheway.net  
facebook.com/walktheway



groundworkonline.com  
facebook.com/groundworkradio



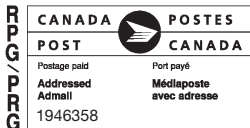
churchjuice.com  
facebook.com/churchjuice



spotlightradio.net  
facebook.com/spotlightradio



ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED  
CORRECTION D'ADRESSE DEMANDÉE



RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED  
PORT DE RETOUR GARANTI

# Today

refresh, refocus, renew

re: FRAME MEDIA

3475 Mainway  
Burlington, ON L7M 1A9  
905-336-2920

[info@ThisIsToday.com](mailto:info@ThisIsToday.com)

[www.ThisIsToday.com](http://www.ThisIsToday.com)

[facebook.com/ThisIsToday](https://facebook.com/ThisIsToday)

P.O. Box 5070, STN LCD 1  
Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8



Back to God  
Ministries International

# Today

refresh, refocus, renew

---

re: FRAME MEDIA

3475 Mainway  
Burlington, ON L7M 1A9  
905-336-2920

[info@ThisIsToday.com](mailto:info@ThisIsToday.com)

[www.ThisIsToday.com](http://www.ThisIsToday.com)

[facebook.com/ThisIsToday](https://facebook.com/ThisIsToday)

P.O. Box 5070, STN LCD 1  
Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8



**Back to God**  
Ministries International

---

Periodicals postage paid at  
Palos Heights, Ill., and at additional mailing offices.

# Today

refresh, refocus, renew

---

re: FRAME MEDIA

6555 West College Drive  
Palos Heights, Illinois 60463  
708-371-8700  
[info@ThisIsToday.com](mailto:info@ThisIsToday.com)  
[www.ThisIsToday.com](http://www.ThisIsToday.com)  
[facebook.com/ThisIsToday](https://facebook.com/ThisIsToday)



**Back to God**  
Ministries International

---

# Today

refresh, refocus, renew

---

re: FRAME MEDIA

6555 West College Drive  
Palos Heights, Illinois 60463  
708-371-8700  
[info@ThisIsToday.com](mailto:info@ThisIsToday.com)  
[www.ThisIsToday.com](http://www.ThisIsToday.com)  
[facebook.com/ThisIsToday](https://facebook.com/ThisIsToday)



**Back to God**  
Ministries International

---