

Sept/Oct 2019

Today

refresh, refocus, renew

ENCOUNTERING JESUS

ALSO: THE EYES OF YOUR HEART

Friends:

As a multimedia ministry, we at ReFrame Media aim to use communication technologies to become a ministering presence in your life. We write, podcast, email, and otherwise broadcast the gospel in order to help you see God's story already at play in your lives.



But we're not the first to use technology to extend our fellowship.

The whole New Testament, for example, was written by disciples of Christ to reach out across the Roman Empire and encourage Christians wherever they could be found. Many of the books in the New Testament were actually personal letters that brought greetings, teaching, and encouragement from the authors to various groups of Christians (churches).

In the opening chapters of Revelation, for example, John records messages to seven congregations from Jesus himself. And through these writings, we too, along with those churches, encounter Jesus and his words.

This September, Jim Poelman helps us to know Jesus more fully as we explore the opening chapters of Revelation and see Jesus teaching his churches.

Then, in October, Gary Bomhof explores Paul's prayer that we would see Jesus with our inmost being, through the "eyes" of our heart. May we have the ears to hear and the eyes to see what God has to share with us.

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

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Steven Koster". The signature is written in dark ink on a light background.

—Steven Koster

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“The Eyes of Your Heart”
Gary Bomhof

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ReFrame
Media

october

The Eyes of Your Heart

Gary Bomhof

In Ephesians 1:18 the apostle Paul prays that the eyes of our hearts “may be enlightened” so that we know the hope to which God has called us. Of course, Paul is not talking about the heart that pumps blood throughout our bodies. He is talking about the heart of our being—what is often called the center of our emotions and beliefs and motivations. With this heart we feel, love, and see things that we would have no knowledge of with just our natural vision. For example, when two people fall in love, they see things in each other that no one else sees.

This month we will be conducting an eye examination—not of our natural eyes but of the eyes of our hearts. As we look at ordinary events and other things in life, we will be reminded of and urged to see the work and presence of God through Jesus Christ in this world and in our lives. May these devotions help us see and ponder some of the amazing wisdom and power of God and the spiritual blessings he has in store for us through salvation and new life in Christ.

Gerrit Bomhof immigrated as a young child with his family from the Netherlands to Vancouver Island, British Columbia, in 1954. He graduated from Trinity Christian College in 1972 and from Calvin Theological Seminary in 1976. He served as a pastor to five churches in Canada and retired in June 2017.

A NEW MIND

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds. —Ephesians 4:22-23

Whenever I, as a Canadian, drive my car into the United States, I need to convert miles per hour into kilometers per hour and gallons of gasoline into liters and vice versa. As a result, my mind is constantly converting at every speed-limit sign and fuel stop so that I understand correctly.

In today's passage, the apostle Paul reflects on what Christ has done for us, and he calls us to a complete transformation, a total conversion to a new way of life. This is not limited to—but certainly includes—the renewing of our minds.

Recently I came across the phrase “the conversion of our imaginations.” I think that expresses a real need for us to become “like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Throughout this month of October, we will be looking

at references in the Bible to everyday items all around us. For example, snow is not only a white blanket that covers the landscape in cold weather, but it can also remind us of the purifying work of the Lord (Isaiah 1:18). As we apply our biblically enlightened imaginations to such things, I pray that the Holy Spirit will deepen our understanding of God, make more meaningful our faith in Jesus, and clarify our calling and task in the Lord's church and kingdom.

Lord, as we meditate on your Word and reflect on ordinary things in life, make us new “in the attitude of our minds.” In Jesus, Amen.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me."
—John 10:14

Some time ago, while I was studying about Psalm 23, I read about someone who wanted to become a sheep farmer. He wanted to make sure he had all the right equipment, including a shepherd's staff: a long pole with a J-hook at the end. But at the farm-supply store he found that shepherds today use dogs instead of a staff.

The differences between the two are quite obvious. It can be mesmerizing to watch sheep dogs round up a flock of sheep and force them to comply. The dogs can cover a lot of distance quickly, doing the work with a lot less people power. With an ankle nip here and a sharp bark there, the dogs corral sheep into particular fields where the shepherd wants them to go. Without these helpful dogs, shepherds used to have to round up their sheep on their own, or with

lots of helpers—all of whom used a staff to direct the sheep.

With the Lord as our good shepherd, we are well cared for. The Lord Jesus is intensely and intimately involved with us as his sheep. He calls us by name, and we know his voice. He leads us to green pastures, clean water, and safe havens. Ultimately, he lays down his life for his sheep so that, even when we enter the darkest valleys of life, where we don't want to go, his directing nudge comforts us—and we know he will bring us safely through. As he faithfully calls us, may it be our heartfelt desire to follow the good shepherd!

Lord, our shepherd, thank you for loving us and leading us in the right paths. May others see your direction in our lives and hear your call and follow you too. Amen.

WATER

"Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."
—John 4:14

In the summer of 2017, I joined a group that was bicycling from the Pacific coast to the Atlantic coast, a journey of over 4,300 miles. At about the 30-mile mark, I developed severe cramps and agonized about dropping out and having to explain that to all the people who had sponsored me for the trip. After struggling into camp, some of the more experienced riders asked me how much water I'd been drinking. I learned that I had not been drinking nearly enough. They explained why we needed to "hydrate, hydrate, hydrate"—and, following that advice, I no longer suffered from cramps during the journey. It's amazing that water can make such a difference in our lives!

Water is an absolute necessity for life. The Samaritan woman knew this and laboriously drew it daily from the well. But Jesus introduced her to water that

would solve the problem of thirst once and for all. In John 7:39 we learn that this water is the Holy Spirit. As Jesus put it, this water "wells up" to eternal life.

Maybe we think of "eternal life" as something to be obtained and experienced only after we die. But Jesus is saying that the Spirit empowers us to experience eternal life already today. This water reaches into every nook and cranny of our lives, creating love, joy, peace, and much more—and this water keeps filling us with real, full life forever.

Lord, nourish us with your Spirit, for without the water that only you can provide, we cannot experience eternal life. Amen.

CITIZENSHIP

Our citizenship is in heaven.

—Philippians 3:20

I was visiting my infant grandson when his Canadian birth certificate came in the mail. I said to him, “Elliott, you may not understand what you have just received, but this shows how really blessed you are. An infrastructure is set up to provide safety, education, health care, and so much more! Hopefully, in a world where many risk life and limb to enter this country, you can grow to appreciate this great gift of citizenship, and you, in turn, will contribute to the welfare of this country.”

We must never forget though, as Paul reminds us, that we are also citizens of heaven. God gives us life itself—along with protection, healing, and sound teaching for full life with him! We show appreciation for this gift by following Jesus and keeping our eyes on those who live by faith in him.

Sadly, as Paul points out, there are many others who are enemies of the cross. In other words, they do not want to recognize their sin that Jesus paid for on the cross. “Their god is their stomach”—all kinds of fleeting appetites—and they occupy themselves with selfish gain and the power, status, or fame (glory) that this world thinks is important. But all these things only fade away.

To be included as citizens of God’s kingdom, we do not have to risk life and limb; rather, we place our hope, trust, and love in Jesus Christ, who has the power “to bring everything under his control.” How truly blessed we are!

Spirit of God, enable us to be faithful citizens of your kingdom. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

AMBASSADORS

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors. . . .

—2 Corinthians 5:20

When a sovereign nation has diplomatic relations with another country, it appoints an ambassador to be its representative in that foreign land.

In today's verses Paul describes *us* as Christ's ambassadors. And what does this mean? Well, we can see some similarities in the roles of diplomats still today. Ambassadors go to live in a foreign culture, just as followers of Christ live *in* the world but are not *of* the world (John 17:14-19), being citizens of heaven.

Ambassadors are also the face of the country they represent. If they are rude and crass, they make a negative impression. As Christians, we represent the one who "died for all." As a result, we live "for him who died for them and was raised again." Our demeanor, generosity, sacrifice, and love are to show others what Jesus has done for us.

In Paul's day, though, ambassadors from Rome were different from most ambassadors today. They were representatives in a land that would soon become a province of the Roman Empire. So they were responsible to bring others into the Roman family.

Our situation as ambassadors for Christ is similar in some ways. While we are not to be militant empire makers, we must recognize, as Paul puts it, that it is "as though God is making his appeal through us." Through the work of our Savior, we are ambassadors of reconciliation as we introduce others to Christ and help bring them into the family of God.

Lord, we are privileged to be your ambassadors. Guide us to represent you faithfully each day. Amen.

BREATH

He breathed on them. . . .

—John 20:22

Breathing air is a sign of being alive. But not just any air will do! Asbestos fibers, nicotine, smog, and other pollutants are harmful and should not be part of the air we breathe. For this reason, our governments set up agencies to regulate air quality.

In today's passage, the resurrected Jesus suddenly appears to his disciples who were gathered behind locked doors "for fear of the Jewish leaders." These disciples were alive—that is, they were breathing—yet they were paralyzed with fear. We read that Jesus "breathed on them"—and soon everything would change!

Instead of cowering behind locked doors, they were sent out into the world as the Father had sent Jesus. They received this mission because Jesus not only breathed on them but also commanded them to receive the Holy Spirit, whose name in the original languages of

the Bible (Hebrew and Greek) means "breath" or "wind."

Pictures of breath and life are found throughout God's story of redemption. When God breathed into the man he had formed, Adam "became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). But later sin came into our lives, and even though we were physically alive, we were "dead in [our] transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). Through Christ's finished work, however, we are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), and through the Holy Spirit we produce the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

May Christ breathe his life-giving Spirit into our lives today!

"Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love the way you love, and do what you would do." Amen.

WEAPONS

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.

—2 Corinthians 10:4

Life is full of battles. Two teams may battle it out on the football field. A person struggles to lose weight or to conquer an addiction. Businesses fight to stay afloat. Society combats racism and gender inequality. Armies engage in war. All of these battles engage particular weapons—an ace quarterback, a special diet, 12-step programs, civil rights, civil liberties, stealth weaponry.

Christ's followers engage in battles too. As Christians, we must be careful with our choice of weapons. Paul here defends himself against false teachers who are publicly finding fault with him in order to boost their own reputations. Many of us are familiar with the weapons they used: belittling, bullying, gossip, false accusations. But instead of responding the same way, Paul uses the meekness and gentleness of Christ. He is not interested in defend-

ing himself; he desires to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

What is included in the arsenal we may use in God's kingdom? Our personal testimonies can be a powerful weapon against "every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God." Prayer is our lifeline to communicating with God, giving thanks, and understanding his will for us. And in God's strength we use our gifts and talents in obedience to Christ. We can bring reconciliation, teach, show compassion, organize projects, serve to help others, and more—all with the love and grace that bring blessing to the world through Christ.

Inspire us, Lord, to be a blessing in this world by bringing the love and good news of your kingdom, for your sake. Amen.

WOUNDS

He was pierced for our transgressions . . . and by his wounds we are healed.
—Isaiah 53:5

There is a story behind every scar that we have. Maybe it's a reminder of knee surgery that has helped to bring a new bounce to your step. Perhaps a scar reminds you of an accident, and you're thankful for the recovery you have experienced. Some scars are emotional and psychological, reminding us of deep hurts inflicted by others.

When appropriate, we should be willing to share the stories of our scars. As we do that, we can show our gratitude, humility, and need for community. A drawback to the popularity of social media today is that people often portray their life as a bed of roses. It's easy to share news about vacations, happy family gatherings, and celebrations. But true fellowship emerges when our scars are exposed in personal communication with others.

Today we see Jesus in one of his post-resurrection visits to his disciples. And when "he showed them his hands and side," his followers were overjoyed as they recognized the Lord.

And what a story his wounds tell! He was not some comic-book superhero who easily accomplished great feats. Rather, as we see in Isaiah 53, Christ's victory came through deep personal sacrifice. We are also reminded of our sins, our transgressions. When we embrace these two realities—Jesus' wounds and our need—we find healing. Indeed, "by his wounds we are healed"!

Lord, our scars remind us of how vulnerable we are. Thank you, Jesus, for making yourself vulnerable for our sake and for providing us healing. In your name we pray. Amen.

THE AUTHOR

"You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead."

—Acts 3:15

There seem to be two views on life.

In one view, I create my own future. After all, as the English poet W. E. Henley wrote, "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul."

So, in that view, I am the author of my life. Our society today often teaches this by saying, "Believe in yourself; you can be anyone you want to be."

The second view on life is to recognize that Someone Else is writing the story of my life.

Peter, in Acts 3, indicts the crowd in Jerusalem for killing the true author of life—Jesus Christ. In Colossians 1:16-17, we read, "All things have been created through [Jesus] and for him. . . . and in him all things hold together."

One way that we try to be "like God" (Genesis 3:5) is by

attempting to write our own story. And when we do that, we too are killing the author of life!

Peter urges his hearers to repent so that their "sins may be wiped out" and "times of refreshing may come from the Lord." In John 10:10, we hear Jesus say, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

Surely the one who created all things has everything to make us thrive. He desires to write the next chapters of our lives. What a blessing!

Forgive us, Lord, for wanting to be the authors of our own lives. Please write the next chapters of our life journey, with you as our Lord and Savior guiding us. In your name, Amen.

PIERCED EARS

"Pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life."

—Exodus 21:6

Ear piercing is a widespread phenomenon. In some ancient tribal traditions, people pierced their ears in the hope of protecting themselves from evil spirits. For virtually everyone today, though, piercing is mainly a fashion statement.

The Bible describes a tradition of piercing ears, but that was not done for protection or fashion reasons. In Exodus 21, we find a rule requiring that after seven years, a Hebrew servant was to be set free. Often a person would become a servant of someone else to pay off a debt. But they were not required to be servants for life; instead, they had the hope of freedom.

In some situations, though, not all servants *wanted* to be free after seven years; some preferred to stay with their master. Maybe they were treated very well and—with the rest of their family—wanted to stay

with the master. Perhaps they couldn't imagine themselves living anywhere else.

In cases like that, the master and servant would go before a judge to ensure that the servant was willing to stay. The master would then take the servant to a doorpost and "pierce his ear with an awl. Then he [would] be his servant for life."

These practices have parallels to our new life in Christ. By his sacrifice, Christ has set us free. The Holy Spirit moves in us so that we desire to be faithful servants of the Lord. We recognize how good God is to us, and there's no other place we'd rather be than serving him.

Lord, "I am not my own, but belong—body and soul"—to you. Make me "wholeheartedly willing and ready" to live for you. Amen.

SNOW

Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

—Psalm 51:7

Have you ever spilled mustard or ketchup on a clean, white suit or sweater you were wearing? It's a stain you can't hide—and it can be embarrassing if you have to stand up and speak in front of people with that fresh stain showing!

King David had a much more serious problem with a stain. The prophet Nathan confronted him about it and told him that it needed to be addressed (2 Samuel 12:1-13). Was there any way to remove the stain of sleeping with another man's wife and then murdering her husband? Sometimes we think we can cover up the stains of our sins by placing blame elsewhere. But the stains remain.

In Psalm 51, David writes, "Cleanse me with hyssop." The word for "cleanse" here literally means "un-sin." Imagine being able to push an "undo" button to wipe out something wrong you have done! Hyssop was a plant

with brush-like branches, and in ancient Israel it was used for purification rites. Moses dipped a hyssop branch in blood and used it to sprinkle people and objects to declare them purified (Hebrews 9:19-23). Hyssop was also used to spread blood on the doorframes of Israelites' houses before they were freed from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12:21-23).

This pointed to the blood of Jesus, which "purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). As Christians, we know that there is one cleansing agent—the blood of Christ—that can wash away our sins. So if we repent and ask God for forgiveness, we will be cleansed, for Jesus' sake.

"Lord Jesus, I long to be perfectly whole. . . . Break down every idol, cast out every foe; now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Amen.

THE WAY

"I am the way and the truth and the life."

—John 14:6

People are always looking for ways to get from point A to point B. With GPS today, many of us can find our way easily around town or on a trip. Most routes are clearly marked, and we just have to follow the directions.

People also search out new ways of doing things. Innovators try to find better ways to make things work. Medical researchers seek out ways to cure cancer. Business owners look for ways to improve their bottom line.

In today's Scripture, Jesus talks about being *the way*—and he is referring to the way to real, everlasting life. This is the most important thing for all of us to know. We may reach a destination, find a cure for cancer, and make a business more efficient and profitable. But if we do not know the way to full life with God, what have we really

attained? Finding cures and new ways to improve things in life may be helpful blessings for a while, but they do not solve all of our problems and struggles. Only God can do that, in eternity.

There are always people who claim that there are many ways to God. But there is really only one way—through Jesus, who himself is God. He is the one who came from heaven, lived, died for our sake, conquered death for us, and then ascended to rule at the right hand of the Father in heaven. He is *the way*, and he invites us to journey into full life forever with him!

Whom do we have in heaven but you, Lord? And earth has nothing we desire but you (see Psalm 73:25). Lead us in the way everlasting. Through Jesus, Amen.

ENOUGH

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."
—John 14:8

Have you ever felt distant from God? You might be doing "all the right things"—attending worship, reading the Bible, praying, helping others—yet God doesn't seem close. Maybe you have felt this way in a crisis—or even in the midst of daily routines. You just wish that God would show you who he is and that he is active.

Philip seems to show that sentiment, saying, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." But Jesus is surprised by this; he says, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time?"

Jesus had revealed the Father throughout his entire ministry! Jesus "is himself God and . . . has made him known" (John 1:18). He taught that he is "equal with God" (John 5:18). He also said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30).

Jesus had also made several "I am" statements, using the Lord's special name "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:13-15). He had walked on water and had raised people from the dead. That night, Jesus had also eaten his last supper with his disciples, telling them he would soon die and rise again (John 13). Yet Philip wanted more revelation! Would it really be enough?

In worship today we can interact with and rejoice in the risen Christ. May these opportunities—worship, reading God's Word, prayer, and more—warm your heart to the truth of who God is and how he works in our lives. God has revealed himself and is close to you!

Lord, give me eyes of faith to see you working in my life, and draw me close to you today. Amen.

ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

Give thanks in all circumstances. . . .

—1 Thessalonians 5:18

Today is Thanksgiving Day in Canada. We give thanks for health, family, jobs, harvests, travel opportunities, and more. Yet some circumstances can bring out other feelings too.

Some years ago, my first wife, JoAnn, desperately needed a lung transplant. In the nick of time, lungs became available, so I reasoned that God was about to give her a new lease on life. I thought surely she would not have to go through this difficult surgery only to succumb to the disease she was suffering (scleroderma). Yet, without leaving the intensive care unit, she died three months after the transplant surgery. I found myself wrestling with God. I was bitter, angry, and certainly not thankful in that circumstance.

Yet the Lord used this text to begin a journey of healing. By God's grace, I sought to obey this command and was able

to thank God for 39 years of marriage, for our children and grandchildren, and for wonderful memories. Because Jesus went through the ordeal of the cross, JoAnn now reigns in heaven with him and is no longer limited by her disease. As I counted my blessings, I experienced God using me to be a blessing to others. I have also been able to marry again. We may never be thankful for things like cancer and other calamities; but even in those situations we can find much to be thankful for as the Lord opens our eyes. God meets all our needs according to the rich blessings we receive in Jesus.

Lord, equip us to be more than conquerors as we experience your grace in all of life's situations. Amen.

ADDING

Make every effort to add to your faith. . . .

—2 Peter 1:5

A house doesn't become a home until you add furniture, pictures, plants, and more to make it cozy and comfortable. It's important also to add memories and fun by opening your home to others and sharing good times together.

The apostle Peter encourages us to “add” to our faith. The Greek word for “add” in this text has an interesting history. Michael Green, a commentator, explains that this word is a metaphor from Greek drama festivals, “in which a rich individual called the *choregos* (from which we get ‘choreographer’), joined with the poet and the state in putting on the plays. This could be an expensive business,” and yet the *choregi* aimed to outdo each other in their generosity and training of players and choruses. “Thus the word came to mean generous and costly cooperation.”

Peter used this rich word to help us picture the generous grace of God. We are saved by grace—and this is wholly a gift! Yet we are called to participate as well—to add “good character, spiritual understanding, alert discipline, passionate patience, reverent wonder, warm friendliness, and generous love” (*The Message*).

May the Spirit equip us to cooperate with God in living out a Christian life, which is possible only through his generosity and strength. God wants us to be effective and productive in growing to know Jesus, who has added so much to our lives.

Lord, thank you for the gift of salvation. Inspire us to add to our faith goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, and love. Amen.

WORKOUT

Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

—Philippians 2:12

Have you ever wondered why a visit to the gym is called a “workout”? Maybe it’s because somewhere deep inside you is a strong, svelte, and trained body ready for rigorous competition. But that body is not present here and now—it needs to be worked out!

It’s similar with farming. Through irrigation, fertilization, and weed control a farmer works out the results of a potential crop. One can only work out results if something already has potential.

In today’s Scripture, Paul is urging us to engage in a spiritual workout and to take it seriously. By grace, God—through the work of Jesus Christ—has placed into our lives the most precious of gifts: salvation to new life!

We do not earn our salvation by our own efforts; rather, we are called to cultivate and develop

this gift of God, provided at the cost of his own Son’s life. We are to work it out to its full potential.

The Holy Spirit is our personal trainer for this workout. Pointing us to Jesus, he urges us to be “like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4). That’s a big challenge, and it reminds us all that we still have much to work out.

Thank you, Lord, for your gracious gift of salvation. Forgive us for not recognizing its potential in our lives today. Train us, Holy Spirit, to become fully mature followers of Christ. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

SLEEP

He grants sleep to those he loves.

—Psalm 127:2

One of life's simplest and best pleasures is a good night's sleep. We can go to bed tired and worn, and we can wake up in the morning re-energized. But is that all that happens in our sleep?

This ancient psalm was sung by God's people as they traveled each year to a festival of worship at the temple in Jerusalem. Yet it deals with issues that still ring true in today's world. Our lives are consumed with our jobs, families, and concerns about security. "I'm so busy" is a mantra in our world today. But this psalm reminds us that unless the Lord is an active participant in all we do, our efforts will be in vain.

The psalm writer underscores this point by making a reference to sleep. We read that God "grants sleep to those he loves." This phrase can also be translated as "while they sleep, he provides for those he loves." This picture may remind us of plants in nature and

crops that keep growing while we are busy with other things—and even while we are asleep! Describing the kingdom of God in a way like seed sown by a farmer, Jesus says, "Night and day, whether [the farmer] sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how" (Mark 4:27).

Are we involved in activities in which the Lord is working and providing? Or are we feverishly engaged in things that have nothing to do with God's kingdom? Let's be mindful of serving God in all we do each day, and we can rest peacefully while the Lord keeps providing for us and building his kingdom.

Lord, give us the rest and energy we need in order to serve you, and help us to see where you are at work in our lives and in this world. In Jesus, Amen.

ARROWS

Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth.
—Psalm 127:4

Parents sometimes compare their child to a teddy bear, or a princess, or maybe Einstein. But have you ever heard of children compared to arrows, as in Psalm 127? This psalm describes children as providing protection from enemies. That was important in ancient times, and we can see its benefits still today.

For example, if outlaws came to steal or wreck your property, a group of defenders could help to protect you. Having a large family could give you strength in numbers. And, as this psalm points out, it's also important to have defenders in court, in case some accusers try to ruin you even though you are innocent. In that society, having two or more witnesses on your side could uphold your case in the public court and keep you from shame.

This psalm gives us a wake-up call in the way that we raise

our children. We must have an urgency in training our children to use their talents and gifts to do what is right and to live by the ways of the Lord, who “builds the house” (Psalm 127:1)—and that can refer to our household of family members as well as to the household of faith (the Lord's church). We need to pray often for our children, knowing that even while we are sleeping (v. 2) God keeps working in them through his Spirit, honing them for service in his kingdom.

What kind of difference can you make—not only now but also for future generations?

Equip us, Lord, to train up children in the way they should go, for your sake, from one generation to the next. Amen.

FRIENDS

"I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."
—John 15:15

Have you been blessed with close friends? Maybe they are friends you have known all your life, or maybe they are relatively new friends. Either way, one of the best measures of a good friendship is the willingness to be open and honest together. Good friends are transparent with one another.

Abraham "was called God's friend" (James 2:23), and we see some evidence of that in today's story (Genesis 18). God wanted to be transparent with Abraham, so he told Abraham of the destruction that would soon come on Sodom and Gomorrah because of their grievous sin. And Abraham did not simply take this as information; he pleaded with God to spare these cities if there were 50, 40, 30, 20, or even 10 people living there who tried to live righteously—by following God's ways.

As Christians, we have a friend in Jesus. He shares with us everything he learned from his Father—and this includes all the good news of salvation as well as all the warnings and rebukes we need to hear about turning away from sin. And by the power of his Spirit, he says, we can live God's way.

So, like Abraham, we can plead with God to save our friends and family who don't yet know him. And, like Jesus, we can share the gospel and our own testimonies, praying that these words will help bring salvation to others. What's more, we can rejoice that God graciously calls us his friends!

Lord, we stand in awe that you call us your friends. Thank you for revealing what you have done, are doing, and will do in your kingdom! Amen.

MYSTERY

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus. —Ephesians 3:6

Researchers around the world are seeking to solve mysteries about many diseases. If someday a cure is found for multiple sclerosis, for example, or for Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS), many people will rejoice. If only these mysteries could be revealed today!

In our Scripture for today, Paul uses the word "mystery" four times. He explains that God has now revealed a mystery he had hidden for ages. Because we are now reconciled with God through Jesus Christ, God is now our friend. And he reveals what he has been doing for past ages and what he is up to now.

This mystery has to do with salvation. God is not only the God of the Israelites but also the God of all nations. This revelation calls for rejoicing! In Jesus, the Father brings all peoples together in one body, the church, the one people and family of God.

Today many of us may have the opportunity to gather for worship at a local church. At one level, the church is like every other human institution. We deal with hypocrisy, imperfect leaders, and a lack of financial resources. But, as our text tells us today, the church is also much more than any other institution. God's "intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."

May we find joy that God has revealed this mystery to us!

Lord, you have provided salvation for all nations. May this revealed mystery shape our lives and guide us to praise and serve you today. Amen.

EAT THE BOOK

“Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but ‘in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.” —Revelation 10:9

Sometimes what we eat is only enjoyable for a short time. A special recipe might taste good, but it may not sit well in our stomach. A heavy luncheon can make us groggy through the long afternoon. We might take pleasure in a scrumptious dessert while we eat it, but we may also regret it when our clothes are a bit tighter.

Our text today describes a similar situation. The apostle John is told to eat a little scroll. This is not the first time one of God’s prophets is commanded to eat a book. The prophet Ezekiel was told to do the same thing, and his account is quoted here (see Ezekiel 3). The taste in their mouths was “as sweet as honey.”

This sweetness describes God’s Word here and elsewhere in Scripture. For example, the psalmist writes, “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth” (Psalm 119:103). Nothing is

sweeter than knowing God, who—through Jesus—is working to bring restoration and to make all things new! That is a message we want to know and share.

But the word turns sour in our stomach. As Ezekiel discovered and the judgments in Revelation make clear, many people reject God’s offer of grace. But this does not cause us to stop sharing God’s Word, because “the mystery of God will be accomplished.”

May we have urgency and passion with the gospel message. May the sweetness of God’s Word compel us to share it everywhere with others, even if they choose to reject it.

Dear Father, thank you for the sweetness of your Word. Make us faithful messengers for you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

HEIRS

Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. . . .
—Romans 8:17

A recent study describes what is called the “Great Wealth Transfer.” Over the next few decades, the baby boomer generation is expected to transfer \$68 trillion in financial assets to the next generation. The heirs of these asset holders are set to receive a large inheritance!

Our text today informs us that we are heirs of God. How is this possible? Through the grace of God the Father, the sacrifice of Jesus the Son, and our adoption brought about by the Holy Spirit, we are members of God’s family! As a result, we are “heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.”

And what exactly belongs to God? Psalm 24:1 tells us: “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it.” Jesus, as the one and only Son of God, is the rightful heir and is set to inherit all that belongs to his Father. And, amazingly, because we’re

adopted as children of God, we are co-heirs with Christ! This has been God’s plan all along. He knew in advance that we would “be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that [Jesus] might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters” (Romans 8:29).

And, like Jesus, we will also inherit suffering. But our suffering is not a requirement for the inheritance; instead, suffering is an inevitable result of identifying with Jesus. As Hebrews 12:3 reminds us, “Consider [Jesus] who endured such opposition . . . so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” Focusing on Jesus helps us to persevere.

Inspire us, Lord, to keep our hearts focused on Jesus, who has given himself so that we can be your children and heirs. In his name we pray. Amen.

LAUGHTER

But he said, "Yes, you did laugh."

—Genesis 18:15

Laughter is good for our hearts. I hope you can think back on many joyous and laugh-filled occasions.

But not all laughter is the same. Sometimes it is cynical. When I told people that I—an overweight and out-of-shape senior citizen—was going to cycle across Canada, there were many who laughed to themselves in unbelief.

Ninety-year-old Sarah laughed in disbelief when she was told she would give birth to a son. She knew that after a certain age, women simply do not get pregnant. The idea must have sounded like a joke. Abraham had also laughed earlier when God told him Sarah would have a son (Genesis 17:16-17).

While reading this story, I was convicted that my cynicism is often tied to a lack of faith. I sometimes see old feuds, a lack

of growth in our churches, and incurable illnesses as “just the way things are.” And I see that God’s question applies to my life: “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” Ephesians 3:20 reminds us that God “is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.”

When God fulfilled his promise and a son was born to Abraham and Sarah, they named him Isaac, which means, “he laughs” (see Genesis 17:19). Their laughter now had a positive tone, as in Psalm 126:3, which says, “The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.” May God give us that kind of joy when we recognize that he keeps his promises!

Lord, thank you for the gift of laughter. Give us faith in your promises, and fill us with rejoicing. Amen.

ACCESS

Through [Jesus Christ] we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.
—Romans 5:2

If you could gain access to any place in the world, where would you go? Maybe you'd want a backstage pass at a concert or a Broadway production, a behind-the-scenes tour of a government building, or a private showing of artifacts from the tombs of ancient Egypt.

Romans 5 reminds us that we now have access not simply to some earthly adventures but to the very grace of God! This amazing access is more valuable than anything this world can offer.

Did you notice what the writer, Paul, says about the timing of this access? This is not a promise that someday we will have admission to God's grace and peace in the future; no, this is a reality for us now. "We now stand" in God's grace, and "we have peace with God." So our lives should be vastly different

than if we did not have this access.

How is this access displayed in our everyday lives? We have optimism "in the hope of the glory of God." We know that the purpose for which God created us will ultimately be realized. We also know that transformation is taking place as "suffering produces perseverance . . . character, [and] hope." Further, we have the assurance of God's love, which he pours out into our hearts by his Holy Spirit. We are truly blessed to have this access to God!

Forgive us, Lord, when we lose sight of how much you have changed our lives. Enable us to appreciate the access we have to your grace, so amazingly given to us through Jesus. In his name, Amen.

TREASURES

In [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
—Colossians 2:3

Smartphones put remarkable treasures at our fingertips. We can use these devices to make phone calls, send text messages, take photos, set up appointment calendars, search the Internet, and download vast amounts of music. With the addition of countless apps, the treasures in a smartphone are multiplied a thousandfold. I am a novice at finding all these treasures, so I often rely on my children and grandchildren to help.

Two months from today we will celebrate Christmas. Looking at the seemingly ordinary child Jesus in a manger, we would never guess that “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are hidden in him. As a result, we rely on the Bible to reveal these treasures so that we may make use of them.

What is wisdom? Wisdom is personified in Proverbs 8 as being the right and best way to live.

Wisdom was “the first of [God’s] works,” brought forth before the Lord created anything else in the universe. And wisdom finds its perfect expression in Jesus Christ. In him we find insight for daily life—how to distinguish right from wrong, the important from the unimportant, and the temporary from the eternal.

Knowledge has to do with understanding a subject. Jesus knows his Father, the Creator, intimately. When scientists begin to scratch the surface of all the wonders of the universe, I stand amazed at the knowledge and wisdom of God. What a lifelong task he has given us—to discover and use all the treasures hidden in Jesus!

Lord, you are the fountain of wisdom, knowledge, and truth. As we live and learn each day, may we find all we need in you. Amen.

CLOTHING

Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.
—Colossians 3:12

Sometimes what you wear allows other people to see what you value and what your character is like. If you go to a sports game, you will be surrounded by a sea of team jerseys. When pictures of Prince Harry and Meghan of England first appeared in public, the apparel she wore was sold out in minutes.

In today's Scripture passage, we are encouraged to dress in a way that shows what we value and who we are. In verses 5-11, we are reminded to put off things that are sinful, demeaning, and hurtful, such as malice, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed. Then we are urged to put on a new set of clothes: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. We also add love, "which binds them all together in perfect unity." In other words, that makes our outfits perfectly coordinated! All of these articles

were "worn" perfectly by Jesus Christ; as his followers, we model our lives after him.

I remember a time when I was wearing a "March for Jesus" tee shirt. I was in a department store and unhappy with the customer service department. I was ready to give the clerk a piece of my mind, but then I remembered what I was wearing. If I acted rashly, what would the clerk think of Jesus? Very quickly, my attitude and tone of voice changed for the better. May we always put on the mind of Christ and glorify him before others.

Coordinate our attitude with the clothing you call us to wear, Lord Jesus. Thank you for sharing the virtues that help us to identify with you. In your name, Amen.

THE UMPIRE

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.

—Colossians 3:15

Organized sports need referees and umpires. These unbiased officials make decisions on plays, fouls, and other points of order to keep games fair and entertaining. We might not always agree with the calls they make, but things could get chaotic without them.

Paul says, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.” The word for “rule” here literally means “to act like an umpire.” In this way we can see that the peace of Christ, a result of working things out through God’s wisdom and love, is our reliable guide for decision making and daily living. With the peace of Christ as our guide and goal, we can follow God’s way of goodness, righteousness, and justice for all.

But we often mess things up. The peace of Christ is not always present in our marriages, families, churches, workplaces,

and neighborhoods. We often act in line with our old sinful nature instead of seeking God’s wisdom and his peace.

People sometimes think of peace as the absence of war. But it’s far more—it’s about the way things are supposed to be. Having peace in our lives means living into all that Jesus represents, keeping in step with the Spirit of God who has come to live in us (see Galatians 5:22-26).

In our worship today, may the peace of Christ fill our hearts as we sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. And may we live by his wisdom and real peace in all our relationships.

Lord Jesus, teach us the peace of full life that you came to bring into the world. Amen.

THE GIFT

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. . . .

—John 3:16

Buying the right gift for someone can be a challenge at times. Receiving a gift can have its challenges too. If we don't really like a gift, we might try to be polite and say thank-you to the giver, but later we'll find a way to get rid of it or just put it in a closet. We might appreciate the thoughtfulness of the giver, but if we don't really love the gift, we're not likely to use it or value it much.

In our Bible reading today, we learn of the most precious gift God gave to the world: Jesus Christ, his one and only Son. Many people want nothing to do with this gift. They might just ignore it and think it's a fairy tale or that it doesn't apply to them. They might argue that if God really wanted to help us, he should have ended poverty, war, and suffering; or should have cured cancer or cleaned up the environment. Others

might be polite and say they appreciate the gift, but they don't really do anything with it.

But there are others who absolutely love the gift of Jesus. To enjoy this gift fully, we need to know and understand how Jesus is to be received. John says we must believe in him—and this means more than just agreeing with what the Bible teaches; we need to live by faith that Jesus' coming into the world frees us from sin and changes us to live new, full life that we can enjoy forever with him (see John 6-10). May it be clear in the way we think, play, work, and love that Jesus is our most precious, appreciated gift!

Forgive me, Father, when I show apathy and a lack of faith. Thank you for giving me all I need in Jesus, your one and only Son. Amen.

YEAST

“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast. . . .”

—Matthew 13:33

Do you ever wish that your church could make a bigger difference in your town or community? Or maybe that the worldwide church could make a greater impact? On a more personal level, perhaps you have prayed for transformation in your life, but you don't feel as if much has changed.

The relative smallness of God's people and God's work is a repeating theme in the Bible. In the Old Testament, only a small group of people remain faithful to God—they're called the remnant. Jesus picks up on that theme when he compares the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed and to yeast.

Our text describes yeast being *mixed* into flour; some translations of the Bible describe the yeast as *hidden* in the flour. The idea is that when the yeast is mixed or hidden in the flour to make dough, no one can see

it anymore. It's so small that it seems to be gone!

But although the yeast is small, it has a large effect. Jesus describes someone mixing up about 60 pounds of flour—that would make a lot of dough! Can you picture how much bread would come from all that mixed flour? A transformation would take place as the yeast did its work, making the dough rise! What a difference a little yeast can make!

As Jesus says, the kingdom of heaven is like that. It may seem small, but it makes an amazing, transformative difference.

Lord, help us not to grow weary when transformation seems small. May we have eyes of faith to trust that you will bring about great results. Amen.

AROMA

We are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ. . . .

—2 Corinthians 2:15

White lilies adorn the pulpit area of our church on Easter Sunday. For some of us, the aroma that floats through the sanctuary is invigorating. Others, though, need a dose of antihistamines just to make it through the worship service. The same scent produces extremely different reactions.

Followers of Christ can be like those lilies. Paul refers to himself and others who spread the good news of Jesus as bringing “the aroma of Christ.” And he has two pictures in mind. One has to do with the Roman “triumphal procession,” in which a victorious general would lead a parade of conquering soldiers and defeated enemies. The smell of incense would fill the air—and for the victors, this was the smell of salvation; but for the defeated, it was the smell of their imminent death.

Paul also has in mind a picture of the Old Testament sacrifice, which raised a pleasing aroma to God. And today, because Jesus’ sacrifice for sin brought an end to those sacrifices, we who believe in Jesus offer ourselves “as a living sacrifice . . . pleasing to God” (Romans 12:1).

Paul explains that we can be a pleasing aroma to God among all the people around us. Sadly, some people reject Jesus and his message, so the good news seems displeasing to them. But we know that the Spirit of God can change people’s hearts. So let’s pray that God will use us to help people see his love and desire to save everyone, so that they may recognize the “aroma that brings life.”

Father, help us to be pleasing to you. Grant also that many others will be drawn to you through us. Amen.

ALPHA AND OMEGA

"I am the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."
—Revelation 22:13

Some people yearn for past decades, when life may have seemed simpler. Others wonder what life will be like in one or two generations. Solomon understood how difficult it can be to grasp changes through the ages, and he writes, "No one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Still, we try to live our lives for God during the time that we have.

Both God the Father and Jesus the Son reveal themselves as the Alpha and Omega. These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and together they represent everything in between. As the Alpha, God is the source of life. We confess that he is "the creator of heaven and earth." And Jesus the Son, through his death and resurrection, "came that [we] may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

God is also the Omega. History has a trajectory, and no other ruler or power can change the final outcome. In Scripture, we hear loud voices in heaven proclaim, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 11:15).

This month we have considered a variety of things we see in everyday life. I pray that our eyes have been opened in some ways to see more clearly the One who graciously reveals himself as the "Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

Awaken our imaginations, Lord, to see you in the ordinary things of life. Thank you for revealing your love and good news to us all. In Jesus, Amen.



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