

The background of the entire page is a dramatic landscape. In the foreground, a dark, silhouetted cross stands on a hill. To the left, there is a small, dark structure, possibly a tomb or a chapel. The middle ground shows a body of water reflecting the sunset. In the background, there are mountains and a sky filled with soft, golden light from the setting or rising sun. The overall mood is contemplative and spiritual.

# Life at its *Best*

## Living Wisely in an Unwise World

**“And we pray this in order that you may live a life  
worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way:  
bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the  
knowledge of God” Colossians 1:10**



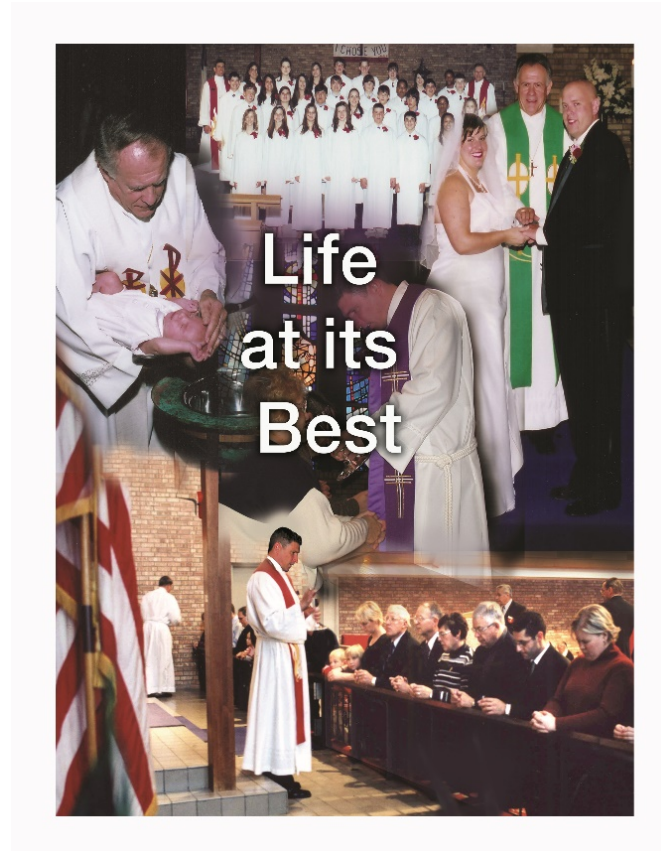


# Life at its *Best*

*Sermons and  
Bible Studies*



# *Life at its Best:* *Living Wisely in an Unwise World*



## *A Ten-week Sermon and Bible study Series*

Ron Chewning  
Stewardship Advisors  
32842 Bassett Woods Ct.  
Beverly Hills, MI 48025  
248-644-6150  
stewardshipadv@aol.com



## To Pastors and Church Leaders,

I am pleased that your church is going to offer **Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World**. I am confident that the messages offered during these ten weeks will be spiritually uplifting and enriching for your members. God continually calls out to us, “*Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11:28). With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can accept God’s gracious invitation to rest in Him and live **life at its best**.

### **The ten weekly themes are as follows:**

- Week one: “Fellowship with God”
- Week two: “Wise Living”
- Week three: “Using Time Wisely”
- Week four: “A Life of Service”
- Week five: “Controlling our Money”
- Week six: “Shaping Lives through Obedience”
- Week seven: “Seeking Contentment”
- Week eight: “Faithful Giving”
- Week nine: “Resisting Temptations”
- Week ten: “Letting God’s Light Shine”

The sermons for this series have been written by LCMS pastors.

Churches that purchase this sermon and Bible study series are permitted to reproduce and personalize any of the material on the three-ring binder or on the CD for use within your church.

### **About the author:**

I, along with my wife Phyllis, have spent the past 22 years developing Christ-centered resources. Our material has been used by over a thousand difference churches. In 1997, I started a ministry called Stewardship Advisors, which provides year-round stewardship education resources. In addition, I have authored numerous annual stewardship emphases, Bible studies, and have written two books.

I serve on the Michigan District Stewardship Committee and as a trustee on the Lutheran High School Association of Detroit. My wife and I attend Our Shepherd Lutheran Church in Birmingham, MI, where I serve as an elder. Our three adult children along with their spouses and our six grandchildren live in Michigan and Texas.

I pray that God is honored through this sermon and Bible study series, and I pray that the members of your church will be drawn closer to Him through this series.

Your fellow steward,  
Ron Chewning

Website: [stewardshipadvisors.org](http://stewardshipadvisors.org)



## Introduction

The materialistic and pleasure-seeking world in which we live tells us the life that we long for can be found in money, power, fame, or success. We are told that having the newest and best things will give us the happiness and contentment we seek. Sooner or later, as we head down that path, we find we've been deceived, for while we've experienced short term happiness, the inner peace, joy, and contentment we've really sought has eluded us. The result is life at its worst.

**Life at its best** reflects an attitude or condition inherent in God's "*chosen people*," who live lives that "*declare the praises of Him Who called [us] out of darkness into His wonderful light*" (1 Peter 2:9). We can live our lives joyfully only when God gives us the wisdom to understand that He is the One Who gives us "*hope and a future*" (Jeremiah 29:11). We live by faith in His Son, Who gave His life for us and came that we might "*have life and have it to the full*" (John 10:10). Focusing on God helps us achieve a quality life.

To follow God faithfully and to live **life at its best**, we must rely on His strength to face our daily challenges. Even when sin attempts to divert us onto its own course, we find that God never alters His purpose for us. He does not abandon us to go it alone. God promises, "*Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you*" (Hebrews 13:5b).

**Life at its best** begins with our acknowledgment of God's holiness, majesty, and loving grace. We realize our sinful state, but, in spite of our unworthiness, God has redeemed us through the blood Jesus shed on the cross (John 3:16). Through faith in Jesus, our Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5), we are in fellowship with our heavenly Father. We live with the assurance that our Father will never stop loving us. (Romans 8:38-39).

We live **life at its best** when we seek the Lord's wisdom. We live **life at its best** when we follow the direction He has for us. We live **life at its best** when we draw upon God's strength in His Word and in Sacraments. **Life at its best** begins when we are enabled by the Holy Spirit to...

- repent and receive His forgiveness.
- acknowledge that God created us for His benefit.
- understand that He loves us beyond our comprehension.
- abide with Him in reverence and obedience.
- faithfully serve Him by using our time, talents, and money in service to others and extend His Church.



When God is in control, our lives take on new dimensions and focus. He empowers us with His grace and abilities to carry out His will. Through His Word and Sacraments, we are energized and equipped to overcome the temptations and obstacles that threaten our relationship with God. His grace through the power of the Holy Spirit makes us healthy, functioning Christians who willingly answer His call to service.

It is my prayer that this sermon and Bible study series will assist you and the members of your church to live **life at its best** as you "*press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called [you] heavenward in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 3:14). You are called and equipped to fight the good fight, keep the faith, and finish the race.



## John 10:10

### King James:

*"The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."*

### NIV:

*"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."*

### ESV:

*"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I come that they may have life and have it abundantly."*

### Paraphrase:

Satan comes to steal our joy, kill our faith, and destroy our hope.  
Jesus comes so that we may live **life at its best**.



In this verse, Jesus is telling us that He supplies significance and value to our lives. He provides strength and satisfaction. He gives us hope and a purpose. Through faith in Jesus, we live **life at its best** now and we will live forever with Him in eternity. The world and Satan take away and make life at its worst. They steal and kill and destroy. Without Jesus, our entire focus is on ourselves and the pleasures of the world. Jesus enables us to live **life at its best**.

### Jesus answers our biggest questions:

Why am I here?

Why did God make me?

What is my mission in life?

What is my purpose?

Does my life really matter?

The answer to these questions is, "Jesus is the answer!!"

Our joy comes from following and serving Jesus. He said, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"* (John 14:6).

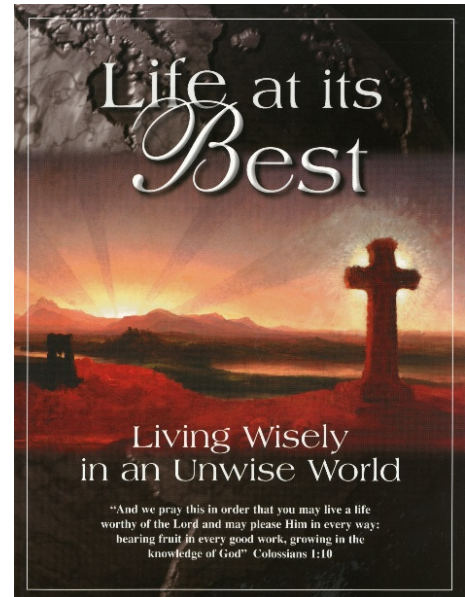
# *Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World*

## **Each of the ten weeks has the following material:**

- Bulletin messages (2)
- Lay reader talk
- Sermon
- Bible study
- Bible study answer guide
- Daily devotions (Microsoft Publisher booklets)
- Power point slide
- Worship helps on one page (File titled: Worship helps)

## **Preceding the series:**

- Bulletin messages (3)
- Newsletter articles (1 preceding; 2 during series)
- “Coming Soon” flyers
- Power point slide
- Trifold brochure



## **The ten weekly themes are as follows:**

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- Week two: “Wise Living”
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- Week nine: “Resisting Temptations”
- Week ten: “Letting God’s Light Shine”

If interested, you can reduce the number of weeks of this sermon series, nor is it necessary to present them in order. All the themes contribute to living **life at its best**.

Artwork to publicize and heighten interest in the series

All files found on CD



Jesus said, “*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly*” (John 10:10). Through faith, we understand that Satan, the biggest thief, comes to steal our joy, kill our faith, and destroy our hope. Jesus comes so that we may live **life at its best**.

**Life at its best** reflects an attitude or condition inherent in God’s “*chosen people*,” who live lives that “*declare the praises of Him Who called [us] out of darkness into His wonderful light*” (1 Peter 2:9). We can live our lives joyfully only when God gives us the wisdom to understand that He is the One Who gives us “*hope and a future*” (Jeremiah 29:11). Focusing on God helps us achieve a quality life.

**Life at its best** begins with our acknowledgment of God’s holiness, majesty, and loving grace. We realize our sinful state, but, despite our unworthiness, God has redeemed us through the blood Jesus shed on the cross (John 3:16). Through faith in Jesus, our Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5), we are in fellowship with our heavenly Father. We live with the assurance that our Father will never stop loving us. (Romans 8:38-39).

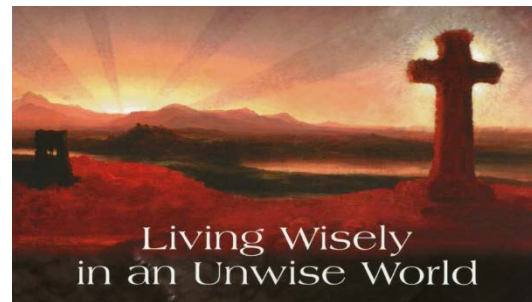
We live **life at its best** when we seek the Lord’s wisdom. We live **life at its best** when we follow the direction He has for us. We live **life at its best** when we draw

upon God’s strength in His Word and in Sacraments.

To help us grow as God’s children and to help us live **life at its best**, we will be offering a ten-week sermon series on the topic of living **life at its best**. The ten weekly themes are as follows:

### Week 1: Fellowship with God

As our fellowship with our heavenly Father grows, so does our ability to live **life at its best**. Our heavenly Father offers us the right hand of fellowship, and we have been created to have a relationship with Him, to love Him, and to serve Him. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can live **life at its best**.



### Week 2: Wise Living

The wisdom of the world causes us to seek self-gratification and the pleasures of this life. In contrast to the wisdom of the world, God’s wisdom will lead us to Him and give us lives of purpose. Wisdom from God leads us into God-pleasing thoughts and activities. God’s wisdom offers an eternal perspective, and, with His wisdom, we can live **life at its best**.

### Week 3: Using Time Wisely

Wise use of time starts by living a life for Jesus. If our time, energy, and focus are on our material wealth or other worldly success, our time has been wasted. God, Who has given us time, will also guide us in using it wisely. **Life at its best** is living a life knowing that our time is in God’s hands (Psalm 31:15).

### Week 4: A Life of Service

While on earth, Jesus gave us the perfect example of a giving life full of service and compassion. In the same way, God is calling us to be His hands and feet in service to others. Service is what emanates from a life filled with love and devotion to Jesus. **Life at its best** is only possible when the Holy Spirit moves us to look beyond our self-interests to the opportunities to help and serve others.

### Week 5: Controlling our Money

When God has first place in our lives rather than money and what money can buy, a big obstacle to an intimate relationship with Jesus has been eliminated, and we can live **life at its best**. Of all the tools that Satan uses to separate us from a relationship with the Lord, money and possessions are possibly the tools that he uses more than any other. Satan wants to make money our identity, security, and purpose. With God’s wisdom and strength, we can have a faithful perspective toward money and

use it in ways that help us live **life at its best**.

**Week 6: Shaping lives through Obedience.** Faith is the foundation for obedience, and obedience is faith in action. To be obedient is seldom the easiest or most attractive path to follow. We are by nature very selfish and sinful, so obedience comes with difficulty. By our own power, we are not capable of being obedient, but, through the working of the Holy Spirit, we are able to be obedient and live **life at its best**.

#### Week 7: Seeking Contentment



Contentment is a gift God would like to bestow on each of us. In order for us to live **life at its best** we need to learn to be content in the circumstances the Lord gives us. Realizing and rejoicing in what we have (the presence of

God), rather than lamenting what we lack (nothing, if we have Christ), brings us contentment.

#### Week 8: Faithful Giving

Our faithful giving honors and glorifies the Lord. As God's people, we give out of gratitude to God for Who He is and

what He has done and continues to do for us. We are not to give out of duty or for recognition. God's grace empowers us to be faithful with our lives and resources. God's love and generosity to us are seen through our giving. We live **life at its best** when we joyfully share God's gifts with Him and others.

#### Week 9: Resisting Temptations

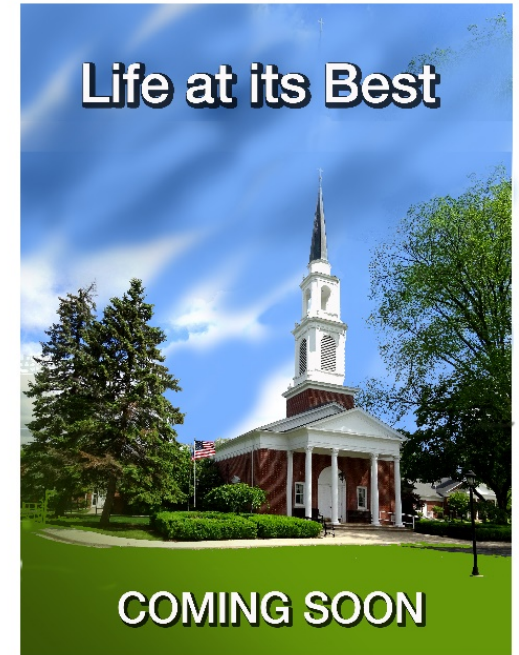
God's strength enables us to resist the temptations of the flesh, the world, and Satan. God gives us the spiritual strength to say, "no." Through faith, we know that God is faithful and will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear so we can live **life at its best**.

#### Week 10: Letting God's Light Shine

Jesus is the light of the world, and we are to walk in His light. The Holy Spirit has placed within each of us a light that shows God's glory and majesty. God prepares us so that His light will shine through us. When our lives reflect Christ, we are living **life at its best**. God has made us to be reflections of Him.

(Place your church's  
name and address here.)

## *Life at its Best*



**Sermon Series  
Starting  
\_\_\_\_ (Date) \_\_\_\_**



# Coming Soon: Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World

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Jesus said, “The thief comes to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10).

Satan comes to steal our joy, kill our faith, and destroy our hope. Jesus comes so that we may live **life at its best.**



# Life at its Best



# COMING SOON



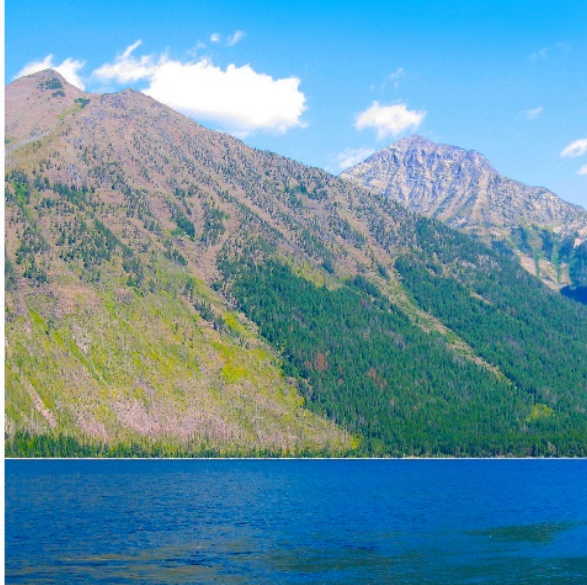
The background of the entire image is a dramatic landscape. In the foreground, there's a dark, silty river or field. In the middle ground, a large, dark cross stands on a grassy hill to the right. To the left, there's a small, dark, rectangular structure. The background features rolling hills and mountains under a sky with a bright sunset or sunrise, with rays of light emanating from the horizon. The overall color palette is dominated by oranges, yellows, and dark browns.

# Life at its *Best*

*Coming Soon . . .*



**Life at its Best**



**Life at its Best**

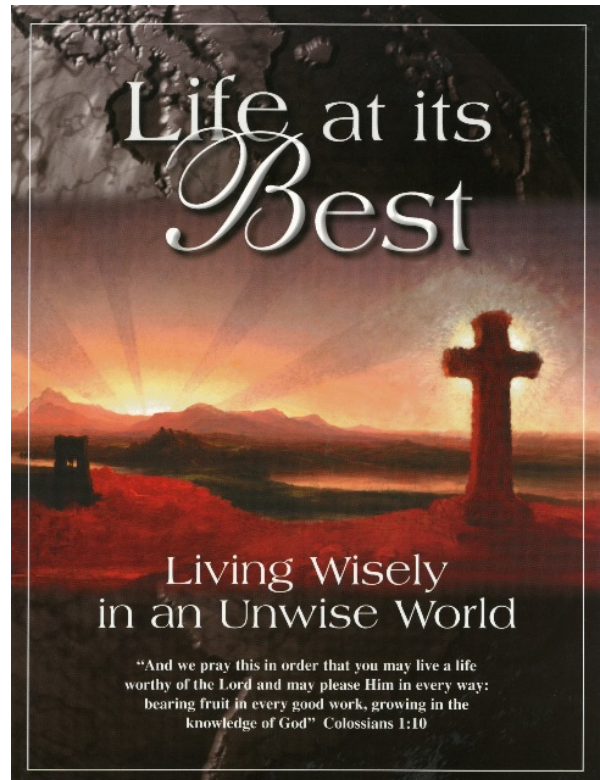


**COMING SOON**

**Life at its Best**



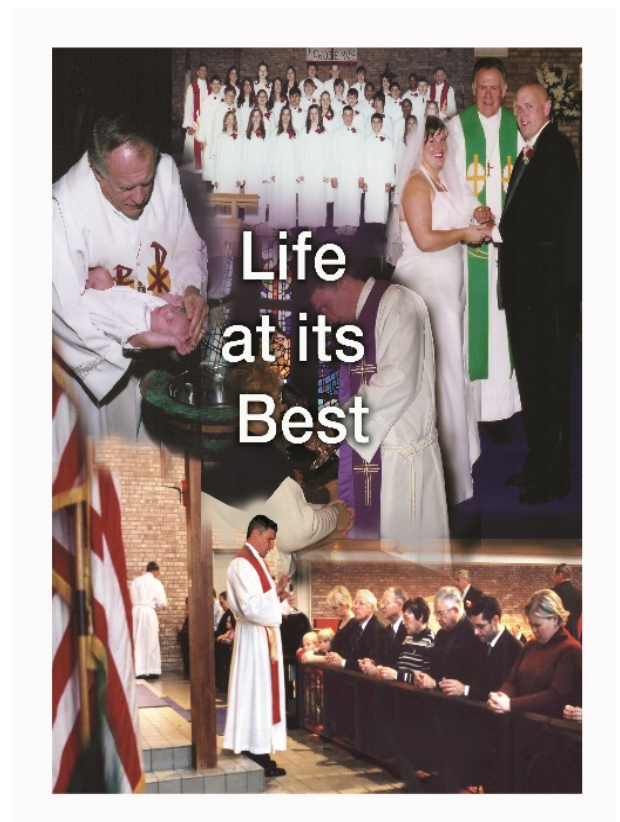
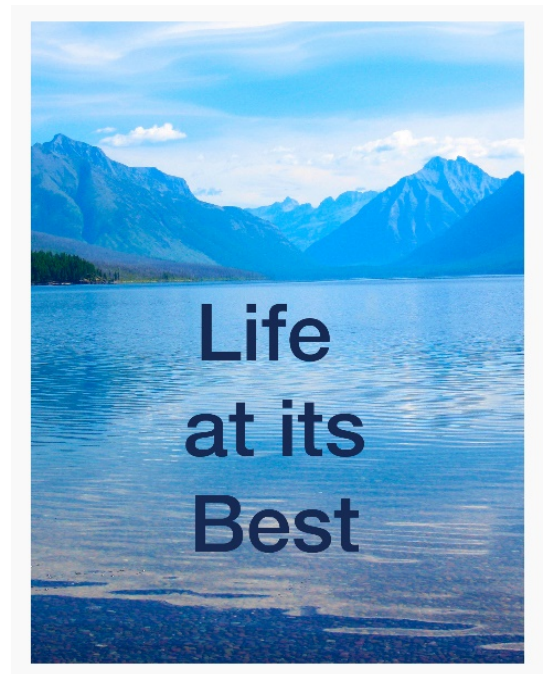
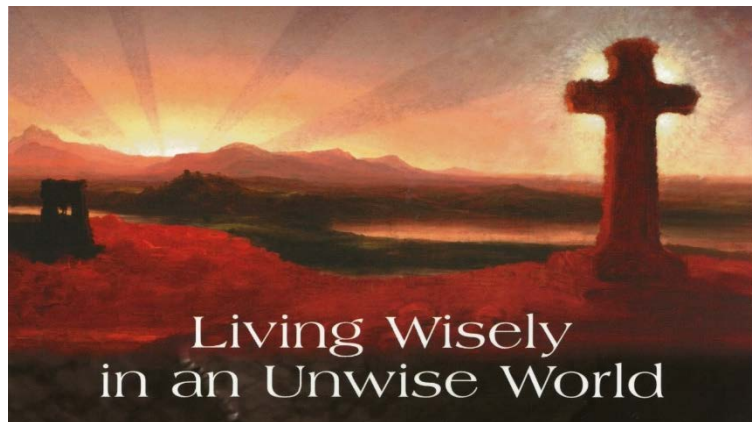
**Life at its Best**



**Living Wisely  
in an Unwise World**

**"And we pray this in order that you may live a life  
worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way:  
bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the  
knowledge of God" Colossians 1:10**





Bulletin messages preceding sermon series

### **Coming Soon: Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World**

Beginning on \_\_\_\_\_ (Date) \_\_\_\_\_ we will begin a ten- week sermon series titled **Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World**. **Life at its best** is a life that turns a deaf ear to the false promises the world offers and focuses on the joy and purpose that redeemed children of God experience as they live their lives under the control of the Holy Spirit. By God's means of grace through His Word and Sacraments, we are enabled to live **life at its best**. Please join us for both worship and Bible studies during this special sermon series as we learn together how we can live **life at its best**.

### **Coming Soon! Life at its Best Sermon Series**

Satan comes to steal our joy, kill our faith, and destroy our hope. Jesus comes so that we may live **life at its best**.

Jesus said, "The thief comes to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).



### **Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World**

**WE LIVE BY FAITH IN JESUS, WHO GAVE HIS LIFE FOR US AND CAME THAT WE MIGHT LIVE LIFE AT ITS BEST.**



"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

## **Life at its Best Comes from Jesus**

Jesus said, “*These things I have spoken to you, that My joy be in you, and that your joy may be full*” (John 15:11). As we are filled with God’s grace, love, and presence, joy is an everyday experience. It is not the temporary joy that worldly pleasures can provide. For periods of time, the world can provide happiness, but it does not last. When the thing or person that provides the happiness is gone so is our joy. Only the joy from Jesus is full and everlasting.

When Jesus said, “*These things I have spoken to you,*” He is referring back to the beginning verses in John 15. In those verses, we are told that Jesus is the Vine and we are the branches. Jesus likens our relationship with Him as a vine with its branches. Those branches that stay connected with the vine will thrive and do well. Those branches that become disconnected will die.

Satan wants to destroy our relationship with Jesus. He wants us to believe his lie that we can live life at its best without God. Satan tells us that if we want fulfilled and happy lives, we will find fulfillment in worldly pursuits and accomplishments. If we follow Satan’s lie and focus on ourselves and the world, we will destroy our happiness and the abundant life that only Jesus can give us. Jesus said, “*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly*” (John 10:10b). This abundant life can only come from a relationship with Jesus and not material goods or worldly success. The more people seek to fill their desires through things of the world the emptier they become. With the help of the Holy Spirit working in our lives, we will not be lured by the devil, and we will find our rest and peace in Jesus.

During our sermon and Bible study series titled **Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World**, starting on \_\_\_\_\_ (Date) \_\_\_\_, we will learn more about living life at its best as we abide in Jesus.



## **God's Grace Gives us Strength and Hope**

In the next few weeks, we will begin a series of sermons titled "Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World." With the challenges in your life right now, you may be thinking that there needs to be something more to life than what you are living. Life is difficult when finances get out of control or when issues at work, marital problems, health issues, or defiant children cause upheaval. You may feel you're living "life at its worst" rather than "Life at its Best"?

As Christians, we know that God wants the best for us. In the books of Psalms, we read, "[A faithful person] is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers" (verse 1:3). This prosperity is not of money and possessions, but it is the deep abiding faith within God's people that lifts us up even in the darkest of times. In the midst of our troubles and pains, we will prosper because God is with us. Wherever God places us, His grace and presence will be with us. He will work through us so we can bear fruit even in the most difficult circumstances to help those in our midst.

The Widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-16) was facing challenging times. This widow and her son were so impoverished that they had only enough flour and oil for one more meal. They were prepared to eat their final meal and then die. To rescue them, God sent His prophet Elijah to visit this drought-stricken region. When he met the widow, Elijah asked her for some bread and water. At first the woman told Elijah that she didn't have enough food to feed all three of them. Elijah told her to bake a loaf of bread for himself and one for herself and her son. He told her not to be afraid because God would not let the flour and oil run out before the end of the drought. She obeyed and, by God's grace, she and her son were kept alive despite the continuing drought.

When we place our faith and trust in the Lord, our perspective on life will change. With hearts, rooted in God's promises and faithfulness, we learn to be content with what's before us, and we are enabled to face our challenges with confidence that God is in control. Our problems don't go away, but we can face them with better resolve, peace, and hope. God's grace that saved the widow and her son is still available to get us through the difficulties that we face.

Newsletter article (One or two months prior to series)

## **Living Life at its Best**

Jesus tells us that He came in order for us to have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10). Just as we as parents are pleased and thrilled to see our children thrive and do well in their careers, with their families, and in their churches, our Heavenly Father, in a much more profound way, is pleased that we are experiencing **life at its best** in the years, months, and days that God has given us. We are His children and His amazing love for us was shown to us on the Cross where Christ won for us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life through faith in Him. This gift empowers us to live abundantly. It is God's desire that we live abundant lives. Just as we want the best for our children, He wants the best for us. He is so pleased when we walk by faith in ways of obedience, compassion, selflessness, and seek to follow His ways. By God's grace, we can be contented people who live **life at its best** aware of His presence and enjoying the intimacy of His companionship. **Life at its Best** is the rich life that God wants for us.

In contrast to the abundant life that Jesus came to give us, we find Satan (thief) doing all he can to make us live life at its worst. *"The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy"* (John 10:10a). Satan comes to steal our joy, kill our faith, and destroy our hope. He attempts to separate us from Jesus, and he wants us to live lives of despair and gloom.

In this tenth chapter of John, Jesus tells us that He is our Good Shepherd. As our Shepherd, He feeds us, guides us, and takes care of our needs. He even lays down His life for us! What a humbling and staggering thought that Jesus the Creator of the universe wants to be our Shepherd! He wants us to be His children in spite of our sinful and evil ways. He invites us to follow Him and to receive His affection and attention. He tells us that we, His sheep, know His voice and follow Him. As part of His flock or family, we acknowledge His authority and seek to follow His direction. Out of gratitude we attempt to live lives that please Him through our serving, witnessing, and giving. Because Jesus is our Good Shepherd, we can live **life at its best**. May we all boldly say, "The Lord is my Shepherd."

In the coming weeks, our sermons and Bible studies will focus on **Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World**.



Newsletter article (Month preceding sermon series)

## **Life at Its Best**

**Life at its best**—certainly a goal most of us strive toward. What are the means we use to achieve that end? Money, possessions, status, power? Does the acquisition of these things ensure that we will experience **life at its best**? That's the message we hear the world proclaiming. If you buy a new, preferably luxury model, car, you'll be satisfied. If you have a bigger house, you'll find contentment. With that next promotion, you'll be secure.

Jesus, on the other hand, says, *"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls"* (Matthew 11:28-29). He offers rest for our souls, not more striving. He promises to be a gentle and humble teacher, not a raucous voice screaming in our ears. He tells us that **life at its best** is found through Him alone, not through chasing after the fleeting pleasures of the world, which at best provide only fleeting happiness and contentment.

I am excited to inform you that on \_\_\_\_\_ (Date) \_\_\_\_\_ we will begin a ten-week sermon series focusing on **life at its best: living wisely in an unwise world**. I pray that you will make every effort to be at worship and attend the Bible studies that will also be discussing **life at its best**. *"And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God"* (Colossians 1:10).

Newsletter article (During sermon series)

## **Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World**

During this month, both in our worship services and in our Bible studies, we are learning what it means to **live life at its best** and how to **live wisely in an unwise world**. While human nature tells us that worldly fame and fortune will bring us peace and contentment, Christ tells us that fellowship with Him will fill our longings. *"But whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life"* (John 4:14). Prevailing opinion urges us to look out for "Number One," but Paul encourages us to *"do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves"* (Philippians 2:3). Peter exhorts us *"not [to be] greedy for money, but eager to serve"* (1 Peter 5:2). Common sense dictates that to get more, we must hoard our wealth for ourselves. Godly wisdom says, *"Freely you have received, freely give"* (Matthew 10:8).

**Life at its best** is a life with an eternal perspective. It is life nourished by Word and Sacraments. It is a life of graciously receiving of God's gifts and the faithful use of those gifts. We live life at its best when we seek God's wisdom and follow His ways.

Please join with your fellow church members each Sunday as we continue focusing on our theme **Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World** and learn about the great gifts God has given to us. Through faith, we respond with gratitude to His grace in our lives. *"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work"* (2 Corinthians 9:8).



## **Life at its Best**

For the past few weeks, our sermon messages have focused on the theme: **Life at its Best**. Our message in week one centered around the fellowship that God seeks with each of us. In the following weeks, we discussed “Wise Living,” “Using Time Wisely,” “A Life of Service,” and “Controlling our Money.” By God’s means of grace through His Word and Sacraments, we are enabled to live **life at its best**.

W. Phillip Keller in his book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, identifies seven attitudes essential to live the abundant life (**life at its best**).

1. Instead of loving myself most, I am willing to love Christ best and others more than myself.
2. Instead of being one of the crowd, I am willing to be singled out, set apart from the gang.
3. Instead of insisting on my rights, I am willing to forego them in favor of others.
4. Instead of being “boss,” I am willing to be at the bottom of the heap.
5. Instead of finding fault with life and always asking “Why?” I am willing to accept every circumstance of life in an attitude of gratitude.
6. Instead of exercising and asserting my will, I am willing to learn to cooperate with His wishes and comply with His will.
7. Instead of choosing my own way, I am willing to choose to follow in Christ’s way: simply to do what He asks me to do.

Mr. Keller goes on to say, that “God wants us to move on with Him. He wants us to walk with Him. He wants it not only for our welfare but for the benefit of others as well and God’s own dear reputation.” If we are willing and wanting to follow God, He will make this possible by the Holy Spirit Who is given to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32).

May God help us all live **life at its best**.

## **Worship Helps: "Life at its Best"**

### **Week 1: "Fellowship with God"**

#### Hymns:

"Christ is Our Cornerstone" (912)  
"Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing" (528)  
"Come, My Soul with Every Care" (779)

#### Readings:

Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 15:6-21  
New Testament Lesson 1 John 1:1-4  
Gospel: John 1:1-13

### **Week 2: "Wise Living"**

#### Hymns:

"Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word" (655)  
"We Walk by Faith and not by Sight" (720)  
"Thy Strong Word" (578)

#### Readings:

Old Testament Lesson: Proverbs 2:1-15  
New Testament Lesson: 2 Timothy 4:1-10  
Gospel: Matthew 7:24-29

### **Week 3: "Using Time Wisely"**

#### Hymns:

"Take My Life, and Let it Be" (784)  
"O God, Our Help in Ages Past" (733)  
"Holy Ghost, Creator Blest" (498)

#### Readings:

Old Testament Lesson: Psalm 31:14-18  
New Testament: Ephesians 5:15-21  
Gospel: Luke 10:38-42

### **Week 4: "A Life of Service"**

#### Hymns:

"Lord, Help Us Walk Your Servant Way" (857)  
"Son of God, Eternal Savior" (842)  
"Lord, Support Us All Day" (884)

#### Readings:

Old Testament: Exodus 35:30-6:7  
New Testament: Philippians 2:1-11  
Gospel: Luke 10:25-37

### **Week 5: "Controlling our Money"**

#### Hymns:

"The Temple Rang with Golden Coins" (787)  
"We Praise You, O God" (785)  
"Gracious God, You Send Great Blessings" (782)

#### Readings:

Old Testament: Joshua 24:14-15  
New Testament: 1 Timothy 6:6-10  
Gospel: Matthew 6:19-24

### **Week 6: "Shaping Lives through Obedience"**

#### Hymns:

"Sing Praise to God, the Highest Good" (879)  
"Lord, Take My hand and Lead Me" (722)  
"How Firm a Foundation" (728)

Old Testament: Deuteronomy 28:1-14  
New Testament: 1 John 2:1-6  
Gospel: Mark 12:28-33

### **Week 7: "Seeking Contentment"**

#### Hymns:

"The King of Love My Shepherd Is" (709)  
"Children of the Heavenly Father" (725)  
"Rejoice, My Heart, Be Glad and Sing" (737)

Old Testament: Ecclesiastes 2:1-11  
New Testament: Philippians 4:11-13  
Gospel: Matthew 6:25-34

### **Week 8: "Faithful Giving"**

#### Hymns:

"Forgive Us, Lord, for Shallow Thankfulness" (788)  
"Lord of Glory, You Have Bought Us" (851)  
"We Give Thee But Thine Own" (781)

Old Testament: 1 Chronicles 19:10-19  
New Testament: 2 Corinthians 8:1-7  
Gospel: Luke 12:13-21

### **Week 9: "Resisting Temptations"**

#### Hymns:

"Rise, My Soul to Watch" (663)  
"Be Strong in the Lord" (665)  
"Rise! To Arms! With Prayer Employ You" (668)

Old Testament: Genesis 3:1-15  
New Testament: James 1:12-18  
Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11

### **Week 10: "Letting God's Light Shine"**

#### Hymns:

"Spread the Reign of God the Lord" (830)  
"How Shall They Hear," Who Have Not Heard (831)  
"I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light" (411)

Old Testament: Psalm 119:105-112  
New Testament: 1 John 1:5-7  
Gospel: Matthew 6:14-16

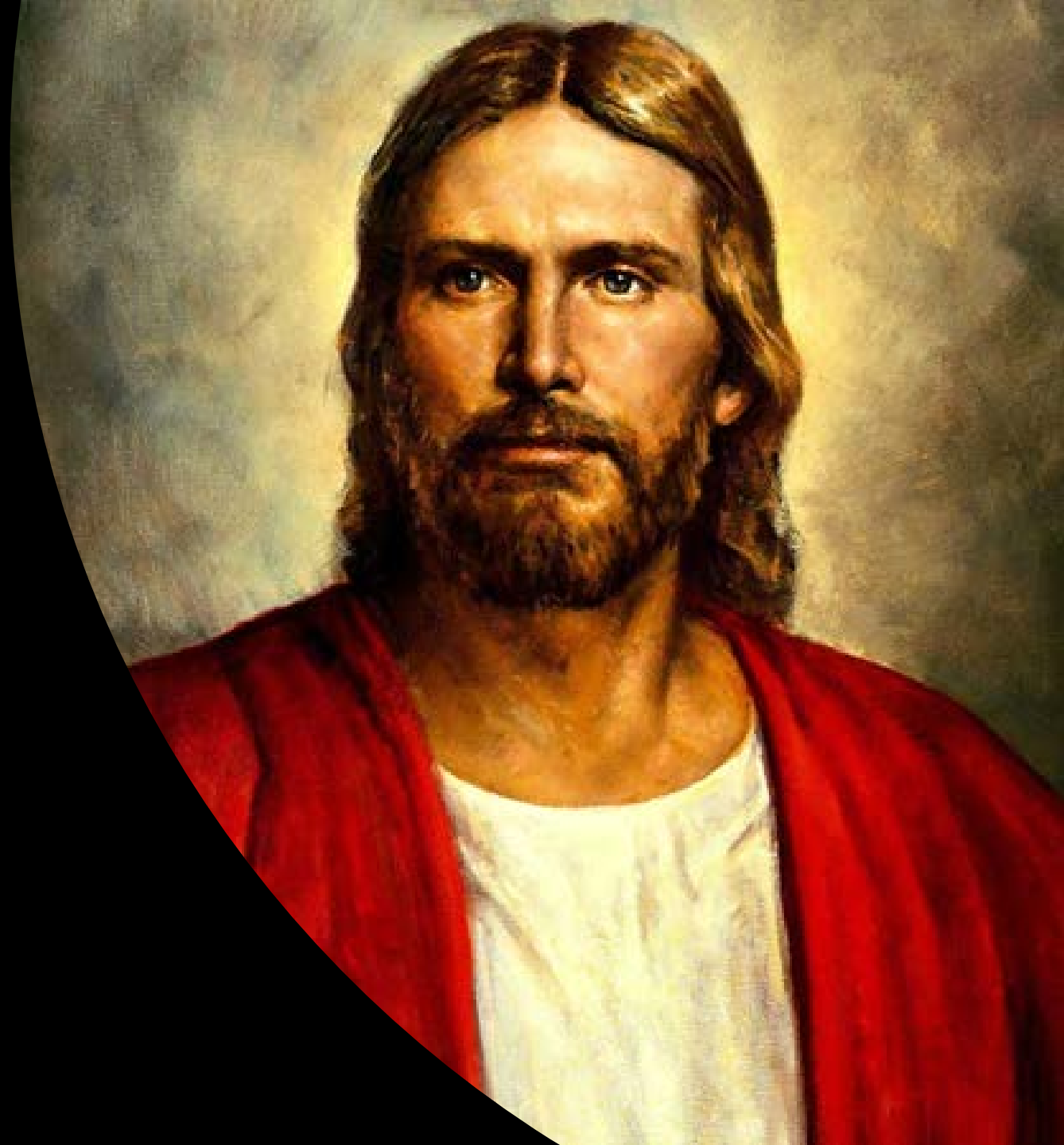


# Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World

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Week 1:

“Fellowship with God”



Bulletin messages, Week One: "Fellowship with God"

## **Life at its Best**

### **Week One: "Fellowship with God"**

*"O God, You are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for You, my body longs for You..."* (Psalm 63:1). These words that David, the psalmist, expressed so many thousands of years ago are as true now as they were then. Without "fellowship with God," we know something is missing, even though we may not know what it is. We search for satisfaction and fulfillment in the things the world has to offer and still find ourselves lacking. St. Augustine wrote, "...our hearts are restless till they find rest in [God]." God has created us to be whole only as we are in fellowship with Him.

Christ invites us, *"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls"* (Matthew 11:28-29). In order for us to live **life at its best**, we need fellowship with God. Today is the first-week in our ten-part sermon and Bible studies titled: **Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World**.

### **Life at its Best, Week One: "Fellowship with God"**

"Fellowship with God" is our focus for our first theme in the series **Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World**. As our fellowship with our heavenly Father grows, so does our ability to live **life at its best**. God desires fellowship with us even when we rebel against Him. *"But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8). There is no greater joy than experiencing a close fellowship with our heavenly Father. That fellowship is not only our joy, but our strength as well. Please join us next week when our theme will be "Wise Living."

### **Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World**

**CHRIST, WHO GAVE HIS LIFE FOR  
US ON CALVARY'S CROSS, WILL  
FILL THE VOID IN OUR SOULS.**

"And the peace of God, which transcends  
all understanding, will guard your hearts and  
your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).



Lay reader talk (week one)

## **Fellowship with God**

This is the first week of our sermon series **Life at its Best**. Our focus today is “Fellowship with God.” God created Adam and Eve and all mankind for fellowship. Unfortunately, the fellowship that God initiated with us was broken by our disobedience and sin. To restore His fellowship with us, God sent His Son into the world to bridge the gap that our disobedience created. Through the cleansing, redeeming blood of Jesus, our fellowship with God continues. In spite of our rebellion and our indifference, God continues to reach out to us through Word and Sacrament, maintaining His relationship with us.

We often don't understand what is lacking in our lives. Having achieved the status, the financial security, even family and friends we thought would fill the void in our lives, we still find that, in the words of St. Augustine, “...our hearts are restless till they find rest in [God].” It is fellowship with God that we need in order to live **life at its best**.

David expressed his longing for that fellowship in Psalm 63:1: *"O God, You are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for You, my body longs for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water."* A.W. Tozer wrote, "We pursue God because, and only because, He has first put an urge within us that spurs us to the pursuit." Christ invites us, *"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls"* (Matthew 11:28-29). We are invited into this fellowship with God through Jesus, and it is only through this fellowship that we can live **life at its best**.



## Children's Message (Week one)

### "Hanging Out"

Hello boys and girls. It is great seeing you today.

How many of you have a friend? When you "hang out" with your friend or friends, what do you do?

(wait for answers)

Isn't it nice that the more we "hang out" with our friends the more we get to know them? We discover what they like to do and what they don't like to do. We find out what is important and not important to them. We know when they are happy and sad. When we "hang out," we develop a relationship with them. A relationship is a mutual friendship or bond between two people.

Jesus loves us very, very much. Because He's our friend, He wants to "hang out" with us. What are some ways that we can "hang out" with Jesus?

- Being in church
- Being in Sunday school
- Praying
- Reading His Word
- Serving Him by serving others
- Keeping Him in our thoughts

Good answers

Thank you for being here today. Let's pray: Dear Jesus thank You for loving me and watching over me. Help me to want to "hang out" with You. Thank You for wanting to "hang out" with me. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

## Sermon for Week One: “Fellowship with God”

**Text: 1 John 1:3:** *“And our fellowship is with His Son, Jesus Christ.”*

Prayer: Dear gracious Father, we pray that, through Your Word and through Your Sacraments, You would touch our lives. Touch our hearts and our minds so that we would draw nearer to You. Lord, keep us in that faith through all of life into life everlasting, and we pray for Your blessings on our sermon series, **Life at its Best**, that we begin today.

May God’s mercy and His grace and His peace be multiplied to each one of you through our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus at the hearing of His Word. Amen.

The young man sat in the pastor’s office, a handsome young man, a young man who had lots of life still ahead of him, but also a very troubled young man. “I don’t get it,” he said, “everything seems to be going wrong in my life. It doesn’t seem to be happening to everybody else; why does it always happen to me?”

The pastor said, “Well, I think it’s something like this. Let’s assume that you just bought a brand-new car. You liked this car, you liked driving this new car, and the car looks beautiful. It’s so bright and shiny. It runs so well, and it’s very comfortable. If you open the glove compartment in the car, you’ll find a manual for this car. The manual has instructions on operating the car and taking care of it. Now, you can choose to ignore the manual, you could put it back, and you could just put gas in the car and drive it until the wheels fall off. You could do that if you like.”

The young man said, “Oh, I don’t need that manual. What do they know about cars? It’s my car, and I’ll take care of it and do with it whatever I want.” The pastor said, “Well, then, it isn’t too surprising that your life has turned out the way it has, is it?”

The pastor continued, “God created you; He’s your creator and designer. He’s given you a manual to follow, and He wants you to get the most mileage out of life that you possibly can. God has given you the power of Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. He wants to give you a new heart, a new life, to make you a new and better person. He wants you to have a special relationship with Him.”

“You see, He sees us as people who belong to Him, but, when He looks at us closely, He also sees us as people trying to go our own ways. We want to ignore the manual and chase after things—things that break down, things that rust, things that are easily destroyed, or lost, or disappear. Despite our focus on ourselves and our attempts to get what we want, He still is willing to love us and accept us as we are.”

“Because He loves us, He wants us to have the very best, the very richest life He has to give us. He wants to give us everything He has --- a life of peace, a life of joy, and a life of fulfillment instead of emptiness, happiness instead of sadness, a life of forgiveness instead of resentment or bitterness, a life of security instead of insecurity, a life that has eternal values rather than just temporary values. Unfortunately, very often we don’t want that. We’d rather be in charge of our own lives, thank You! We’ll determine what’s best for us, and that’s the way we’ll live our lives. If we want God to be part of our lives, that’s our choice. If we want something of God, maybe just a little bit, that’s O.K., but not too much God, mind you, because we don’t want God to crowd out our lifestyles in any way.”

So often we fail to see that everything will fail without God. It’s only God Himself Who can satisfy. Sometimes we have to learn that through very hard, very difficult lessons, in painful ways. Maybe sometimes, until we’re at the bottom, we don’t realize that God is the answer. Often, we think that our lives are good, and, most of the time, we don’t have a clue how empty and unfulfilled we really are without Him.

We're so busy with all the things in life that God doesn't even stand a chance of ever getting any closer to us.

When we do look for meaning and purpose in our lives, we often tend to look in the wrong places, in the wrong directions. Maybe we need a better job, a different place to live, some new toys in our lives, maybe even a new husband or wife, new family. Somehow, we don't ever seem to get it; we don't understand that we've been created by God to glorify Him, to serve Him, to have fellowship with Him. He created us for a relationship with Him.

We live in a world that wants to focus on all the power, position, prestige and everything that the world has to give to us. You see, we desperately need God, but, somehow, our old selfish rebellious natures don't want that. We don't want to recognize that; we want to fight against that. The sainted Billy Graham said, "The more knowledge we acquire, the less wisdom we seem to have. The more economic security we gain, the less secure we seem to become. The more pleasures we seem to enjoy, the less satisfied we are."

God is the only answer to all things in life. He is the answer to our confusion and our emptiness. Jesus said in Matthew 11, Come to Me with all your stuff and all your burdens and all your cares and concerns, all those kinds of things; cast them on Me, and I will give you rest.

**Life at its best** comes with a relationship with Christ Jesus. Jesus said, "*Apart from Me you can do nothing. I have come that [you] might have life, and have it to the full*" (John 15:5; 10:10). You see, God created us for fellowship with Him, to be loved by Him, and to love, to be served by Him, and to serve those around us. That fellowship is intended by God to be a relationship with Him, but it was destroyed by our sin. Sin brings darkness, darkness to our souls; it brings regret; it brings guilt; it brings shame. It hurts us and gets in the way of our relationships with God and with one another. We see that in our family lives. Families are broken down. We see issues in our lives that we have difficulty dealing with—abuse and road rage and assisted suicide and who knows what else. All kinds of barriers get in the way of our relationship with God. Our thinking becomes distorted; it's more self-centered than God-centered. Our tongues get us into all kinds of trouble for the words that they say. Our actions are often contrary to serving God and serving one another. When we're filled with ourselves, there is no room for God in our lives.

Of course, our world encourages us to be filled with ourselves. You should look after yourself; take care of yourself—you're #1! So, you should do whatever you want to do; just go for it and do it! Get everything you can, and so what if there is no room for God. Be strong, be courageous, be self-confident, self-sufficient! Be independent and do your own thing! Well, when we do that apart from God, we shut Him out of our lives. Then we open the door for lots of emptiness and unhappiness.

Isaiah 53 says, "*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way*" (Isaiah 53:6a). The life that Jesus Christ has to offer is a different kind of life. St Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me.*"

We live in a country that is known for having perhaps the highest average income of almost any country in the world. That means that we're surrounded with lots of worldly successes, so the stores and the restaurants cater to that which is upscale, and the focus seems to be on building bigger and bigger houses. There was a time when 1,000-square-foot house was adequate and acceptable. Now it must be a minimum of 2,000 square feet. There was a time when we only needed one bathroom; now we need two and a half or three bathrooms.

The world around us wants to draw our attention away from God. Jesus said we easily become choked up and drawn by all the cares and pleasures of this world. Sometimes, if we don't have it, we're consumed by



what somebody else has. It's called coveting! The commandment says how easily we covet what someone else has. We covet our neighbors' lifestyles, their houses, or their cars. Whatever they have we want to have for ourselves.

When confronted with the sin of coveting or with any of our sins, we often want to deny any responsibility. We can always find some other reason to justify or to blame it on. Lord, it was this person over here, or, if she hadn't said this or done that, then I wouldn't have reacted the way I did. A wise man, an elderly church member, once said to the pastor, "Which word do you think is the most difficult word in the English language to speak?" The pastor tried to come up with some tongue twisters, but none of them was the right answer. Finally, the man said, "Have you ever noticed how hard it is to get someone to say, 'I'm wrong'?" We want to deny all responsibilities; we hide, and we blame someone else. The game is as old as Adam and Eve. When God confronted Adam and Eve, Adam first blamed Eve and then God Himself. "God," he said, "it's Your fault, because You sent this woman into my life." Then, of course, Eve blamed the serpent, and we continue to this day to blame one another. You know what we blame today? Our genes! Not the kind that you wear, but human genes—the kind inside of us. We want to blame genes for obesity, for dysfunctional families, for homosexuality, for criminal behavior, for temper tantrums, and for so many other issues in our lives.

To confess our sin is not easy. In fact, it takes a lot of risks, and it takes a lot of trust. A child who trusts the love of his parents is far more likely to confess his wrongs, his sins. As we think about confessing our sins, we must remember that we can go to our heavenly Father, and we can trust Him. He loves us in spite of our sins, and His love overcomes all our fears of rejection and punishment and whatever. His love is there for us always. His love is proven by his death on the cross. Because of His great love for us, we can trust in Him no matter what. We can trust in Him for forgiveness, for new life, for salvation. That's where our restoration begins our new relationship with God in Christ Jesus, our new fellowship with Him. It opens the door to wholeness and hope. It opens the door to new life of encouragement and freedom and happiness. It opens the door to a living relationship with Him as our Lord and Savior. It opens the door to living **life at its best**.

The evangelist Dwight Moody once told a story that took place in the horse-and-buggy days. He'd been invited to preach in a rural area in a mid-western state. He took the train to the nearest town, and there he was met by the local pastor in a horse and buggy. Riding along, they met another horse and buggy coming toward them. In the other buggy were a young man driving the horse and beside him, an older woman with gray hair. These two people both waved at the pastor and the evangelist, and they had these big smiles for them. The evangelist Moody said, "Those people are smiling at you as if they know you. What's the story here? Who are they?" The pastor said, "That's the finest young man that I know, and the gray-haired woman sitting next to him is his mother. His father was an alcoholic, and, ultimately, they lost the farm because of the father's alcoholism. When the father died, they had to sell the farm to pay off the debts and pay for the funeral expenses. There was no money left whatsoever. The wife didn't have any place to live and had no way to support herself. She had to go to a place over the hill which was known as the poorhouse and that's where she lived. The son was twelve years old at the time. He got a job stocking shelves in the grocery store in the village. He worked hard all day long; at night he'd study and read. He saved up every penny, as much as he possibly could. Eventually, he became somewhat successful and became a clerk at the bank in the village. When he was 25 years old, he bought the farm back. He took over the farm, fixed the roof, painted the house, and furnished it the best he possibly could. He bought a team of horses and a good buggy, and one day he rode over the hill to the poor house. He went to get his mother and he said, "Mother, here it is; it's all yours." The mother broke down in tears and said, "That can't be. There's no way; we had to give that all up." "Mother," he said, "I bought it all back; it's yours. Here's the deed to the farm with your name on it. It's yours, all yours."

This is an illustration of what was lost by our sin but was restored by Christ Jesus through our fellowship with Him. We broke that relationship with Him, and, as a result, we lost our eternal life. Then came Jesus Christ. He worked very hard. He labored a lot. He lived and died for us. He bought it all back. In doing so, He took away all our sins and brought us into a new relationship with Him as our Lord and Savior. Now it's ours; it's all paid for forever, world without end.

We have been separated from God by our sins. We also lived in the poorhouse, but God went over the hill for us, over the hill of Calvary to pay the price for all our sins. Now we can have fellowship with Him - intimacy with Him once and for all. Now we have it all. We have been created with a purpose: to have a relationship, to love Him, and to serve Him and enjoy fellowship with Him.

Scripture is very clear about the need for intimacy, for a relationship with Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. When we fully depend on Him and trust in Him, we will enjoy **life at its best**. Our heavenly Father offers us the right hand of fellowship; He gives it to us so that we can live **life at its best** by the power of His Holy Spirit.

In His name. Amen.

## **Life at its Best**

### **Bible Study, Week One: “Fellowship with God”**

**Prayer:** Dear good and gracious Heavenly Father, thank You for Your grace that gives us **life at its best** today and life forever with You. We pray that You will continue to bless us with Your grace, love, and mercy. Help us to fix our eyes on Jesus our Rock and Redeemer. Bless this study that we are about to begin and use this time to draw us closer to You. In Jesus’ precious and holy name, we pray. Amen.

1. Read John 10:10. What does God want for you? How is this possible?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 15:9-11. Why is God’s grace so necessary in order for you to have fellowship with God? What were the Apostle Paul’s qualifications for this fellowship? How important is God’s grace to live **life at its best**?
3. Read Psalm 42:1-2; 63:1-5. How did David express his longings for God?
4. Read John 15:5. How is your connection to God illustrated?
5. Read Colossians 2:6-15. What obstructs your relationship with Jesus? What did Jesus do about these obstructions?
6. Read 2 Timothy 2:22. In order to maintain fellowship with God, what are you to pursue?
7. Read Genesis 3. What happened to Adam and Eve when they became disconnected from God?
8. Read Matthew 14:27-30. What caused Peter to sink in the water? Why is this relevant to **life at its best**?
9. Read Luke 12:13-21; 18:18-30. What prevented the farmer and the Ruler from fellowship with God?
10. Read Jeremiah 29:13. What did God promise?

Questions for further Discussion:

11. What is the difference in knowing about God and having fellowship with Him?
12. How can material things affect your relationship with Jesus?
13. How can you stay in fellowship with God?
14. Why did God create mankind?
15. As sinners, why and how would God seek a fellowship with you?

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the opportunity that we had to study Your Word. Place in us a thirst and a hunger to be in Your Word each and every day. Thank You for seeking fellowship with each of us and help us to live **life at its best** for Your glory. In Jesus’ name. Amen.



## Week One: Wrapping Up: “Fellowship with God”

God has given life to each of us, and He is to be our only God (Exodus 20:3). He has given us a free will, and, with that free will, we can choose to ignore Him as the Lord of our lives. Those who choose to go their own ways will be lost eternally! Without God, we may experience periods of worldly happiness, but we will not find lasting peace and harmony. God created us for His purposes. When we are in fellowship with Him, those purposes will be fulfilled!

Scripture is very clear about our need to have an intimate relationship with Christ. In spite of all the admonitions and guidance we receive in God’s Word and from friends and pastors, many of us still fail to live faithful, God-pleasing lives. When we fully depend upon and trust in Him, we will enjoy **life at its best**.

Our dependence on the Lord gives us His power to accomplish the tasks He places before us. God’s presence in our lives enables us to handle life’s most difficult obstacles. *“Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint”* (Isaiah 40:30-31). The Lord gives us strength to face our daily tasks and the courage to go forward.

Through Jesus, we are given full rights as sons and daughters. God has adopted us into His family in Holy Baptism.

*But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir* (Galatians 4:4-7).

Our heavenly Father extends His right hand of fellowship to us, His Children, and His Spirit fills our hearts with peace and joy enabling us to live **life at its best**.

The definition of **life at its best** can be stated in different ways:

- The response of faith
- Thankfulness for divine goodness and mercy
- The joyful expression of lives lived in fellowship with our Lord

As we live our lives in honor and reverence unto the Lord we lay *“...a firm foundation for the coming age, so that [we] may take hold of the life that is truly life”* (1 Timothy 6:19).

### ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS

<u>LIFE-ENRICHING</u>	<u>LIFE-DESTROYING</u>
Intimacy with God	Aloneness
Dependence on God	Independence
Stewardship	Ownership
Wisdom	Information
Knowledge	Facts
Viewing life as a trust	Going for the gusto
Living for eternity	Living for the moment
God and I	I, me, mine
Repentance	Remorselessness
Bible reading and prayer	Busyness
Humility	Pride

## Bible Study 1: Answer guide for “Fellowship with God”

1. God wants us to live life to the “full,” “abundantly,” or to live **life at its best**. Satan comes to steal our joy, kill our faith, and destroy our hope. Jesus comes so that we may live **life at its best**. To live **life at its best** is a gift from God. The Holy Spirit changes our hearts, and we respond to God’s invitation to have fellowship with Him. **Life at its best** is living in a relationship with Jesus.
2. 1 Corinthians 15:9-11. On our own, we don’t even desire, much less can we attain fellowship with God. By grace, God gives us life and all things. It is by grace that God reaches out to us and accepts us in our sinful state to be His children. Paul wrote that he was “*unworthy to be called an apostle*.” With a transformed heart and by God’s grace, he served God with all his heart. God’s grace makes **life at its best** possible.
3. Psalm 42:1-2. “*As the deer pants for flowing streams of water, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*”  
Psalm 63:1-5. “Earnestly I seek You.”  
“My soul thirsts for You.”  
“My flesh faints for You.”
4. John 15:5. Jesus is the Vine. We, as the branches, are connected to Jesus the Vine. Our connection to Jesus gives us spiritual life and enables us to live **life at its best**.
5. Colossians 2:6-15. We are to be aware of and stay away from false teachings. The flesh, the world, and Satan tempt us to sever our relationship with Jesus. In Christ, through Baptism, the old self was drowned, and the new creation was raised. “*God made [us] alive in Christ.*”
6. 2 Timothy 2:22. Pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, and fellowship with other believers.
7. Genesis 3. They hid from God. Adam blamed Eve for their sin. Eve blamed the serpent for being deceived.
8. Matthew 14:27-30. When Peter took his eyes and focus off Jesus, he sank. When our time, energy, and attention is focused on Jesus, we can live **life at its best**.
9. Luke 12:13-21. The Rich Fool sought wealth so he could eat, drink, and be merry. He gave God no credit for his success nor was he interested in helping others.  
Luke 18:18-30. Money was the Rich Ruler’s god. He walked away from the wealth that Jesus wanted to give him.
10. Jeremiah 29:13. God promised that we would find Him when we seek Him with our whole hearts.
11. We can have knowledge of God without a relationship with Him.
12. Material things can become overly important and become a priority in our lives. They can become a god as money did with the Rich Young Ruler. On the positive side, though, when our money becomes a tool in reaching others with the Gospel, our relationship with Jesus can be strengthened.
13. Spend time reading and studying God’s Word. Attend church regularly and participate in the Lord’s Supper. Pray continuously. Have fellowship with believers.
14. God created us for relationships, first and foremost with our Heavenly Father
15. God’s nature is to love. He sent His Son, Jesus, to reconcile us with Him. God wants all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4).

## Sunday, Week One, “Fellowship with God”

### *Focusing on God*

*“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus...” (Hebrews 12:2).*

To live “life at its best” our focus must be on God, Who is always there waiting for us. St. Matthew in his Gospel records that when Jesus’ disciple Peter first started walking on the water toward Jesus, he was successful. *“But Jesus immediately said to them: ‘Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.’ ‘Lord, if it’s You,’ Peter replied, ‘tell me to come to you on the water.’ ‘Come,’ He said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’”* (Matthew 14:27-30).

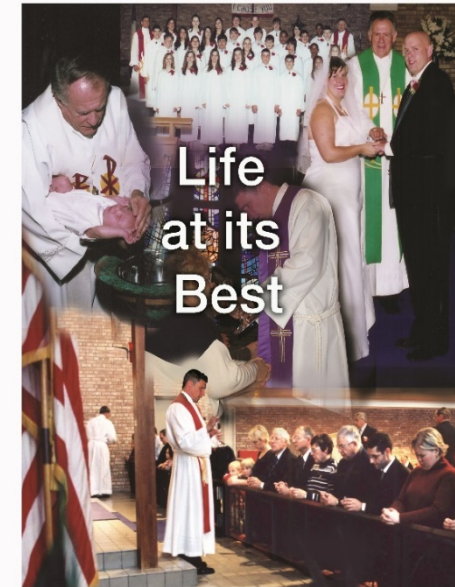


While Peter focused on Jesus, he was fine. Only when Peter started to doubt Jesus and began to think about his own circumstances did he have problems. Peter’s faith faltered when he no longer gave Jesus his full attention. When we become too proud or when we become fearful, we may lose our focus on Christ. We can expect to go down like Peter when we focus on self or on things around us rather than on the Lord.

Jesus, during His life on earth, called His followers to righteousness, loving service, obedience, and sacrifice. Even if we were able to fulfill that calling, we know through God’s Word that we cannot earn or win anything from God through our own efforts. In Isaiah 64:6 we read, *“.... all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”* When our hearts are humble and our spirits contrite, when we come with nothing to offer, the Holy Spirit draws us into closer fellowship with God as He pours out His unconditional love on us.

Jesus Christ came to earth for our redemption. He lived the perfect life for us. Through His atoning sacrifice on the cross, Jesus reconciled us with His heavenly Father. Through faith, His righteousness is imputed to us. Jesus said, *“...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”* (John 10:10). We live “life at its best” when we bear witness to His life, so that others might know Him as Lord and Savior.

Prayer: Dear Father, help me to focus only on You. Amen.



## *Daily Devotions* *for the whole family!*

### *Week 1*

#### **“Fellowship with God”**

Monday	“God Reaches Out to Us”
Tuesday	“Living with Christ at the Center”
Wednesday	“Understanding our Need for God”
Thursday	“Seeking and Depending on God”
Friday	“Intimacy with God”
Saturday	“Knowing God”
Sunday	“Focusing on God”

## Monday, Week One: “Fellowship with God”

### *God Reaches Out to Us*

*“He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will” (Ephesians 1:5).*

God calls each of us into fellowship with Him through His Son, Jesus, giving us the opportunity to live “life at its best.” God desires this fellowship with us even when we rebel against Him. *“But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).* There is nothing that can break this fellowship with us that God initiates and nurtures. (Romans 8:38-39).

God brings all kinds of experiences, pleasant and painful, into our lives in order to draw us closer to Him and shape us into the people He wants us to be. The closer our relationship with God, the more Christ-like we become.



We will find satisfaction, joy, and purpose in life. God’s unconditional love, even while He is “pruning” us (John 15:2), shows us how to live “life at its best.”

There is no greater joy than experiencing a close fellowship with Christ. That oneness is not only our joy, but our strength as well. Sometimes, we foolishly

think we can handle the stresses of life by ourselves. To teach us to rely on His strength, God may even allow us to fail. Then we rejoice, for *“[Christ’s] power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).*

God seeks fellowship with us in spite of our sinfulness. He sees our attempts at independence. He sees our desire for worldly things. In spite of what he sees, He is willing to accept us as we are because of Christ’s act of reconciliation. We are acceptable to God because Christ has made us acceptable. Because of His love, God desires intimacy with us. God does not wait for us to come to Him; He comes to us in His Holy Word and Sacraments. Christ has broken down the walls of alienation and has put an end to our loneliness. On our behalf, God sent Jesus, Who is *“the way and the truth and the life”* and the only way to the Father (John 14:6).

Prayer: Dear Father, thank You for seeking a relationship with me. Because of Your grace and love, I can live “life at its best.” In the name of Jesus my Lord and Savior, I pray. Amen.

## Tuesday: Week One: “Fellowship with God

### *Living with Christ at the Center*

*“...Choose this day whom you will serve...But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).*

We can make the choice of being alone, without God. We can make the choice of keeping Him in the margins of our lives, or, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to live with Christ at the center. Only God will satisfy us; everything else will fail us. Many of us need to discover how empty and how unhappy we are without Him. Tragically, many of us do not realize how desolate and unfulfilled we are. Keeping ourselves busy—albeit productively—we do not allow ourselves opportunity to explore the emptiness within. When, finally, we come to the end of ourselves and choose to stop rejecting God, we discover that He is there waiting for us.

Almost as tragically, many of us believers live as “Sunday Christians,” going about our daily lives with Christ on the periphery. We trade God’s *“abundant goodness”* (Psalm 145:7), choosing instead the privilege of running our own lives. There is an old saying: “If God seems far away, guess who has moved.” He is always close to us—even though we do not know it. When our lives start to unravel through various circumstances, God is present to restore that frayed relationship He has with us. His Spirit leads us to long for Him, as Isaiah the Prophet did: *“My soul yearns for You in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for You...”* (Isaiah 26:9a). Jesus promised that He Himself would satisfy us: *“...whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst”* (John 4:14a).

With Christ at the center of our lives, our thirst is quenched by His “living water.” *“Indeed, the water [He gives us] will become in [us] a spring of water welling up to eternal life”* (John 4:14b). Our perspective changes from an earthly, temporal one to a heavenly eternal one.

As God’s people, we must always realize that what happens within us is more important than what happens to us. If we want to know what God is like, we can look at Jesus. If someone wants to know what Jesus is like, he should be able to look at His followers. Can people see Christ in you?



Prayer: Dear good and gracious Heavenly Father, help me to place my love and trust in You so I can live “life at its best.” Use me as Your channel of grace, love, and mercy. In Jesus name, I pray. Amen.



## Wednesday, Week One: "Fellowship with God"

### *Understanding our Need for God*

*"Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4).*

For generations, we have been obsessed with searching for meaning and purpose in our lives. Wherever we live, whatever we do for a living, we are looking for significance in life. Unfortunately, in our efforts to "find ourselves," we often go the wrong direction. Some of us will never come to understand that we have been created to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. As Christians, we believe that God has given us life, and that life in Him gives us meaning and purpose throughout eternity.

We live in a society that tells us that power, fame, and fortune are the keys to satisfying our needs and achieving success. We are told that to achieve happiness and success, we need to focus on "self." Many who have succeeded according to the world's standards have stated their lack of satisfaction with what the world offers. Lee Iacocca said, "Fame and fortune are for the birds." Mohammed Ali complained: "I had the world, and it was nothing." A Texas millionaire once said, "I thought money could buy happiness." He found that he was wrong. A famous film star broke down and said: "I have money, beauty, glamour, and popularity. I should be the happiest woman in the world, but I am miserable. Why?"



One of life's greatest illusions is that life is great when "self" is at the center and that satisfaction is gained from acquiring things of the world. Ted Turner said, "When money is your god, you are never going to be fulfilled, you are never going to be happy, because no matter how much you have, it is never enough." By nature, we look for peace, joy, and happiness in the wrong places (Jeremiah 2:13). Those who spend their lifetimes chasing power and success will find themselves all alone at some point. Why? Because. . .

- True success is not found in material things of the world.
- True success is not found in having status or power in the eyes of the world.
- True success is found when, by the power of the Holy Spirit, God is at the center of our lives.

Prayer: Dear Father, grant me wisdom to know that I need You. Empower me to follow Your ways so I can live "life at its best." Amen.

## Thursday, Week One: "Fellowship with God"

### *Seeking and Depending on God*

*"The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge..." (Psalm 18:2).*

God promised, *"You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart"* (Jeremiah 29:13). Our journey in life is a continual quest for God. He is the only answer to the confusion, the lack of morality, the spiritual void in the world in which we live. A.W. Tozer wrote, "We pursue God because, and only because, He has first put an urge within us that spurs us to the pursuit." We live in uncertain times, and only God is enduring and unchanging. *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever"* (Hebrews 13:8). Christ wants to be our source of strength. He continues to welcome us: *"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls"* (Matthew 11:28-29).

Our major pursuit in life needs to be our relationship with the Lord. The depth of our fellowship with God determines the direction our lives will take. The response that God is looking for is our longing for Him. We need to get rid of our pride and dependence on ourselves so that we might possess the peace that only He can provide.

In Matthew 6:33, Jesus told His disciples, *"Seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* With the "horse before the cart," so to speak, we do not hinder God in the work He does in and through us. Our problems are caused by ignoring God. Our problems are caused by chasing after the pleasures of the world. When we don't seek God first in our lives, we are spiritually empty and without purpose. We will not find fulfilling answers to "what" and "who" we are and "where" we are going. Pursuits other than a close relationship with God will lead us into frenzied activities which will not satisfy our souls' deepest desires. *"Seek the Lord while He may be found"* (Isaiah 55:6a),

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, You are my maker and redeemer. Fill me with a need to depend on You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



## Friday, Week One: “Fellowship with God”

### *Intimacy with God*

*“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).*

Christ, Who gave His life for us on Calvary’s Cross, will fill the void in our souls. Nothing else on earth will satisfy us. If God is our obsession, He will satisfy our longings and bring us peace of mind. We all possess a spiritual hunger, although we may not feel the hunger pangs. We may think we have filled it, but, apart from God, there is no quenching of our spiritual hunger and thirst. King David said in Psalm 42:1-2, *“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?”* We all yearn to know that we are not alone. King David not only knew of God’s presence, he longed for His presence in his life.

As God’s people, we, like David, find our happiness and sustenance in an intimate relationship with Him. After all, we are His children. (Galatians 3:26). The whole world cannot fill the emptiness that exists in us without God. A relationship with God begins with acknowledging that God has made us and all creation. He was in the beginning and still is today. He redeems us through the blood of His Son and sanctifies us through the Holy Spirit working through Word and Sacrament. Our relationship with the Lord sustains and keeps us.

For our lives to be complete, we need to remain in fellowship with Him. If we become disconnected from Him, life will be empty and incomplete. We will never be truly satisfied unless we are in communion with God. Our souls, in a state of hunger, are drawn to Him. St. Augustine said, “Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.” God created us for Himself. We long for Him all our lives long. Our only true satisfaction and sustenance come from Him. Charles Spurgeon said, “Without the Spirit of God, we can do nothing. We are as ships without wind, or chariots without steeds; like branches without sap, we are withered; like coals without fire, we are useless.”

Prayer: Dear Lord, fill my emptiness with Your Spirit and may I always feel your presence as I live “life at its best.” Amen.

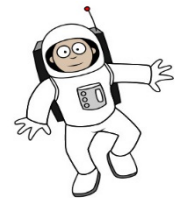


## Saturday, Week One: “Fellowship with God”

### *Knowing God*

*“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God” (1 John 4:7).*

In a press conference, a Russian cosmonaut followed that atheist country’s party line by saying that when he was in space, he didn’t see any evidence of God. One of our American astronauts, in a press conference about a year later, was reminded of what the Russian had said and was asked, “Did you see any evidence of God?” The American astronaut replied, “I didn’t see anything else.”



To live “life at its best” is to know God. We may know of or about God as even Satan and evil spirits do (Luke 4:33-34). We may see Him in His creation and experience His goodness. The most important thing, however, is for us to know Him personally. To know God intimately is more than an intellectual understanding or a philosophical awareness. To know Christ is to know God. “If you really knew Me,” Christ told the disciples, “you would know My Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him” (John 14:7).

To know God intimately is to know He has a plan for our lives. His plan gives purpose and true meaning to life. Christ came to restore God’s purpose in our lives. He came to bring us back into the living fellowship with our heavenly Father which had been destroyed by sin (Isaiah 59:2). It is only in Christ and through Christ that we can approach God and have a relationship with Him.

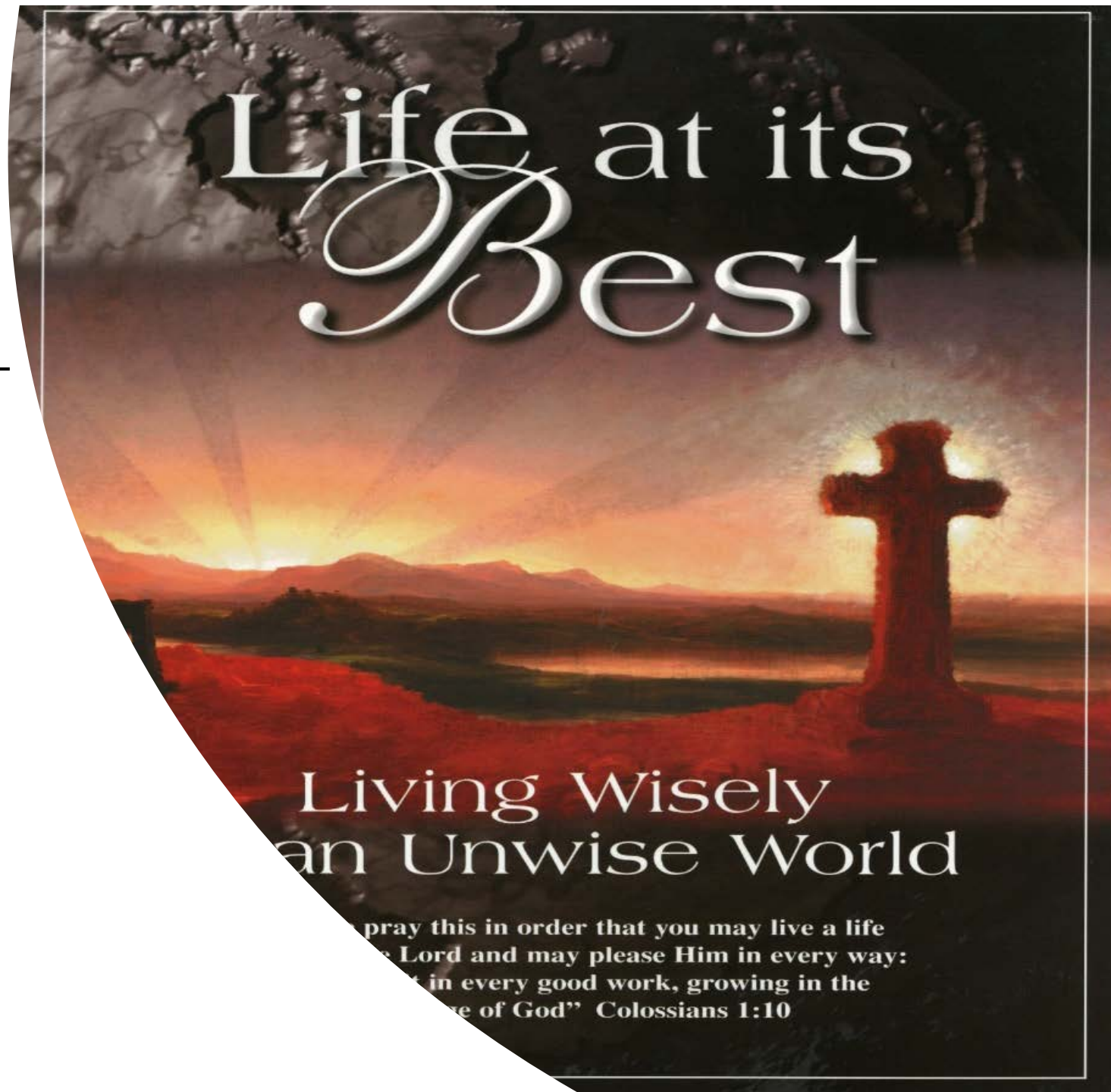
Because of what Jesus has done for us, we are redeemed people with infinite value. We know God through Christ Who became flesh. Our inherent value does not come from who we are, but from Whose we are. “See, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands” (Isaiah 49:16a). God pours out His love upon us as a father pours out love upon his children. God’s love is consistent and unwavering. Christians are people who believe that our lives are good gifts from God. We live our lives in response to God’s marvelous love shown on the cross.

Prayer: Father, help me know You and draw closer to You. Amen.

# Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World

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## Week 2: “Wise Living”



## Bulletin Messages, Week Two: “Wise Living”

### **Life at its Best, Week Two: “Wise Living”**

The theme for this week is “Wise Living,” which is an art at which we'd all like to become proficient. Proverbs 9:10a points out, *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”* True wisdom comes from knowing the Author of Wisdom, our Lord. He will help us to see His perspective as we turn away from the wisdom of the world, which is foolishness in God's sight (1 Corinthians 3:19), and seek His gift of wisdom, revealed to us by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament. God's wisdom offers us an eternal perspective and with His wisdom we can live **life at its best**. Please join us next week when our theme will be “Using Time Wisely.”

### **Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World**

**AS CHRISTIANS, WE TRUST IN THE WISDOM OF GOD, NOT IN OUR OWN WISDOM.**

“Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it’” (Isaiah 30:21).





Lay reader talk (week two)

## Wise Living

The focus for this week is “wise living” as we continue in our sermon series **Life at its Best**. In Proverbs 3:13-14 we read, *"Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold."* Throughout Scripture, and especially in the book of Proverbs, the virtue of wisdom is extolled. It would be beneficial to us, then, to concentrate on “wise living” as we seek to live **life at its best**.

How do we gain that wisdom that Solomon wrote about? We learn from Proverbs 9:10 that *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."* Proverbs 2:6 points out that *"...the Lord gives wisdom, and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding."* Our God, Creator of all good things, is also willing and eager to give us all these things, including the gift of wisdom.

For how many of us is “wise living” a goal? We pursue health, wealth, power, and success. Where on our lists of priorities is a desire for “wise living”? In our acquisition of facts, information, and knowledge, are we gaining wisdom as well? How does Godly wisdom compare with worldly wisdom?

When Solomon, renowned through the ages for his great wisdom, became king, God told him to ask for whatever he wanted. Solomon requested, *"So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people..."* (1 Kings 3:9). A chapter later, in 1 Kings 4:29-30, we read, *"God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt."* That same wisdom is available to us. James 1:5 exhorts us, *"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, Who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him."*

May God help each of to live wisely, so we can live **life at its best**.

Children's message (week two)

Wise or Foolish

Hello boys and girls! How is everyone today? Today we are going to talk about living wisely. Did you know that God's wisdom is different than the wisdom of the world? God's wisdom is perfect and everlasting. As God's children, we want to follow His wisdom.

I want to ask you some questions.

Do you think that brushing your teeth is wise or foolish?

Do you think it is wise or foolish to hit your brother or sister when they won't share their toys?

Is it wise or foolish to yell at your mom when she tells you to go to bed?

Is it wise or foolish to help your neighbors when they need help?

Is it wise or foolish to pray before you eat?

Is it wise or foolish to go to church each week?

God loves us and wants the best for us. His wisdom is for our good. God promises us that He will give us wisdom when we ask for it.

Let's pray and ask God for His wisdom:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for loving me so much. Help me to want Your wisdom. Help me to follow and use Your wisdom. In Jesus' holy and precious name I pray. Amen.

## Sermon for Week Two: "Wise Living"

**Text:** 2 Timothy 4:7: *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."*

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I want to begin our second sermon message focusing on **Life at its Best** by introducing a phrase that intrigues me the longer I live. The phrase is simple "finishing well." When I witness someone finishing well in just about anything, it always stirs in me a desire to imitate. Finishing well doesn't mean winning in the sense of beating everyone else. Rather, finishing well means crossing the finish line having done your best, having given your all, having maintained your values, having not lost sight of your goal.

Perhaps you've known or heard of someone, gifted in many areas, but not especially so in the realm of hand/body coordination. Yet, this person had a desire to run, even to compete in running, so he faithfully worked out. He worked hard. He competed in some of the local marathons. He didn't win or place in any. In fact, he finished dead last nearly always, but he never gave up. In one race at least, he was so far behind that they were tearing down the equipment as he crossed the finish line where his competitors and the remaining crowd gave him a heartfelt ovation. They believed he had finished well.

Finishing well can apply to the individual matters of life. It could mean not letting down as you finish a job with one company, having taken a better offer with another company. It might mean taking notes on the last day of class. It is as simple as cleaning up after you have finished the project. There are many individual matters in life in which we can demonstrate our desire to finish well. When we finish well, we can live **life at its best**. This will be our theme for the next few weeks.

The place where finishing well is most attractive to me and most impressive to me is at the end of life, and that is the focus of this message. I want you to think about your life in terms of "finishing well." I see this concept in the Old Testament in a man named Moses:

*Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone. The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over" (Deuteronomy 34:7-8).*

Moses finished well. "His eyes were not weak." This could mean he had 20/20 eyesight, but could this also mean that Moses had not lost perspective throughout his life? He did not lose his edge. There were many things he still wanted to do up to his dying day. "His strength was not gone." Beyond physical strength, might this mean he kept the strength of his convictions and they were like a furnace within, fueling his life? "The Israelites grieved for Moses." This seems to indicate his influence. He had impacted many lives. He had left a legacy.

In the New Testament, I see another man intent on finishing well. His name was Paul He said, *"Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14).*

Paul was like Moses. He saw clearly what was ahead and he had determined in his heart that he wanted to finish well. His desire to finish well produced an alertness and an energy in his life. He would not let up until he crossed the finish line. Certainly, he knew how to live **life at its best**.

In our own current century, I think of people like Jimmy Carter, who was our 39<sup>th</sup> President, as an example of someone who is finishing well. His eyes have not become dim. He has not let politics cloud his vision for the need to be personally involved in humanitarian work with Habitat for Humanity. He is

introspective, taking time to consider God's Word daily with his wife, Rosalyn, and then weekly in a Bible Study he has led for years in his church in Plains, Georgia.

What about the opposite? I have seen the opposite of finishing well demonstrated in the Bible and in contemporary life as well. Solomon finished his life poorly. He had so much: *"All King Solomon's goblets were gold, and all the household articles in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon were pure gold. Nothing was made of silver, because silver was considered of little value in Solomon's days. King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth"* (1 Kings 10:21, 23).

Wealth, splendor, notoriety, and the friendship of God—Solomon had it all. Yet, he didn't finish well. He let things slip in his life. He lost track of what was important.

*The Lord became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, Who had appeared to him twice. Although He had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the Lord's command. So the Lord said to Solomon, "Since this is your attitude and you have not kept My covenant and My decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates"* (1 Kings 11:9-11).

Solomon didn't finish well because he lost his perspective and became lukewarm about his values and convictions. His legacy was immediate civil war in the nation after his death.

I think of a lot of great men in our day who have had legacies wrested from them because they did not calculate what it takes to finish well:

Pete Rose had one of the greatest baseball careers going but didn't finish well. He was barred from the Hall of Fame because gambling became more important than loyalty to his team and his sport.

Bill Clinton was in his second term, riding the wave of an incredible economy and out-flanking the Republican Party time and time again, yet he chose not to finish well as President. He embarrassed the Office, his family, and the Nation through indiscretion and lying. When the history books condense Bill Clinton's legacy into paragraphs, they will include the word "impeached."

Both the Bible and contemporary life show people who finished well and those who finished poorly.

How about you and me? None of us knows how long we have left on this planet. Will you finish well? Are you determined to finish well in life like Moses, or will you let your life slide like Solomon?

Maybe you haven't thought about this much. You're in the midst of life—always running, always trying to keep up with all the commitments at work, at home, at church, in the community. Sometimes you feel as if all you are doing is grinding it out from day to day. So many people share with me how busy they are, how weary they are, how they are just coping to get done what needs to be done for that day, that week, that fiscal quarter.

I want you to think in terms of finishing life on earth well. Is this a new way of thinking, a new perspective? Is it too audacious? Don't be overwhelmed by this. It is what makes life exciting. It's what is meant by living **life at its best**. God has saved you for such a perspective. God sent His Son to save you from your sins and the fear that death has determined that you will finish poorly in life. Because Christ rose from the dead and has included you in that resurrection, you can live your life now by faith that what you do with your life today is important to God. In Christ, you know God is for you. In Christ, God has instilled in you an eternal perspective. In Christ, your perspective is different than the one you



had without Christ. Because Christ has saved you, you desire to live your life in a way that demonstrates the high calling of grace that says you are the eternal child of God.

You see, God your Father wants to say to you at the end of your life, "*Well done, good and faithful servant.*" Imagine God saying to you, "You finished well. Very well." Doesn't thinking about that make you shiver?

It is the forgiveness of God in Christ that gives us assurance that we can finish well. If finishing well were based on our performance, we all would have grave expectations, but we live in the grace of Christ, Who has forgiven us our sins. God loves us now, not just at the finish line of life. It is already determined that the God Who loves you now is the God Who will love you at the finish line, because Christ finished well for you. What zest this brings to my life! What excitement this creates for **wise living!**

Don't let life grind you down to the point where you become bitter or hardened or cynical. God wants you to finish well. Let's give ourselves afresh to the God Who gave Himself completely for us and, with a renewed desire, maximize our lives right up to the point where we meet the radiant face of the Savior Who finished well for each one of us.

What does it mean for a Christian to finish life well? Let me try to give you a perspective on what that means.

1. The Christian man or woman who finishes well maintains a personal vibrant relationship with God right up to the end.

**[Use an example here of someone you know—possibly a family member, friend, neighbor, co-worker, church member, etc.)**

2. The Christian who finishes well maintains a learning posture and learns from many sources—especially from life. Those who finish well seek opportunities to be life-long learners. A wise learner knows that knowledge provides facts and information, but it does not answer the "why" or "for what purpose." Knowledge does not help us in times of crisis, despair, or loneliness. Knowledge combined with a fear—awesome respect—of the Lord is wisdom, and wisdom is the key to transforming panic into peace, stress into serenity, and chaos into control. The person who finishes well in life fears the Lord and never stops attending the school of life and the school of God's Word, resulting in godly wisdom.

3. The Christian who finishes well maintains the eternal values of God evidenced in terms of one's character. This is a matter of the heart. Proverbs 4:23 reads, *"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."* Your character will never rise beyond the flow level of your obedience to the Holy Spirit's dealings with your own heart. Although your standard of character is outlined in God's Word and expressed through the person of Christ, the substance of character is fashioned by the accumulated responses of the heart to the Spirit's daily work in your life. Finishing well is a result of daily seeking God's direction as you follow His plan for your life.

4. The Christian man or woman who finishes well lives out truth in life such that his/her convictions and the promises of God are seen to be real. Life places us in situations that test our faith. In these circumstances, God, through His Holy Word and Sacraments, will supply the strength and resolve we need to remain faithful, the strength, and resolve to live **life at its best**.

**(Should you wish to do so, insert an example from your personal experience here.)**

5. Finally, the Christian who finishes well walks with a growing awareness of personal destiny and leaves behind one or more contributions, that is, a legacy.

**(Use an example from your personal experience.)**

If there is one thing I am learning from life as I get older, it is this: my determination to finish my life well for the glory of God motivates me to **wise living** right now. I have put this into a kind of slogan:

Finishing well tomorrow  
Inspires living wisely today.

When you think about how you want your life to turn out, you start to see each day, week, and year as a building block to use in that direction. Not caring how your life turns out will lead to foolish, careless living.

In Christ, we have a dynamic future. In Christ, we have been joined to God and God's family. In Christ, we have a new perspective on what life is meant to be. We are excited about the plans God has for us. We want to finish well; we have a perspective on what that might mean; we realize that finishing well leads to **wise living** and having **life at its best**.

Let us commit ourselves to letting this Good News of Christ be our inspiration for living wisely today and finishing well tomorrow!

## **Life at its Best**

### **Bible Study, Week Two: “Wise Living”**

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, we give You humble and heartfelt thanks for the grace and love You lavish upon us. By the power of Your Holy Spirit, let us reflect Your presence in our lives. Thank You for calling us into fellowship with You which enables us to live **life at its best**. Bless us as we gather together and help us to follow Your wisdom rather than the wisdom of the world. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

1. Read Proverbs 2:6-7; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16; James 1:5. Where do you get wisdom? What does wisdom do?
2. Read Proverbs 3:7. What will God’s wisdom cause you to do?
3. Read Proverbs 4:11. What will the Word of God do for you?
4. Read James 3:13-18. What differences between God’s wisdom and the wisdom of the world are identified?
5. Read 1 Kings 3:9. What did Solomon ask from God? What did he receive (1 Kings 4:29-30)?
6. Read 1 Corinthians 3:18-21. Why does the Apostle Paul admonish the “wise” man and lift up the “fool?”
7. Read James 3:13. When you have received Godly wisdom, what will others see in you?
8. Read Proverbs 8:18. God’s wisdom says there is wealth that does satisfy. What is that wealth?
9. Read Proverbs 8:10-11. How is God’s wisdom described?
10. Read Proverbs 3:17-18. What are some blessings of wisdom?

Questions for further discussion:

11. How can Godly wisdom help you live **life at its best**?
12. How are information, knowledge, and wisdom alike? Different?
13. How has the growth in man’s knowledge, technical advancement, and wealth helped or hindered growth in people seeking God’s wisdom?
14. What does Godly wisdom urge you to seek? What does worldly wisdom seek?
15. Who of your acquaintances live lives of Godly wisdom? What characteristics or Biblical truths do you see operating in his or her life?

**Prayer.** Father, thank You for all Your blessings, especially the gift of Your wisdom. Help us to reflect Your wisdom and presence in our lives. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

## Week Two: Wrapping Up: “Wise Living”

In contrast to the wisdom of the world, God’s wisdom will lead us to Him and give us lives of purpose. Godly wisdom promotes purity. Worldly wisdom leads to a life of lust, greed, and power. Wisdom from God directs us into God-pleasing thoughts and activities. The wisdom of the world causes us to seek self-gratification and the pleasures of this life. Only God’s wisdom gives us **life at its best**. In His divine wisdom, God works for the good of those who love Him.

God is eager to give us His wisdom. Through God’s Word, the Holy Spirit draws us closer to the Lord and reveals God’s knowledge. Filled with His Spirit, we are capable of seeking Him with all our hearts. God’s wisdom will help us choose the path in life that gives us peace and an eternal home.

As God’s people, we look upon life as a sacred trust. We are stewards, managers, and caretakers of God’s gifts. All our time, talents, powers, and earthly possessions belong to Him. We are to use our gifts wisely and profitably to accomplish God’s purposes in our lives.

### ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS

#### LIFE-ENRICHING

God’s wisdom

Eternal values

Loves people and uses things

Follows God’s plan

Fears God

God’s purposes are primary

Lives a moral life

Under God’s control

Generous

Committed to serving Christ

Humble and serving

Sees what is inside as important

#### LIFE-DESTROYING

World’s wisdom

Worldly values

Loves things and uses people

Takes control and stays in charge

Has no fear

Success, power, fame, and money are primary

Lives a life of self-gratification

No control

Selfish

Committed to ungodly things

Proud and using

Sees the outside and the glitz as important



## Bible Study 2: Answer guide for “Wise Living”

1. Proverbs 2:6-7; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16; James 1:5. The Lord gives wisdom through His Spirit. We receive the Spirit so we can understand and accept God’s truth. To get wisdom all we need to do is to ask prayerfully and faithfully.
2. Proverbs 3:7. Fear the Lord and shun evil. Don’t trust yourself (Verse 5: *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding”*)
3. Proverbs 4:11. God’s Word leads us along straight paths.
4. James 3:13-18. God’s wisdom is seen in our good deeds. God’s wisdom is pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, and sincere. The wisdom of God harbors envy, selfish ambition, and denies the truth. Worldly wisdom is seen in *“jealousy and selfish ambition.”*
5. 1 Kings 3:9. Solomon asked for a wise and discerning heart so he could distinguish between right and wrong. God gave him wisdom that was greater and wiser than any other man (1 Kings 4:29-30).
6. 1 Corinthians 3:18-21. Paul is talking about a person who is wise in his own eyes and wise in the view of the world. Such wisdom of the world is foolishness in God’s sight.
7. James 3:13. They will see good deeds done in humility.
8. Proverbs 8:18. Riches, honor, enduring wealth, and prosperity are God’s gifts He gives to us. These gifts are lasting because it is not necessarily physical wealth as the world measures wealth. God’s wealth and riches are seen in the peaceful, contented, and joyful lives that we live in relationship with Jesus.
9. Proverbs 8:10-11. Wisdom is more important than precious rubies and nothing can compare.
10. Proverbs 3:17-18. Wisdom is a tree of life and those with wisdom will be blessed. God’s wisdom makes our lives pleasant and peaceful.
11. Godly wisdom enables us to see the true riches that we have in Jesus. Our eyes and hearts are opened to see the foolishness of the world. Wisdom enables us to see what life **at it best** really is.
12. True wisdom sees life from God’s perspective. Knowledge is information. Wisdom is the application of knowledge.
13. With both an increase in knowledge and in wealth, our dependence on God can diminish. We can become self-sufficient in our thinking and in what money can buy. God is no longer the center of our lives and our security is no longer in God. We seek the world’s wisdom rather than God’s wisdom. On the other hand, God’s people can and have used wealth and technology to reach throughout the world to bring souls into His kingdom.
14. With God’s wisdom, we seek to know Him more, and we seek a relationship with Him. We follow His direction and guidance. We understand how blessed we are. We want to please and honor Him in our thoughts and actions. We seek His mercy, grace, and peace.  
Worldly wisdom seeks the pleasures of this world. It glorifies self and material things. It makes us independent and self-sufficient. With worldly wisdom, we are told that by buying and owning a few more things we will find the happiness that we are seeking.
15. Personal response.

## Sunday, Week Two: "Wise Living"

### *Blessings of Godly Wisdom*

*"He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them His way" (Psalm 25:9).*

Godly wisdom enables us to make the choices that result in our living "life at its best." God's wisdom helps us handle the difficulties and challenges of life. Finding our strength and wisdom in the Lord will bring us contentment, peace, and happiness. *"Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord"* (Proverbs 16:20).

The application of God's wisdom results in positive things happening. The book of Proverbs identifies some of these positive results.

1. Life is more stable. Proverbs 3:17 describes wisdom: *"Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace."* Even when Christians are called by God to suffer and endure hardships, spiritual wisdom helps to keep life smooth, on an even keel. If we accept the wisdom of God found throughout the Scriptures, we will be able to reduce some of life's ups and downs

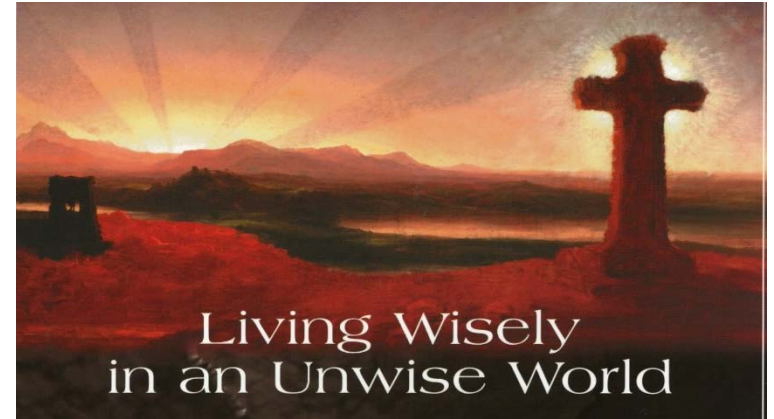
2. Life is longer. *"My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity"* (Proverbs 3:1-2). God promised King Solomon, *"And if you walk in My ways and obey My statutes and commands... I will give you a long life"* (1 Kings 3:14). It seems that obedience is a key to long life. We are wise to choose to obey and to seek to do God's will.



3. Life is peaceful. Proverbs 3:17-18 says of wisdom, *"Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed."* One of the many blessings we receive from God's wisdom is peace with the Lord and the world around us. When we have peace with our Creator, we will be at peace in our places of work, at home, and everywhere. God's peace surpasses anything that the world can offer (John 14:27).

Prayer: Lord, thank You for Your goodness and faithfulness to me. Help me to show my gratitude to You by seeking to do Your will. Amen.

## *Life at its Best*



## *Daily Devotions* *for the whole family!*

### Week 2 "Wise Living"

Monday	"Wisdom Is a Gift from God"
Tuesday	"Wisdom Allows us to See with Discernment"
Wednesday	"Seek Wisdom more than Knowledge"
Thursday	"Choosing Wisdom over Wealth"
Friday	"Trusting in God's Wisdom"
Saturday	"Develop a Personal Mission Statement"
Sunday	"Blessings of Godly Wisdom"

## Monday, Week Two: “Wise Living”

### *Wisdom Is a Gift from God*

*“For the Lord gives wisdom, and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:6).*

Would others identify wisdom as one of your gifts? How does it show? We need wisdom to understand who we are, what we are, and where we are going. Wisdom that leads us to fear, love, and follow God is essential if we are to live “life at its best.” With God’s wisdom, we know Who we are. Proverbs 3:7 warns us: *“Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil.”* Without wisdom, life becomes disjointed, lacking direction and purpose. Proverbs 4:11 promises, *“I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths.”* With wisdom, we are able to understand reality and live a prudent life. With wisdom, we are motivated to make necessary changes in life.

Life is like a puzzle. Wisdom enables us to fit the pieces together. God has made the wisdom to live life skillfully available to all believers. We live lives that are very complex, full of pressures, burdens, and traps.



No wonder Solomon wrote in Proverbs 3:13-14, *“Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold.”*

Proverbs 9:10a points out, *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”* We are called to

revere and respect God and to acknowledge God for Who He is. True wisdom begins when we submit ourselves to His will. Bill Gothard said, “Wisdom is seeing things from God’s perspective.” Only when we see things from God’s perspective will they make sense. God gives us wisdom, and, along with it, the freedom to choose between His wisdom or that of the world. Only God’s wisdom will lead us to Him and give us lives of purpose.

Prayer: Dear Father, please send Your Holy Spirit to lead and guide me in Your wisdom. Thank You for Your wisdom. Amen.

## Tuesday, Week Two: “Wise Living”

### *Wisdom Allows Us to See with Discernment*

*We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit Who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us (1 Corinthians 2:12).*

Godly wisdom offers an eternal perspective. Godly wisdom...

- motivates us to seek after things that are right and pure.
- motivates us to seek God’s direction as we follow His plan for our lives.
- is not popular with people with worldly interests.
- will give us the ultimate victory over Satan and death.

Worldly wisdom has a much different orientation. Worldly wisdom...

- causes us to seek worldly success.
- urges us to seek fame, power, and monetary wealth.
- seeks immediate and self-gratification.
- focuses on the pleasures of this life.

Charles Swindoll defines Biblical or Godly wisdom as follows: “Wisdom is the God-given ability to see life objectively and to handle life with stability.” God gives us the ability to see life from a different perspective; life here on earth is a preparation for the life to come. *“And He said to man, ‘The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding’” (Job 28:28).*



Wisdom equips and prepares us to handle life so we can live “life at its best.” God gives us wisdom, knowledge, and happiness. Through these gifts, we receive abundant joy and peace as well. *“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, Who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5).* God’s wisdom is given freely. Unfortunately, many of us end up loving the world and the friendship of the world more than we love the wisdom God has to offer.

With Godly wisdom, we are not seized by fear of what life may or may not offer. By the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can follow God’s wisdom in our places of work, our homes, and our neighborhoods.

Prayer: Lord, help me follow Your wisdom. Amen.

## Friday, Week Two: “Wise Living”

### *Trusting in God’s Wisdom*

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.” (Proverbs 3:5-6).*

Most of us want to be accepted by our families, our peers, and our employers, but more important, we want to be accepted by God. And we are! *“But God demonstrates His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8). However, He does not leave us in the low state in which He found us. He makes us *“new creations”* (2 Corinthians 5:17) and gives His wisdom to all who ask for it (James 1:5). Paul tells us to pray...*asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding ...that you...may please Him...* (Colossians 1:9-10). May we find truth in these two lines from an unidentified poet:

To know God’s will is life’s greatest treasure.  
To do God’s will is life’s greatest pleasure.

Fulfillment, peace, and a sense of purpose can be found in the heart of a person seeking to know and do the will of God.



The wisdom of the world pulls at us to deny the will of God. It wants us to exchange our devotion for quick thrills and to exchange spiritual wisdom for worldly wisdom. The wisdom of the world says, “Go ahead; it’s OK.” “Don’t worry, no one will know.” The world promises pleasure; Jesus promises that we will find pleasure in Him. The world pounds raucously at our door; Jesus knocks quietly at our door. Do you hear the pounding or the knocking? Which wisdom will you follow?

The Apostle Paul imparts the wisdom of seeking God and concentrating on the eternal. *“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things”* (Colossians 3:1-2).

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for Your presence in my life. Help me to live “life at its best” by trusting in Your wisdom. Amen.

## Saturday, Week Two: “Wise Living”

### *Develop a Personal Mission Statement*

*“Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it’”* (Isaiah 30:21).

Developing a personal mission statement is useful in focusing us on our desire to live wisely with the Lord. As Christians, there is no requirement to have a mission statement, but it offers the potential to enhance our lives. A mission statement can help us focus our thoughts, energies, and resources, as well as give us purpose for our lives. A mission statement can help provide a framework for thinking and help us achieve our goals.



Jesus gives us the basis for our mission statement. *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”* (Matthew 28:18-20).

The Great Commission prompts and calls us to do the Lord’s work during our lifetimes. Our individual mission statements will identify our own unique gifts, abilities, and resources.

In order to develop our personal mission statements, we need to determine what we want to accomplish and which characteristics we want to develop. In addition, we need to examine the calling God has given us. If you are a spouse, parent, teacher, manager, plumber, or doctor, you need to identify God’s specific plan for you. In this process, you identify core principles and values by which to live.

Below is an example of a brief three-sentence personal mission statement: By God’s grace, I seek to please Him in all I do as a husband, father, churchman, and disciple of Christ. With God’s guidance, I will do all I can, as long as I can, to equip myself to serve Him and others in order that I might help to *“make disciples of all nations.”* It is my prayer that He prepare and place me in settings where I can make a difference in people’s lives.

Prayer: Lord, give me the boldness to be an ambassador for You. Amen.



## Wednesday, Week Two: “Wise Living”

### *Seek Wisdom more than Knowledge*

*“I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion” (Proverbs 8:12).*

In our country, we are overwhelmed with information. With round-the-clock news sources like Fox News, CNN, MSNBC, and C-Span, we are the most informed people ever. However, information is replacing knowledge, even as knowledge has supplanted wisdom as the answer to life’s problems. T.S. Eliot asked: “Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?”

We grasp at information and memorize facts but many times stop short of using that knowledge wisely. We can recite the 10 Commandments and quote Scripture but lack discipline to incorporate God’s Word into our minds, hearts, and lives. We’re content with the bare bones and ignore the meat! The result is that we are full of knowledge but still lack wisdom. We have wisdom when we use knowledge properly. Knowledge provides facts and information, but it does not answer the “why” or “for what purpose.” Knowledge does not help us in times of crisis, despair, or loneliness. Knowledge combined with a fear—awesome respect—of the Lord is wisdom, and wisdom is the key to transforming panic into peace, stress into serenity, and chaos into control.



Today’s world admires the “wise” man, the “self-made” man, the one who needs no one as he goes through life. Paul says that wise man’s thoughts are “futile.” He advises the one who is wise in the eyes of the world to become a “fool.” That “fool” is the one who already possesses knowledge and, beyond that, knows who and Whose he is. His reliance is on the Lord. He knows the danger of self-sufficiency. *“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God”* (1 Corinthians 8:1b-3). Knowledge may lead to pride and arrogance which can cause us to disdain dependence on God. The Bible tells us that even when we are weak, we can still be strong in the Lord (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help me to trust in Your wisdom. Amen.

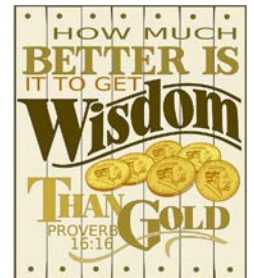
## Thursday, Week Two: “Wise Living”

### *Choosing Wisdom over Wealth*

*“Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her” (Proverbs 8:10-11).*

Our standard of living has increased because we have more money today than ever before to purchase more things. We may think we have improved our lifestyles, but, in the process, we are losing our ability to live. We are amassing wealth at the expense of wisdom. We are living in a rat race without understanding where the finish line is. Life is out of focus because we are not seeking God’s wisdom. Somewhere on life’s journey, most of us will realize that a fifty-fifty proposition with God is too little. We need more, because we need 100 percent of God. We need His spiritual wisdom. We need spiritual wisdom that works from the inside out. What we need is God’s wisdom in our minds and hearts. Then we can give God all of ourselves.

Solomon, one of the best-known Old Testament characters, taught us about the importance of wisdom. *“At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, ‘Ask for whatever you want Me to give you.’”* (1 Kings 3:5). Solomon requested, *“So give Your servant a discerning heart to govern Your people...”* (1 Kings 3:9). *“God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon’s wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt”* (1 Kings 4:29-30).



The Lord was so pleased that Solomon chose wisdom over wealth and a long life that He not only gave him wisdom, but riches and honor as well. Ecclesiastes 7:12 says, *“Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor.”* The wisdom God gave Solomon enabled him to lead a very productive and prosperous life. His Godly wisdom was both his shield and his strength.

Prayer: Dear Lord, grant me confidence in Your wisdom. Amen.



# Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World

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## Week 3:

## **“Using Time Wisely”**

## Bulletin Messages, Week Three: “Using Time Wisely”

### **Life at its Best** **Week Three: “Using Time Wisely”**

*"Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil"* (Ephesians 5:15-16). Wise people realize how precious time is. Recognizing that time is a commodity that, once used, is gone forever, we will strive to make the best use of our time. We are wise to try to control our time by setting goals and prioritizing our activities

In the midst of our productive, hectic days, we must remember the account of Mary and Martha who were visited by Jesus. Martha, busy in the kitchen, was annoyed that her sister wouldn't help her. Jesus reminded her that *"only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her"* (Luke 10:41-42). The first use of our time should always be for the *"one thing [that] is needed,"* and that is time for the Lord. We also need to save time for others, for our families, of course, but also for our neighbors and those with whom we can share our faith, as Jesus did with Mary. In so doing, we can carry out Jesus' command to *"Love each other as I have loved you"* (John 15:12).

### **Life at its Best, Week Three: “Using Time Wisely”**

“Using Time Wisely” is our focus this week. As God's stewards, we are called to use His gift of time wisely. The Apostle Paul reminds us how we should spend our time and where to place our focus: *“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal”* (2 Corinthians 4:18). Whatever the length of time God gives us we are to make use of it to bring Him glory. *“Be wise in the way you act...make the most of every opportunity”* (Colossians 4:5). Next week we will be concentrating on “A Life of Service.” May God's Holy Spirit fill us and flow through us as we seek to be the stewards God in Christ has called us to be.

**IF WE DO NOT PLAN WISELY,  
WE OFTEN FIND OURSELVES  
ASKING THE QUESTION,  
“WHERE DID THE TIME GO?”**

*“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil”* (Ephesians 5:15-16).



Lay reader talk (week three)

## Using Time Wisely

To live **Life at its Best**, which is the title of our current sermon series, we need to use our time wisely. God is the giver of our time, and time is crucial because the minutes and hours can't be reclaimed. Time squandered in futile pursuits and meaningless amusements is forever gone.

To illustrate the importance of spending time wisely, Jesus told a parable about two builders. One spent little time on his house, not even bothering with a solid foundation. The storms came, and his house tumbled down. The other builder, however, spent the time needed to build a firm foundation when he built his house. Although the winds raged and the rain pounded, his house withstood the storm. He reaped the rewards of using his time well.

Faith, too, needs to be built on a firm foundation, and it is strengthened over time. Time spent in worship where Christians hear and study God's Word and participate in the sacraments is necessary for the building of our faith. Time spent in personal Bible study and in prayer strengthens our relationship with Jesus.

*"Teach us to number our days aright,"* prayed Moses, *"that we may gain a heart of wisdom"* (Psalm 90:12). How should we spend our time in order to gain a heart of wisdom? Shouldn't we be about our Father's business even as Jesus was at the tender age of twelve? Establishing and keeping our priorities in mind, with the work of the kingdom of God taking precedence over all else, will help us to stay focused on what is important.

Your time is needed to sit on the committees and boards that serve our congregation. Your time is needed to teach Sunday school or sing in the choir. Your time is needed to visit the sick, the lonely, and those wandering from the faith. **Life at its best** is life lived in the Lord and for the Lord. God, Who has given us time, will also guide us in using it wisely.

## Children's Message (Week three)

### "Using Time Wisely"

Hi everybody! It great to see you here today!

Our theme today is time. Who gives us time? Yes, time is gift from God's grace. He created all things, so time is a gift.

Raise your hands if you are old enough to attend school. Does your teacher give you playtime? What do you do during your playtime? (wait for answers)  
Those are fun things to do. God wants us to have time to play and enjoy ourselves. In playtime, we can enjoy doing things by ourselves or play with friends.

In the Bible, we are told that the smartest man, outside of Jesus, was a man named Solomon. He said, there is a time for everything. A time to laugh and a time to cry. A time to be quiet and a time to speak. A time to tear down and a time to build. The list goes on and on. God gives us time, and He wants us to use it wisely.

Let me ask you some questions regarding time:

Is it wise to spend time do your homework?

Is it wise to be spend time to help friends?

Is it wise to be spend time to pray?

Is it wise to spend time to hear about Jesus?

Is it wise to spend time to play?

Yes, there is time for everything. We just need to ask God for wisdom to use our time wisely.

Let's pray. Dear Jesus, thank You for all your wonderful gifts especially the gift of time. Help me to wise and faithful with my time. Let me use my time to give You glory. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.



## Sermon for Week Three: “Using Time Wisely”

**Text:** Psalm 31:15: *“My times are in Your hands.”*

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we thank You for the gift of time. Help us approach our lives with realistic expectations. Instead of stress and strain, help us to find our rest in You as we keep You first in all areas of our lives. In Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen

This is the third message in our sermon series on living **Life at its Best**. Last week we talked about “Wise Living,” today about “Using our Time Wisely.”

John and Tracey Taylor were a couple in their early to mid-30s with two children, ages 7 and 3, Stephanie and Anthony. They both worked full time outside the home, and they would take turns driving the children to school and day care. Stephanie also had piano lessons after school. It seemed that the Taylors were always in the car; they sometimes felt they should have been born with wheels as they ran from one place to another. When they had an evening at home, of course, they had to take care of all the things necessary there – the laundry, the chores, the shopping, the yard. Both wished they could spend more time with their children, but, even if they did have some time to themselves, when they came home in the evening, they were too tired to enjoy it. John taught Sunday School, and Tracey was a Stephen’s Minister in the church which they attended. They both wanted to be more active in the church, but they were finding it more and more difficult to find time.

We all have our very own variations of that story. There are lots of things that compete for our time. In our lifetimes, we will spend an average of a few months sitting at traffic lights waiting for them to change. (I know, some days it seems like all of that all at one time, right?) We will spend an equivalent of a few months of our lives opening junk mail. We’ll spend months at meetings (I’ve already spent more than that) and many more months waiting in lines.

Why is it that, the busier we are, the more important we imagine ourselves to be? The busier we are, the more important we think we are to other people. Somehow, we’ve deceived ourselves into believing that we need to be so busy that, if we’re unavailable, it’s a sign of our success, of our importance.

Of all the gifts that God has given to us, time is one of the most valuable ones we have. We each have a gift of time. A trust from Him, an investment from Him to serve Him and use in loving Him and serving others. God created the gift of time from the very beginning. In Genesis 1:5 we read, *“And there was evening and there was morning — the first day.”* He still rules over time till this day. He’s given us 24 hours a day, 1440 minutes every day. Every hour that He gives to us is to be used to honor Him with our lives by the way we carry out our work and use His gift of time. When we recognize the value of time, we use it to serve our Lord and to serve our fellow man, and, therefore, we use it to live **Life at Its Best**.

Choosing how to use time is not always easy, because there are so many things out there staring us in our faces. There are so many options and so many possibilities. A certain percent of that goes toward taking care of things and activities. A percent of that goes toward taking care of people and relationships. We must also always remember to keep relationships first above things and activities. It’s so easy in this materialistic age in which we live to spend all our time on things and activities rather than on people. God gives us the freedom to choose how we spend our time. We can waste it, we can misuse it, we can abuse it, or we can use it to accomplish God’s purpose in our lives.

Every single day is a gift. In fact, someone once said, “That’s why it’s called the present; because it’s a gift.” When someone gives you a present, it’s yours to enjoy and to appreciate and to use. St. Paul writes

in Ephesians 5:15, “Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”

Since time is a gift, we want to use it to make a difference in the lives of others, to make this world a better place to live. We want to use our time to give to God, to give to our fellowman, to our families, to our friends, and to ourselves. The Psalmist said that as long as he had life and breath, he would use his time to praise the Lord. The writer of Ecclesiastes 3 reminds us,

*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them...a time to be silent and a time to speak . . .*

There are other things on that list in Ecclesiastes 3, so take a look at it.

We all receive the same amount of time, and we have the responsibility to budget our time wisely. When our children are young, many of us give them an allowance to teach them some financial responsibility. If they see something they'd like to buy, and it costs more than what their allowances are, they have to do something to figure out how they're going to get that item. It's called budgeting. They budget their money in the same way we budget our time to accomplish the most good.

If I spend all my time on the Internet, face book, or cell phone, then I have no time for my family and friends or for getting the things done that really need to be done. If we're not sure how to start budgeting our time, we might start by making a list. Make a list of the important people in your life. Make a list of the important things that you need to get done—things that have to be taken care of, people who need your attention, your love, and your care. Then list the optional things—the things that aren't quite as important, things that you would like to do. One of the secrets is to choose the priorities and set the goals that you want, such as your worship life, your spiritual life, your family life, your work life, your recreational life.

If we don't have any direction as to where we're going, then we'll be like a ship without a rudder, kind of bouncing around all over the place and not going any particular direction. We'll lose lots of time, we'll waste lots of time, and we'll be disorganized. Do you ever wonder where all the time goes? Have you ever noticed how easy it is to waste time? I can find all kinds of reasons for wasting time, for not doing the things I really should be doing. We can so easily become sidetracked by insignificant little things. We can always find another reason for putting off the phone call for another time. We always have good intentions about sending a card or a note or a letter or an e-mail to someone, but there are other things that seem to take a greater priority.

Perhaps we're afraid to say no. Maybe we don't want to hurt someone's feelings, so we take on too much; we do everything that we can, and then we complain that we don't have any time. Maybe we feel we have to be accessible 24 hours a day to our families and to our friends. We have these cell phones growing out of our ears and pagers and beepers growing out of our hips. Then we say we have no time. No time for God, for our families, for ourselves.

Maybe we're working too many hours, too many days, too many nights, too many weekends, whatever. As someone said, then we're busier than God intended us to be. Remember the story of Mary and Martha? Mary was the one who took the time to sit at Jesus' feet. She listened to His teaching. Martha was the one who was preoccupied with all the things she had to take care of, because she had such a short period of time in which to do them. There are many times that Jesus would just love to have us come and sit at His feet, just to learn from Him, to have His grace and His mercy exposed to us, but we're so distracted by all the other things in life. Maybe they're even important things, but not as important as Jesus.

In a book called *Margins*, the first thing that Dr. Swensen mentions in managing our time is to expect the unexpected. Do you expect the unexpected when you plan your days or do you cram them so full that, if everything doesn't work out perfectly in the day, it's not going to work out right? We probably have all had days like that when things didn't work the way we thought they were going to, when they weren't perfect. Somebody was late, the babysitter didn't get there on time, somebody forgot where the keys were or had a flat tire, or the check didn't come in the mail. We feel more and more stressed.

[If the following illustration does not apply, substitute another example from your congregation.]

One of the best ways to reclaim our time is to turn off the TV set at least for an hour of two. Recently I met with the confirmation class. I have \_\_\_ students in the class, representing \_\_\_ families at our church. Those families had a total of \_\_\_ TV sets in their households, or \_\_\_ TV sets in every house. How many in your house? Even if we took an hour away from television viewing, it would help us manage some time.

Maybe we need to take a look at all the commitments that we've made. Maybe there are too many. If God were your appointment secretary, what would He do with your schedule? Would He schedule you going from morning to night non-stop, or would He maybe include some free time? What would He take out of your schedule? What are some of the things He might add to your schedule?

Jesus knows that, because of our sin, we have trouble establishing priorities. Yes, we all know that we should have priorities and what they should be, but, somehow, it doesn't seem to happen that way. In fact, we can't make it happen that way ourselves. That's exactly why God sent His Son Christ Jesus. "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and will purify us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:9). Having received His forgiveness, we have power to set our priorities straight. You see, every new day is a gift from Him, and, when we fail to use our gift, we repent of our failures, and we are covered with the blood of Christ Jesus in His forgiveness, and we forgive ourselves as He has forgiven us. Then we start all over again. The next hour or the next day. When we start with His power and His strength, knowing that He'll be there every step of the way. He'll be our companion, our guide, our friend each day along the way.

I know that sometimes we think Jesus doesn't have anything to do with this. He can't relate to all the things we do today. Yes, He can. He had the very same problems that we do. His days were so crowded sometimes that there was no time for Himself. People even anticipated where He would go, and they would get there ahead of Him. When He got there, they would want to know more things. They'd have more demands and more needs and more expectations to be met, so much so He didn't have time for Himself. Sometimes the disciples and Jesus were so bombarded with people they didn't even have time to eat. Their schedule was that busy. (You know what those days are like.) Jesus said to the disciples, "Come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place to get some quiet rest." So, they went away to a quiet place in a boat by themselves, not just to get away from it all but to get some rest, spiritual rest, rest that comes from God Himself, rest that comes through prayer, rest that comes from reflecting on Him and His mercy and grace for us.

To the crowds who were stretched out and hassled and helpless He said, "*Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28), not just a chance to get away from it all, but true rest, rest that refreshes, rest that encourages, rest that comes from Christ Jesus.

In the third commandment, God commands us to set aside time for rest, for spiritual rest. When we find our rest in His Word and Sacraments, then we're renewed and strengthened to serve Him and those around us. He is the one who brings true rest to our lives from all the hectic times and all the hassles going on. He's the one who offers His grace and His mercy to every single time in our lives, so we're not so stretched, not so bent out of shape. Even when we're so busy that we don't have time for Him, He always has time for us. He's never too tired, never exhausted. He never slumbers or sleeps. In fact, He gives us His very

self as He gave Himself for us on the Cross. He gives us strength and courage for every single day. He gives us hope to take on all the things ahead of us and energy for every task along the way.

Some of you can remember when Sunday was a day of rest literally. It's not that way anymore. You can do anything today. In fact, we've become so busy that we use Sunday to do all our chores; we have to go grocery shopping, finish homework and housework, and we get to be exhausted.

**Life at its best** begins with God and finding our rest in Him. Sometimes we become so desperate for success and for materialism that we almost feel guilty by even taking time off to rest for a little while. We've forgotten about God's design for the Sabbath Day. He gives us permission, the permission we need to stop, to restore our souls, to be renewed by the grace of God to find our rest in Him.

Jesus died for all of our sins including the mismanagement of time. It's not our time, but His time. The Psalmist said, *"My times are in Your hands."* If they were in our own hands, we'd be in big trouble. Yes, all of our times are in His hands.

Sometimes we go through some difficult times in life, but we can say along with St. Paul, *"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 8:38-39). Knowing that our Savior is always there for us, that He loves us, that He cares for us, and that He guides us, enables us to say that we trust in Him. Yes, my times are in Your hands. May God keep us that way in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Now, may the peace of God which goes beyond our understanding keep our hearts and minds secure in Christ Jesus, finding our rest in Him for all the times in our lives, even to life everlasting.

## Life at its Best

### Bible Study, Week Three: “Using Time Wisely”

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, we ask for Your blessings on this study as we focus on using our time wisely. We know that it is only by Your grace that we have been given life and time on this earth to enjoy. Whether our time is short or long, help us to use our time in ways that give You honor and glory. We pray that we will use our time wisely so we can live **life at its best**. In Jesus’ holy and precious name, we pray. Amen.

1. Read Matthew 6:21. Even though this verse relates more to financial treasures, how can time be a treasure that will give evidence to what you treasure by the way you use time?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6; Galatians 6:8. In what ways does God’s principle of sowing and reaping relate to time and opportunity?
3. Read Luke 14:15-23. What reasons did those refusing to attend the banquet give? What are common reasons we give for not answering God’s invitation to serve in His kingdom?
4. Read Luke 10:38-42. Why were Mary’s actions more pleasing to Jesus than Martha’s?
5. Read Ephesians 5:15-16. What warning does Paul have about time?
6. Read Ecclesiastes 3:1, 11; 8:5; Psalm 31:15. Why should you get your time in line with God’s time?
7. Read 2 Corinthians 4:18. How are you to spend your time and where should you place your focus?
8. Read Psalm 90:12. What does this verse tell you?
9. Read Proverbs 6:6-11. What happens to unproductive use of time?
10. How can the faithful use of time help you to live **life at its best**?

Questions for further discussion:

11. What are some things you are doing that distract you from prayer and reading God’s Word?
12. What are your biggest time wasters?
13. What does the “tyranny of the urgent” mean to you?
14. How can you save time by spending time in prayer?

**Prayer:** Dear Father, thank You for this study. Impress on us the importance of time and that the time that You’ve given to us is in Your hands. Help us to use time in ways that help others and further Your kingdom. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.



## Week Three: Wrapping Up: “Using Time Wisely”

At some point in life, we start asking, “Where did the months and the years go?” Time is an irreplaceable commodity that God grants us, a precious period of opportunity for fulfilling the purposes for which we exist. **Life at its best** occurs when we realize the importance of time and use it properly. Wise use of time starts by living a life for Christ. If our time, energy, and focus are only on material wealth or other worldly successes, our time has been wasted.

While we must spend time providing for our needs, our life’s purpose must be to do the Lord’s work. We were born to serve our Creator. Jesus, Who “*did not come to be served, but to serve*” (Matthew 20:28), is our model. We are called to bring people to Christ and serve others based on gifts given to us by God. Ignoring God’s plan for our lives will result in anguish and despair.

As God’s stewards, we are called to be good managers of God’s gifts, especially time, which is one of the most important, since it is irreplaceable. God, Who has given us time, will also guide us in using it wisely. When we go about the work of the Lord, God will enrich us with His supply of time and everything else we need to accomplish His purposes.

What if, for one day, Jesus became each of us? What if, for twenty-four hours, Jesus would wake up in our beds, walk in our shoes, live in our houses, and assume our schedules? Would Jesus follow the plans we had made (or not made) for the next twenty-four hours? With Jesus taking over our hearts, would anything change?

If the answer is “yes,” we will want to re-evaluate our goals and aspirations and how we use our time. We will want each step we take to lead us toward building a character more like Christ’s that will help us express our love for God and His Word.

### ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS

#### LIFE-ENRICHING

Spends time wisely

Lives a life of purpose

Makes the most of opportunities

Controls time

Has written goals

Finds time for rest

Follows God’s guidance

Recognizes time as God’s gift

Is proactive

#### LIFE-DESTROYING

Wastes time

Drifts and meanders

Has a lackadaisical attitude

Is controlled by time

Has no plans

Is a workaholic

Is arrogant and independent

Feels he is owed time

Procrastinates

### Bible Study 3: Answer guide for “Using Time Wisely”

1. Matthew 6:21. Jesus said, “*Where your treasure is there your heart will be also.*” Treasure leads. Hearts follow. Time is a treasure that can’t be replaced. For many, time is a bigger treasure than money and possessions. Where you spend your time gives evidence to your priorities.
2. 2 Corinthians 9:6; Galatians 6:8. The truth of sowing and reaping is seen throughout Scripture. If you sow little, you will harvest little. If a farmer wants a bountiful harvest, he must plant many seeds. If you want a friend, you must plant a seed by being a friend. If you want to be better organized with the right priorities of your time, plant a seed by spending time with God first.
3. Luke 14:15-23. One who was invited to the banquet said that he bought a field, and he had to go and see it. Another invitee said that he had bought five oxen, and he had to spend time to examine them. Another said that he had married a wife, and he had to spend time with her. The two most common excuses for not serving are likely “I’m too busy” or “I’m not qualified.”
4. Luke 10:38-42. Mary spent time sitting with Jesus and learning from Him. Martha was busy preparing the meal but was not being spiritually fed. In our lives, we can become too busy, even doing good things, preventing us from growing our relationship with Jesus.
5. Ephesians 5:15-16. Paul tells us that “*the days are evil.*” We live a sinful world that attempts to corrupt us, that deceives us by making us think we have plenty of time.
6. Ecclesiastes 3:1. We are told that everything has a beginning and an end. There is a reason and time for every matter under heaven.  
Ecclesiastes 8:5. A wise heart will know “*the proper time and the just way.*”  
Psalm 31:15. Our time is in God’s hands. He is in control.
7. 2 Corinthians 4:18. We are to spend our time focusing on the important things even though they can’t be seen. Fix our eyes on Jesus. Live with an eternal perspective.
8. Psalm 90:12. Our days on earth are limited and numbered so live wisely.
9. Proverbs 6:6-11. Doing little or nothing with our time and hands lead to unfruitfulness and poverty.
10. God is the creator and giver of time. We are made in God’s image, so we will feel blessed and fulfilled when we use our time in ways that honor and please God. Through faith, God will help us use our time wisely and live **life at its best**.
11. Personal response.
12. Personal response.
13. The tyranny of the urgent means that less important and busy activities can take precedence over the things that are important. We can be busy without being productive.
14. Seeking God’s wisdom and counsel can help us see and do what is important. The Holy Spirit can keep us focused.

## Sunday, Week Three: “Using Time Wisely

### *Avoiding Time Wasters*

*Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control” (Proverbs 25:28).*

The lack of goals, priorities, and plans contributes to the biggest loss of time. There are other time wasters, such as procrastination, carelessness, wrong priorities, and never saying “no.” All these habits steal time and keep us from pursuing the best God has for us.

Most of us on the average weekday work eight hours, sleep eight hours, and use four hours for daily routines. That leaves four hours approximately per day to spend as we please. These twenty hours during the week, plus an additional estimated twelve hours or more from the weekend, give us a total of thirty-two leisure hours per week. What are we doing with this time? The way we spend our leisure time is as great a factor in how we live “life at its best” as the way we spend the rest of our hours. To sow our time wisely, we should be asking ourselves:

- What are we living for?
- What do we want to accomplish before God calls us home?
- Are we doing the best we can to use our time to glorify God?



We are often less productive than we want to be because we are trapped in the “emergencies” of the moment. Possibly, one of our biggest problems is letting the urgent crowd out the important, which has been termed the “tyranny of the urgent.” Those things that confront us the most loudly are likely not the most important. Stephen Covey said, “Urgent matters are usually visible...They’re usually right in front of us and often they are easy, pleasant, fun to do, but so often they are unimportant.”

If we are too busy to attend church or pray or too preoccupied to read God’s Word, we need to take another look at our priorities. The primary consideration in the use of time is to do the will of God and to live in harmony with God’s plans for us. Our goal must be to avoid a hurried lifestyle which would interfere with our relationship of abiding in Jesus.

Prayer: Father, help me to spend time in Your Word and prayer. Amen.

## *Life at its Best*



## *Daily Devotions for the whole family!*

### Week 3

### “Using Time Wisely”

Monday	“God Is the Giver of Time”
Tuesday	“Choosing How to Use Time”
Wednesday	“Sowing Time Wisely”
Thursday	“Productivity Verse Busyness”
Friday	“Committing Time to Relationships”
Saturday	“Waiting on the Lord”
Sunday	“Avoiding Time Wasters”

## Monday, Week Three: “Using Time Wisely”

### *God Is the Giver of Time*

*“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1).*

Are you using your time wisely? Of all the gifts God gives us, time is one of the most valuable because we cannot save it, nor can we have more. Since we cannot reclaim time, we must make the most of it while we have it. All the time we have is a trust from God to be used for doing the things that He would have us do: for worship of God, for service to others, and for self-improvement and enrichment. *“My times are in Your hands...”* (Psalm 31:15). As God’s people, we must be careful not to be so caught up in the process of earning a livelihood that we lose perspective of the value and rich possibilities of time. It is our responsibility not to waste it and to use it for God-pleasing purposes.

God gives long lives to some, short lives to others, but all of us are given the same 1,440-minute or 24-hour day. Our concern should not be how many of these days God will give us. Instead, our concern is to use every hour God does give us to please Him and accomplish the tasks He sets before us. When we recognize the value of time for service to the Lord and our fellowman, we can live “life at its best.”

“Time is everything. Anything you want, anything you accomplish—pleasure, success, fortune—is measured in time” (Joyce C. Hall). What is important to us is indicated by how we spend our time. Jesus said, *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:21). We know He was talking about financial treasures, but certainly time is a precious commodity, a treasure, and how we spend it tells us where our hearts are. The amount and quality of time we spend with God determines the relationship we have with Him. How we spend our time shows what is important to us. If we acknowledge God as the Giver of time, will we not want to make time for Him?

Prayer: Dear Father, help me to manage the time You entrust to me wisely and faithfully. Place in me a desire to take time daily to read and study Your Word. In Jesus’ holy and precious name, I pray. Amen.



## Tuesday, Week Three: “Using Time Wisely”

### *Choosing How to Use Time*

*“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15).*

An old story tells of little Robert, who brought a bird to his grandfather. The old man was always right, and Robert wanted to prove him wrong just once, so Robert held up a bird in his hand. “Granddad, is this bird dead or alive?” Robert was thinking, “If he says the bird is dead, I’ll turn it loose and let it fly away; but if he says the bird is alive, I’ll squeeze the life out of it and hand him a dead bird.” “Granddad, is this bird dead or alive?” repeated Robert. The answer came back: “He is as you wish him to be, my son. As you wish him to be.”

So, it is with our lives. For the most part, our lives are as we wish them to be. God gives us the freedom to choose how we spend our allotted time. We can waste it or use it in ways that fulfill God’s purpose for our lives. Each day is a gift that carries a responsibility. As the years pass, we learn through experience the value of time and how to use it most effectively. The retirement years can be fruitful times as we are freed from family and career obligations to spend more time in building the Kingdom of God.



We make the decisions as to how we spend our time. Time moves forward, and there is no turning back. It was reported that Andrew Carnegie said he would give \$200,000,000 for ten years more of life. From his comment, we are reminded that time is precious. Someone once noted that, “Life is like a coin: you can spend it any way you want to, but you can spend it only once.” The past is comprised of our failures, pleasures, blunders, joys, sins, and successes. We can learn from our past, but the lost time won’t reappear.

A common characteristic of wise people is that they use their time wisely. Living wisely will cause us to move forward in our faith and service. (Ephesians 5:15-16). Whatever the length of time God gives us we are to make it count. God seeks action that fulfills His purpose and brings glory to Him rather than recognition for ourselves.

Prayer; Dear Father, help me to make proper choices with my time. Amen.

## Wednesday, Week Three: “Using Time Wisely”

### *Sowing Time Wisely*

*“My times are in your hands...” (Psalm 31:15).*

*“Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously” (2 Corinthians 9:6).* Time, as well as other areas of life, is affected by God’s principle of sowing and reaping. If we spend our time unproductively, we will not reap the rewards in the same way had we invested our time wisely. If we sow little, we will reap little. The seeds we sow will determine our harvest. The would-be athlete who spends no time building up his body finds himself on the bench, if he’s chosen for the team at all. The aspiring musician who spends no time practicing her instrument is not the one who earns the solo performance. The Christian who spends time in the Word of God and taking part in the Sacraments during regular worship discovers that his faith carries him through the valleys of his life. He knows that it was time well spent.



Our attention and energy must be focused on Godly things to live each day to its fullest. Today we accomplish yesterday’s dreams as well as build a solid foundation for tomorrow’s visions. Life offers us the gift of time and the freedom, within our Christian value system, to use it as we choose. The choices we make with time produce the consequences of our lives.

To get productive use of our time, we need to get time under control. The keys to controlling time are setting goals, deciding on priorities, and making plans. Priorities should be established for time spent on work, family, recreation, and church. Without goals and priorities, our schedules can be lost in the “rat race” of the day. Time is a precious, God-given commodity that needs to be used effectively each day. When we sow generously, we will reap bountifully. The difference between success and failure is the ability to find the time rather than saying, “I did not have time.”

Prayer: Dear Father, enable me to use my time in God-pleasing ways. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

## Thursday, Week Three: “Using Time Wisely”

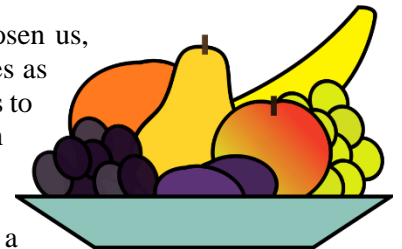
### *Productivity Versus Busyness*

*“I will extol the Lord at all times...” (Psalm 34:1).*

In the book of Luke, we read the story of Jesus visiting the home of His friends Mary and Martha in Bethany. Luke tells us that, while Mary sat at the feet of Jesus listening to His conversation and wisdom, Martha was distracted by all the preparation that had to be done and disgruntled because Mary was not helping her. *“‘Martha, Martha,’ the Lord answered, ‘you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.’” (Luke 10:41-42).*

We hear in these verses that, while the preparation that Martha was doing was important, what Jesus had to say was of far more importance. We, like Martha, also find distractions which take up our time and pull us away from the purpose that God has for us. Perhaps those activities which keep us so busy have kept us from us from studying God’s Word and spending meaningful time in prayer. John 15 discusses at length the importance of abiding in Christ. As branches on the Vine, we are nourished by Christ Himself, Who helps us “keep the main thing the main thing.” The Holy Spirit will guide us into making proper choices so that our work will not be “busyness” but will produce real fruit (John 15:8).

God promises that, even as He has chosen us, He will also bring forth fruit in our lives as we give our time, abilities, and resources to things of eternal value. What we do with our opportunities, such as the one Mary had, impacts our futures. To a Martha-type, being a Mary-type may seem a waste of time. Doers don’t believe in sitting, but just as Mary was commended for her choice, so God invites us to take time to read and mediate on His Word, to pray, and to join in the communion of saints through Word and Sacrament on Sunday mornings. To waste our time is to miss opportunities. To reach our God-given goals, we need to take advantage of our opportunities as they occur. Seizing the moment will result in our living “life at its best.”



Prayer: Father, may You be glorified in how I use my time. Amen.



## Friday, Week Three: “Using Time Wisely”

### *Committing Time to Relationships*

“A cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12b).

We are not designed to be solitary individuals; we’re made for relationships. Our primary relationship is with God through Jesus Christ, but as God’s people, we are also called to live in love toward others. God loves us (1 John 4:19) so that we can pass the love of Christ on to those He puts in our lives. Jesus said in John 15:12: “*My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.*” Jesus says here: Follow My example. As I have loved, you should love.

Thomas Are, in *My Gospel of Stewardship*, illustrates three relationships:

1. Each of us has a relationship with oneself.

We must take care of ourselves responsibly. We need proper food, exercise, rest, and relaxation. God reminds us that our bodies are His temple (1 Corinthians 6:19), and He expects us to be good stewards of all our gifts, including our bodies.



2. We have relationships with God. Fellowship with believers, hearing the exposition of the Word of God, and participating in the Sacraments are integral to our relationship with God. Along with worship, it is vital that we come to Him in prayer and reading and meditating on His Word. We need strength and wisdom to prevent our time of worship in church or our quiet time with the Lord from being crowded by trivial and unimportant things.

3. We have relationships with others.

Relationships with others involve both giving and receiving. As we fill the needs of others, God fills us. People are important to us, and we can’t take them for granted. We need to plan time for our friends. Scripture never mentions that Jesus hurried. He always took time to help those in need, even if He was urgently needed elsewhere (Mark 5:21-43). The support we receive from and give to our friends is very important to our well-being. A good rule for friendships is the Golden Rule: “*do to others what you would have them do to you...*” (Matthew 7:12).

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank You for seeking a relationship with me. Amen.

## Saturday, Week Three: “Using Time Wisely”

### *Waiting on the Lord*

“Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart...” (Psalm 27:14).

In the previous devotions, we have been emphasizing the need to make every moment count and the importance of using our time in significant and worthwhile ways. Action has been the key in our discussion so far, but sometimes the best use of time may not be to go forward with haste but rather to pause and wait. God knows the best time for everything. If we desire to walk with Him, we must follow His instructions, even if it means waiting. What we want to do or desire to have may be acceptable to God, but God’s timing could be different than ours. If He tells us to slow down and wait, He does this for our benefit. We need to trust Him and wait for His direction. “*Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me Your paths; guide me in Your truth and teach me, for You are God my Savior, and my hope is in You all day long*” (Psalm 25:4-5).

With our limited insight and always wanting things now, we are likely to question God’s timing. God only wants what is good for us, so we are reminded: “*Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord*” (Psalm 27:14). God’s timing needs to be our timing. God acts on behalf of those who wait for Him. “*Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from Him*” (Psalm 62:5). God may not tell us why He is asking us to wait, but we can be assured He is listening (Psalm 40:1).



God may want us to wait for one of several purposes. He knows that, at times, to give us something immediately could be harmful for us. We could be unprepared to receive that for which we have prayed; we may have improper motives or need stronger faith. He may have a much better plan in mind. Jesus Himself waited. He heard that His good friend Lazarus was dying, but He didn’t go to him immediately. He told His disciples that the reason for His delay was so that they might believe (John 11:1-44). God is in control, and we know that He will not grow tired or weary of providing for us (Isaiah 40:28b). When we do not wait, we impede God’s plan for us.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help me to follow Your timing in my life. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Life at its Best:  
Living Wisely in an  
Unwise World

# Week 4: “A Life of Service”



## Bulletin Messages, Week Four, “A Life of Service”

### **Life at its Best** **Week Four: “A Life of Service”**

*"Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:26), Jesus said. Servanthood is not a natural inclination for most of us. We have an inborn desire to be served, even to be exalted. This desire is promoted by the society in which we live, but it is contrary to Christ's desire for us and the example He left for us. He desires that we, as He did, set aside our own wants to serve others' needs, and, "Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else" (2 Corinthians 9:13).*

As stewards, we are responsible and accountable for how we use all the gifts God has given us. Hiding our talents and/or using them selfishly do not conform to God's command to, *"Love your neighbor as yourself"* (Luke 10:27). As we live **life at its best**, we will show compassion to the sick, feed the hungry, teach those eager to learn, and be available for whatever plan God has for us. *"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work"* (2 Corinthians 9:8).

### **Life at its Best, Week Four: “A Life of Service”**

“A Life of Service” is our theme for this week as we discuss living **life at its best**. God knows the importance of our being in service to Him. He calls us to *"serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men"* (Ephesians 6:7). The Lord will open our eyes to opportunities for service. We put our faith into action when we become God's hands, arms, and feet in service to others. Don't miss next week when we will continue our discussion on **life at its best**. We pray that each week you will grow in knowledge of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and be encouraged to be better stewards of the gifts He has given you.

### **Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World**

**WE ARE CALLED TO GIVE OUR TIME, ENERGY, AND EFFORT TO SERVE OTHERS. AS CHRISTIANS, WE ARE CALLED TO SERVE.**

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).



Lay reader talk (week four)

## A Life of Service

“A life of service” is our theme today as we consider how to live **Life at its Best**. God has created us to serve one another, *"Just as 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). Christ is our example of servanthood. From the beginning of His earthly ministry, Christ was involved in teaching, preaching, healing, consoling, and forgiving. He is our reason for serving. He is the One Who calls us to service, equips us to do His will, and the One Who forgives our failure to live as servants should.

We are very much like the disciples, who, although they lived with Jesus for three years and witnessed daily His acts of service, longed to be recognized and exalted. Jesus' words are recorded in Matthew 20:26: *"...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave..."* Who aspires to be a slave? Paul wrote, *"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love"* (Galatians 5:13). We serve, not as the slave who serves out of fear of punishment, but out of love for our Savior and others.

Where do we get this desire? How do we work up this motivation? God does not call us to do anything He has not already done, and He equips us to carry out His will for us. *"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work"* (2 Corinthians 9:8).

How exciting to think that Christ has called us to “a life of service.” As we study this concept in living **life at its best**, *"let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds"* (Hebrews 10:24).

## Children's Message (Week four)

### "The Joy of Serving"

Good morning! I'm happy to see your smiley and happy faces.

We are going to talk about serving, so I'd like to start by asking you some questions.

- How many of you set the dinner table?
- How many of you help mom and dad with the dishes?
- How many of you help vacuum the house?
- How many of you help rake the leaves at your house?

These acts of helping your parents, your brothers and sisters, your grandparents, your neighbors, or anyone else are called serving. When we help others, we are serving.

Can you think of other ways that you serve your parents? (wait for answers)

After you helped your parents or your brother or sister with something, how did you feel?

Jesus was all about serving others. Jesus said, "*I came not to be served but to serve.*" Jesus served people when He fed them. He served people when He healed them. Jesus' greatest act of service was when He went to the Cross to die for our sins. As God's children, we are called to be like Jesus and to serve and help others as He did.

In the Bible, Jesus tells us that when we serve and help those in need that we are really serving Him, so remember that when you serve people, you are really serving Jesus.

Thank you for coming today. Let's pray: Dear Lord, grant me a loving and serving heart. Open my eyes and heart to opportunities to serve others. In Jesus' precious name I pray. Amen.



## Sermon for Week Four: “A Life of Service”

**Text:** Philippians 1:1-11,19-27: “Saved to Serve”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

“A Life of Service” is our theme for this week as we discuss living **Life at its Best**

Is life about great beginnings or about great endings? How would you like to be known? Would you like to be known as one who had a great beginning or one who had a great ending? If I could be so bold, wouldn't it be wonderful to have both? A great beginning and a great ending!

That's exactly what St. Paul is talking about in our epistle reading today. He talks about a great beginning; he says, *"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* The one who got it started wants to see you have a great ending too. Paul is writing to a group of believers whom he had met many years before and he says, "Remember that great beginning? Remember that great beginning of life, of faith, of walking with Christ Jesus?"

What about you? Do you remember that greatest of beginnings? Some of you, perhaps later in life, can picture that great beginning and recall the very words of God that came and touched your heart and the person God used. You may even be able to recall the exact place you were when suddenly God's amazing grace and love became clear.

For others, when we talk about that great beginning, what comes to mind are the things that other people have told us. What comes to mind is the love of our parents that brought us to a place like this baptismal font. And the great beginning was when the pastor poured water over us and said, "I baptize you in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." And it was as if heaven opened, and the Lord Himself said, "You are mine. I have called you by name."

My friend, you have had a great beginning. Paul says to those in Philippi, and he says to us today, “Don't forget that great beginning; that's what it's all about.” But there is more. There is more. Even as Paul is struggling with his desire to go and be with Christ in heaven, he says no. He's convinced he needs to remain. Did you notice in our text why he was going to remain? He said, I'm convinced *"...that I will remain...for your progress and joy in the faith."* Having already attained the great beginning, he's talking about growth, about maturity, about progress. In chapter 2, Paul goes on to say, *"...work out your salvation with fear and trembling..."* In the midst of that great beginning, hold on and go with God and watch what he will do in you and through you as a channel of His love, as you mature as a servant of Christ Jesus.

The disciples one day were bickering amongst themselves as to who was the greatest and what was the proper measuring stick for the one who was most important within the group of the 12. The Lord challenged them to look at greatness in a completely different way. Jesus said that greatness for servants of Christ is measured with a different measuring stick than the world uses. Jesus says that if you want to be great you must be a servant of all.

Do you know something, my friends? That word "servant" was just as repugnant, repulsive, and undesirable then as it sounds today. From the beginning of time, that is, from the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden, there has been this desire to be a master, to be a lord, not a servant. We want to make others do what we want them to do. Then Jesus challenged them and said that, if they really wanted to be great, it was about service. Just imagine the looks on their faces. Disappointment. That's not what they were wanting to hear.

Jesus taught a powerful lesson about servanthood. He taught that lesson on the night of the final meal he would eat with His disciples. We're told all 12 were gathered in an upper room with Jesus in their midst. Off to the side, nearly forgotten, was a basin. In the basin was water. No one was standing behind the basin. No one had it in his grasp. It stood unattended, unnoticed. You see, that basin was meant for the

washing of feet. In ancient times, the mode of transportation was a little messier on the road than it is today. The person who was traveling would not only come into your home with a little dust and dirt, but his feet would be dung-stained as well. Washing feet was the job of the least servant. To put it in our terms, the servant with the lowest amount of seniority got the basin as the guests came into the home. He would kneel down and wash their feet.

On that night, when the 12 were gathered with Jesus in their midst, the basin was unattended. There were no men pushing and shoving to see who could be first in line. "No, no, my turn, you got to do it last time. I get to be first. Get behind me. I get to serve. Who do you think you are, pushing in front of me? It's my turn." The basin stood alone—until Jesus got up and took the basin and knelt and began washing the feet of each disciple. It was a very awkward moment. You see, they recognized the One with the basin. They knew where He came from. He was the Son of God, from the right hand of the Father. Finally, Peter, speaking up as if to voice the concern, the awkwardness, and the embarrassment of the whole group, said, "Lord, You can't do this. Of all the people in the room, You shouldn't be doing this!"

The Lord was teaching them about a newer, grander, more blessed way of life. He was getting them ready for what was going to happen less than 24 hours later. As He hung on that cross, and they watched Him bleed and groan and gasp, that same thought washed over them that should come to us as you and I picture that scene. It's supposed to be the same feeling the disciples had when Jesus took the basin. "Lord, this isn't right. You're not supposed to be doing this. I'm the one who should be there. I'm the one who should be suffering, not You." But the Lord makes it clear that, through that cross, He gives more than an example; He gives us new life. New life as we look to Him and recognize the blessings of His service, of His ransom, of His deliverance. We come to rejoice and hold onto and remember that great beginning. That beginning, our salvation through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, is what enables us to live **life at its best**.

There are two bodies of water in the Holy Land, two large seas. The one to the north is filled up by the streams that run down from the mountains from the melting snow and the rains that come in their season. If you stand along the banks of that northern body of water called the Sea of Galilee and look and listen, this is what you'll experience. You'll hear children splashing in the water, fishermen pulling in their catch, and birds flying overhead and diving down to get their fresh fish. Flowers are growing along the bank of the lake. It's a place of life, of celebration, a place of giving and receiving. Then the waters that collect in that lake make their way down the Jordan River.

They head south until they finally come to a collecting place. If you stand on the bank of that body of water, you won't hear any children splashing. There won't be any flowers growing along the shore. There are no birds flying overhead dipping down for fresh fish and no fishermen on the lake. Do you know what that place is called? It's called the Dead Sea. You see, it's one of those places that receives water, receives the gifts, receives the blessings, and then hoards and holds on. There's no escape, there's no outlet, and the waters turn stagnant, putrid, unable to support life. The Sea of Galilee, on the other hand, receives the waters and passes them on. The question for you and me is, "Are we like the Sea of Galilee, channels of God's love, or are we like the Dead Sea, terminal receptors of God's gifts?"

I don't know about you, but, when I go to a restaurant, I enjoy those restaurants that give free refills on drinks. You see, if I'm only going to get one drink, then I'm careful on how I drink. Just a little sip now, as I'm waiting for my dinner to come. It's going to last through dessert, so I'll have to drink sparingly. But, with free refills, it's a whole different story, isn't it? When there are free refills, I'm slugging them down, and the waitress is coming back two and three and four times. If I have my family with me, we might as well have two waitresses helping us.

How do you look at God and His blessings to you? The abilities, the gifts, the finances, everything that He has to pour out to you. When you think of God, is He the kind of God who gives you just one cup? It's going to have to last. Or is He about free refills? Listen to this powerful word of God. It says, "*God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work*" (2 Corinthians 9:8). Because God is the God of free refills, He keeps

refilling His serving people with more time, with more love, with more gifts and abilities to be able to be that channel of His love. When we recognize that we have been saved, something happens inside of us and that desire to serve gets a new spark.

Why, it's like a 13-year-old boy, who, after hearing about God's love for him and the possibility of going away to serve for a week somewhere else in the country, went home and told his parents: "Mom and Dad, I don't care what the baseball coach says. This summer, I'm going on that servant event. Even if I get benched for the rest of the season, I'm going to go." Now, my friends, when a 13-year-old boy who's been playing baseball every summer decides that something else is more important than baseball, God is at work, and the servant spark has caught.

Paul writes to the Philippian Christians, "We are servants of Christ Jesus." Servants of Christ Jesus. According to our human nature, that phrase has gotten a very bad rap. Some would say, "Servants of Christ Jesus? Oh no, that means there are things that I must do, and I can't have any fun doing them. Knowing the Lord and being in His kingdom is hard work, and there's no joy to be found. Ohhhh, it's terrible stuff!"

But you know what I've discovered? I've discovered that those who are servants of Christ Jesus are the most joyful, the most satisfied. They are living **life at its best**.

[If the following illustration does not apply, substitute another example from your congregation of joyful volunteers.]

Why, if you were to be here at church, when the ladies working on their quilts (and they've made hundreds and sent them all around the world) you won't hear this: "Gotta make another quilt. I can't believe we got to make another quilt, nobody's satisfied with all the hundreds we've made before, we gotta make another quilt." If you were standing at the bottom of those steps, as the ladies gather to make their quilts, you'd think they were having a tea party up there. Laughing and joking and having fun, smiling and wondering. Wondering, who's going to use this blanket? Will it be a baby, or will it be an old man? Will it be a young mother? You see, somehow when we say servant of Christ Jesus, we get to thinking that it means that our faces have to turn down: "Servant of Christ Jesus." That isn't the way it is at all. Being a servant of Christ Jesus is about joy and it's about being used by God, experiencing the free refills.

[Use this spot for an illustration of a joyful Christian servant of your acquaintance.]

When God's people come together, it's not unusual for the pastor to say, "Go in peace. Serve the Lord." Then there's a response that the people say. Do you remember what it is? It's, "Thanks be to God!"

Why does that phrase, "Thanks be to God," belong after those two phrases? The first part, "Go in peace," means we're saved. It means we have a healthy relationship with God, we've left our sins at the foot of the cross, He's forgiven them, and our relationship is restored. Therefore, we leave with peace, peace from God and peace with God. That's a grand thing. It's **life at its best** to have that kind of peace.

But think about it; why do I need to thank God when I am being sent out into the world to "serve the Lord"? It's because not everyone is able to do that. There are only so many people who are able to "serve the Lord." Did you know that? Not everybody can serve the Lord. Only those who have peace with God can serve Him and are able to be His channels and His vessels. That's why we have the response, "Thanks be to God!" I have peace with Him! Thanks be to God! I can serve Him, even me! Let's practice it together:

Pastor: "Go in peace. Serve the Lord."

Congregation: "Thanks be to God!" Amen.

May the peace that passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus now and forever. Amen.

## **Life at its Best**

### **Bible Study, Week Four: “A Life of Service”**

Prayer: Lord, You came to earth not to be served but to serve. Let Your purpose be ours as well and help us to be faithful in our service to others. Grant us loving and giving hearts that we may share Your love within us with others. Thank You for the joy that we feel through assisting and helping others. Bless the study that we are about to begin. May all that we think and do give You honor and glory. Amen.

1. Read the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. What acts of service did the Good Samaritan provide? What made his service especially noteworthy?
2. What does 1 Peter 4:10 say about your need to be in service? Identify its three parts.
3. How does Mark 12:30-31 motivate you to serve?
4. What does Jesus ask of you in John 13:1-17?
5. Read Matthew 25:35-40. When helping those in need whom are you really assisting?
6. Read Ephesians 5:1. How can you imitate Christ?
7. Read 2 Corinthians 9:13. What is the ultimate result of your faithful service?
8. What does Matthew 28:20 promise that will equip you as you serve others?
9. What does 2 Corinthians 9:8 mean to you?
10. Read James 2:14-17. What is the connection between faith and works?

Questions for further discussion:

11. Why is serving and loving others an important part of living **life at its best**?
12. How would you contrast true service with self-serving service?
13. In what service activities are you currently involved? What service is God prompting you to do?
14. How does God enable you to serve?
15. What are the differences between people who live as terminals and those who live as channels?

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the opportunity to study Your Word today as it pertains to serving. Open our eyes and hearts so that we will use our time, talents, and money in ways to serve others. Use our hands and feet as Your instruments for good. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## Week Four: Wrapping Up: “A Life of Service”

We are called to give our time, energy, and effort to serve others. Christians are giving people. While on earth, Jesus was the perfect example of a giving life full of service and compassion. When we intentionally fail to give our support to others, or if we ignore the pleas of those in need, we dishonor God. God is calling us to be His hands to help those who are in need, and He will lead us where He wants us to serve. Because of God’s calling and our devotion to Him, service becomes our way of life. Service is what emanates from a life filled with love and devotion to Christ.

God loves the world, the whole world. It is God’s love working through us that enables us to be servants to others. Our love for Christ is seen in acts of serving. We can be either other-oriented or self-oriented. Without God’s motivation within us, our focus is always directed inward, always aimed at fulfilling our own needs. He provides the love we need to love others and gives us the desire to serve them. As our relationship with Christ grows, we will be better able to see the world as He sees it, through eyes of love. **Life at its best** is possible only when we choose to live a life of service to the Lord and others. We are saved by grace through faith for service.

The surprising thing is that, when we help others, we end up receiving an equal or greater benefit than the recipients from our acts of service. We discover that it is a greater blessing to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

### ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS

#### LIFE-ENRICHING

Serving

Compassionate

Sharing

Humble

Is a channel

Receives joy from helping others

Is rich in Christ

Is involved

#### LIFE-DESTROYING

Being served

Self-serving

Keeping

Arrogant

Is a terminal

Finds boredom in his existence

Is absorbed in self

Is separate



## Bible Study 4: Answer guide for “A Life of Service”

1. Luke 10:25-37. The Good Samaritan bandaged the injured person’s wounds and put oil and wine on them. He took the person to an inn where he paid for care and lodging. The care was noteworthy because of the great animosity between Jews and Samaritans.
2. 1 Peter 4:10. We are exhorted to use our gifts in service to others. Each of us is to use his/her gift in service faithfully.
3. Mark 12:30-31. God’s love for us and within us compels us to love our neighbors as ourselves.
4. John 13:1-17. Just as Jesus washed His disciples’ feet, we are to humble ourselves and do lowly acts of service to others.
5. Matthew 25:35-40. When we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and provide drink to the thirsty, we are serving Jesus.
6. Ephesians 5:1. We imitate Jesus by living lives of love.
7. Read 2 Corinthians 9:13. Through your generosity, people will see God working through you and God will be praised.
8. Matthew 28:20. God promises to be with us.
9. 2 Corinthians 9:8. God’s abounding grace can enable each of us to give generously.
10. James 2:14-17. Without works our faith is dead. *“Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”*
11. **Life at its best** is made possible through a relationship with Jesus. That relationship is evidenced by our love toward and our service to others. Through faith, we are enabled to love others and that love prompts us to serve them.
12. True service expects nothing in return. Self-serving service is done with the motive of recognition or getting something in return.
13. Personal response.
14. God transforms our hearts and with changed hearts we can love others more than ourselves (Romans 12:1-2).
15. As terminals, we keep God’s gifts to ourselves. As channels, God works through us, and we become His hands, feet, and mouth.

## Sunday, Week Four: “A Life of Service”

### *Being a Good Samaritan*

*“Do to others as you would have them do to you”* (Luke 6:31).

The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) is one of the most popular parables in Scripture. It has become part of our culture and vocabulary with many hospitals and institutions bearing its name.

We read in the tenth chapter of Luke that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem when He was asked some difficult questions by an expert theologian, or expert in the law. The theologian asked Jesus this question: *“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”* (verse 25). He replied to his own question in verse 27: *“He answered: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind;’ and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”* The theologian had no problem with *“Love the Lord your God,”* but he debated the second half of the command by asking the question, *“Who is my neighbor?”*



Jesus responded with telling this parable. A man was going down the road to Jericho. The man was robbed, beaten, and left half-dead alongside the road. At different times, a priest and a Levite passed by the injured man, but neither chose to give him any help or hope.

Along came a merchant who was identified as a Samaritan. Samaritans were non-Jews living in Israel and were hated by Jews. When the Samaritan came upon the injured person, he had pity on him. Dismounting from his donkey, he bandaged the beaten man's wounds and showed additional compassion by putting the man on his donkey and taking him to an inn. Before leaving the inn, he paid the innkeeper two silver coins for continued care of the injured man. The Samaritan also promised he would return and give the innkeeper additional money should more care be needed.

We are created to be “Good Samaritans” who continually share the love of Christ. God strengthens and nurtures us to share our faith, energy, and time with others. We are to live our lives as “Good Samaritans” and share the message of the Savior with those around us through word and deed.

Dear Lord, thank You for continually coming to my aide. Help me to be a good Samaritan to others. In Jesus' holy name I pray. Amen.

## *Life at its Best*



## *Daily Devotions for the whole family!*

### Week 4

### *“A Life of Service”*

Monday	“Motivated by God’s Love to Serve”
Tuesday	“Being a Channel or a Terminal”
Wednesday	“Not to be Served but to Serve”
Thursday	“We Are Jesus’ Hands and Feet”
Friday	“Go Do as I Have Done”
Saturday	“Using our Gifts for Service”
Sunday	“Being a Good Samaritan”

## Monday, Week Four: “A Life of Service”

### *Motivated by God’s Love to Serve*

“Share with God’s people who are in need...” (Romans 12:13).

Many people ask the question: “Why am I here?” The writer to the Hebrews gives a clear answer: “*that we may serve the living God*” (Hebrews 9:14)! The life Jesus lived for thirty-three years gives us a model of service to emulate. As Jesus lived to serve and extend His Kingdom, we are called to do the same. Jesus lived a perfect life of complete service to those He came to save, and His death and resurrection were His supreme acts of service.

Of all the commandments, Jesus said the most important is “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*” The second is this: “*Love your neighbor as yourself*” (Mark 12:30-31). Service is made possible through love. If love is not the motivating force behind the service, then the service is done for the wrong reasons of approval or acceptance or a desire that it be reciprocated.

Our desire to love and serve our neighbors is our response to the Lord’s love for us. “*We love because He first loved us*” (1 John 4:19). To love is to serve; service is the natural outcome of love. Love is what gives us the energy and desire to serve. When we love someone with our whole heart, we want to continue to serve that person. We don’t withhold our kindness. Because we love our spouses, children, parents, and best friends, we willingly serve them. The *agape* love of Christ enables us to love the unlovely as well. Our life of service is not offered as a way of receiving “more” of God’s love. While God is pleased with our acts of loving service, they do not earn or bring His love. He already loves and accepts us unconditionally. Motivated by God’s love for us, we offer our service as a deliberate gift to Him. Others will see God’s love through us.

Our lives are God’s gift to us. How we use them is our gift to God. When we commit to a life of service because of Jesus’ love for us, we are fulfilling one of the purposes Christ has for our lives. Service is what we can do with the brains, bodies, and talents God has given us. All things flow from and reflect our relationship with Christ.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, please give me a servant’s heart. Amen.

Called to *Serve*

## Tuesday, Week Four: “A Life of Service”

### *Being a Channel or a Terminal*

“...Serve one another in love” (Galatians 5:13).

Throughout life we receive and give. We must receive in order to give and live at all. God gives us all the resources and talents to make serving and giving possible. Keeping what we have brings no blessing to us or others. If we consume our time, possessions, and energy on ourselves, we become empty, spiritually dead, unhappy, friendless people.

The need to give and the benefits of giving can be illustrated by contrasting the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, both of which are in the Holy Land. The Sea of Galilee receives water from the northern mountain streams which continues on, flowing into the Jordan River. Because the sea allows water to flow through it, it lives. On its banks, flowers bloom and bushes grow. Birds and animals drink from its waters. People swim in it and enjoy water activities. Nearby communities enjoy the waterfront.

The Jordan River flows south into the Dead Sea, but this sea keeps all the water it receives. The Dead Sea simply takes without giving. The water has become stagnant with no birds or animals willing to drink from it. No fish live in it. No plants spring up around it. There is no life; in fact, the water destroys life. The very fact that the sea takes without giving has created death in and around it. It is a reservoir rather than a channel.

**Jesus Taught  
us how to  
Serve Others**

Just as there are these two different kinds of seas, there are two kinds of people. People who share nothing and serve no one act as terminals. They will end life unhappy, empty, and stagnant. Our purpose is to be channels so that God’s love and goodness may flow through us. By His grace, God transforms us into generous givers willing to love, share, and serve others and live “life at its best.”

Individuals who act as channels of God’s love and gifts put self aside. God refills serving people with more love, time, gifts, and abilities to share with others.

Prayer: Dear good and gracious Heavenly Father, help me understand that You bless me so I can be a blessing to others. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

## Wednesday, Week Four: “A Life of Service”

### *Not to Be Served but to Serve*

*“...as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10).*

The words of Matthew 20:28, “*Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many,*” remind us that the life of Jesus was one of total sacrifice. Jesus wanted to develop that same servant heart in His disciples and us. He said in Matthew 20:26, “*...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.*” He lived for His heavenly Father and for others. Just as Jesus served His Father, He calls us to serve Him as well. Being conformed to the image of Christ, we will take on the role of servants.

The concept of serving rather than being served is not a natural one. We have an inborn desire to be served ourselves and to have our own needs met rather than to see to others. We prefer to be “number one.” In addition, apathy will often reduce our interest in sharing. God loves changing our mindset from serving ourselves to serving others. Seeing others as our brothers and sisters in Christ helps us live “life at its best.”



A life of service and servanthood is contrary to what our society promotes. We are told by the world that we should aspire to fame, power, and wealth, but for servants, there is no glory, spotlight, or status. Living lives of service, we give of ourselves without striving for financial rewards or personal recognition. Along with the Apostle Paul we say, “*We are not trying to please men but God, Who tests our hearts*” (1 Thessalonians 2:4b). As a servant, Jesus was not looking for praise from the masses; He was interested only in glorifying His Father.

We are called to give our time, energy, and effort to serve others. As Christians we are to be giving people. While on earth, Jesus gave us the perfect example of a giving life full of service and compassion.

Prayer: Dear Father, I know that in my service it is Your love within me that enables me to be in service to others. Continue to use me. Amen.

## Thursday, Week Four: “A Life of Service”

### *We Are Jesus’ Hands and Feet*

*“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10).*

When we intentionally fail to give our support to others, or if we ignore the pleas of the needy, we dishonor God. God is calling us to be His hands to help those who are in need, and He will lead us where He wants us to serve. Because of God’s calling and our devotion to Him, service becomes our way of life. Service is what emanates from a life filled with love and devotion to Christ.

When we desire to serve Jesus, we begin to see people as He saw them. Instead of seeing only the sores covering the leper’s body, Jesus saw a man in need of healing (Luke 5:12-15). He raised the widow’s son out of compassion for a heartbroken mother (Luke 7:11-15). When He allowed the “*woman who had lived a sinful life*” to minister to Him, He was offering forgiveness to a repentant heart (Luke 7:36-38). When we comprehend that “*while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8), performing the ultimate act of service, our response of love and gratitude will be to serve others in need.

*“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love” (Galatians 5:13).* Our freedom expresses itself in the form of service. God brings us into a proper relationship with Himself and then helps us understand that service honors Him. We are called to be imitators of Christ and to “*live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us*” (Ephesians 5:1-2). Christ showed His love by coming to serve. We serve out of love for Christ and the desire to “*live a life worthy of the Lord and [to] please Him in every way*” (Colossians 1:10).

God loves the world, the whole world. It is God’s love working through us that enables us to be servants to others. He provides the love we need to love others and gives us the desire to serve them.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, please open my eyes for opportunities to serve. In Jesus’ holy and precious name I pray. Amen.



## Friday, Week Four: “A Life of Service”

### *Go Do as I Have Done*

“...to look after orphans and widows in their distress...” (James 1:27b).

The entire life of Jesus was one of service, but one act of servanthood that is most often referred to is His washing of His disciples’ feet during the evening of the Passover Feast before His crucifixion.

*When He had finished washing their feet, He put on His clothes and returned to His place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” He asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them” (John 13:12-17).*

Jesus washed the disciples’ feet and told them to do as He had done. As Christ came to serve, so must all disciples accept a life of service to others. In our service, we put our faith into action. We are called to serve, and as we serve, we find support and strength. As we grow and find God’s strength, we desire to put our faith into practice—and so it goes. God’s people reach out to receive and serve in the name of Jesus. Christianity is not a way to do certain things. Christianity shapes the way we do everything. Christianity is a relationship with Christ based on faith. James reminds us that faith and actions work together and that faith is made complete by what we do (James 2:22).

Whatever God calls us to do, we must do. It matters not who gets the credit for what we do, as long as God gets the glory. We are called to be His hands, reaching out to people in need. With God’s help, we can accomplish more than what we thought possible. To do what we can is the responsibility we have as Christians, and, while we serve others, we are equally blessed.

Prayer: Dear Father, may my words and actions give You glory. Amen.



## Saturday, Week Four: “A Life of Service”

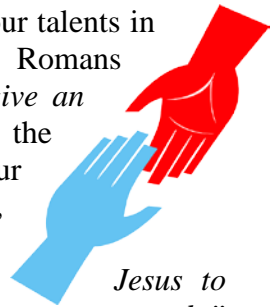
### *Using our Gifts for Service*

“I desire to do Your will, O my God...” (Psalm 40:8).

As an act of His grace, God has blessed each of us with talents, gifts, and abilities. “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7). Through His gifts, God has enabled each of us to serve others. We are called to employ what we’ve been given for higher purposes than simply to make a living or for our own selfish gain or recognition. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul urges us to “...eagerly desire spiritual gifts,” (vs. 1) and to “...try to excel in gifts that build up the church” (vs. 12). God has blessed us with talents so we can carry out His mission here on earth. To know Christ is life’s greatest treasure. To serve Christ is life’s greatest pleasure.

1 Peter 4:10 is one of the Bible’s most challenging and motivating verses: “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” The verse outlines three truths. First, each one of us has received a gift. Second, we are to serve others. Finally, we are to be stewards in administering God’s grace, which has been entrusted to us.

God is watching, and He sees what we do with our talents in service to others. We will be held accountable. Romans 14:12 admonishes, “So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.” God gives us the responsibility and duty to help those in need. Our actions don’t escape His view. We are His hands, eyes, and feet to accomplish His purposes. “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10). We are not to squander or hide our talents (Matthew 25:14-30), but to use them as God intended in service to others.



Prayer, Dear God, use my gifts in service to others. Help me to be Your hands and feet in service to those in need. Amen.





## Week 5: “Controlling our Money”

Life at its Best:  
Living Wisely in an Unwise World

## Bulletin Messages, Week Five: “Controlling our Money”

### **Life at its Best, Week Five: “Controlling our Money”**

“Controlling our Money” is the theme for this week as part of our ongoing sermon series **Life at its Best**. Jesus knows that money and material possessions are very necessary for our lives. He also knows that money and material things are more likely than anything else to replace God at the center of our hearts. “*No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve both God and money*” (Matthew 6:24). In order for our lives to be complete and to live **life at its best**, we must control our money—lest our money control us. Next week’s theme is “Shaping Lives through Obedience.” Please join us!

### **Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World**

**THE MORE MONEY WE HAVE THE  
HARDER IT IS FOR US TO BELIEVE  
THAT CHRIST IS OUR GREATEST ASSET.**

“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15).



## **Controlling our Money**

Unless we honor God in the faithful use of our money, we are not living **Life at its Best**. If we question that assertion, thinking that our finances are somehow separate from our spiritual lives, we would benefit from studying the words of Jesus as recorded in Luke 16:11. *"So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?"* Notice the distinction Jesus made between worldly wealth and true riches. Worldly wealth, beneficial as it can be, pales in significance when compared to true riches. When we see wealth as a tool rather than a treasure, we will have taken a giant step toward "controlling our money."

Money can be a curse or a blessing. If we become engrossed in wanting and having it, it becomes the treasure that keeps us from the true riches God would like us to have. It becomes a curse. It is a curse because we become preoccupied with using our money for the purpose of seeking bigger, better, and more things. We get entrapped in the lure of self-gratifying lifestyles. We ignore the needs of others and the needs of God's Church. If we use our money, whether we have little or much, for the furthering of God's kingdom on earth and helping those in need, it is a tool that can enhance our relationship with Christ. Then it is a blessing to us and others.

Our aims should be to equip ourselves to be good stewards of the financial gifts God has entrusted to us, to learn how to acquire a Godly perspective on money, and to encourage one another to *"Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well"* (Mathew 6:33).

## Sermon for Week Five: “Controlling Our Money”

**Text:** Joshua 24:14-15

Much grace, mercy, and peace be to all of you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May His Holy Spirit open and fill your hearts and minds at the hearing of His Word. That Word for our text this morning is from Joshua 24:14-15:

*"Now fear the Lord and serve Him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable for you, then choose for yourself this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."* This is the Word of the Lord as we continue in our sermon series **Life at its Best**.

In the area of Biblical finance, no one stood out more than Larry Burkett. Prior to his death in 2003, Mr. Burkett was by far the most influential speaker and author on Christian money management. In one of his many books, he gives this account of his experience providing financial counsel to three different couples.

The first couple came to see him because they were in trouble financially. The first thing the husband said was, "Larry, we make \$22,000 a year between us. My wife doesn't work, and we have a small child at home. Larry, you cannot live in Atlanta on \$22,000 a year." Larry went over everything they had—their assets and their liabilities and the budget with which they had been struggling—and he concluded, "You're absolutely right; you cannot live in Atlanta on \$22,000 a year." Then he gave them some homework, prayed with them, scheduled a follow-up meeting, and sent them on their way.

A second couple came into Larry's office with the same problem. "Larry, you know we're struggling. My wife works part-time. I work full-time, and between us we make \$40,000 a year. Larry, you cannot live in Atlanta on \$40,000 a year." Larry looked at their assets and their liabilities; he scrutinized their budget to see how they were spending their money. Finally, he looked at them and said, "You're absolutely right; you cannot live in Atlanta on \$40,000 a year." Then he prayed with them, gave them some homework, and sent them on their way with a follow-up meeting scheduled.

A third couple, both professionals, came to see Larry. "Larry, between the two of us, we earn \$80,000 a year. Larry, you cannot live in Atlanta on \$80,000 a year!" Larry looked at the assets and their liabilities and noted a few extra amenities they had because of their higher income. Then he looked them right in the eye and agreed with them. "You're right; you cannot live in Atlanta on \$80,000 a year." He prayed with them, gave them some homework, scheduled a follow-up visit, and sent them on their way.

Are you with me? What's happening here? You can figure it out. You can see that **life at its best** has more to do with **controlling our money** than we might want to think.

When Larry told that story at a conference, he almost anticipated the question that came up. Someone posed the question, "Larry, what would happen if you took the \$80,000 and gave it to the couple who were living on \$22,000?" Without hesitation, Larry looked at that person and answered for the whole auditorium to hear. "If you gave that couple the \$80,000, they would feel as if they were millionaires...for two years. Why? Because we just continue to rise up to and beyond the levels of income we have." That's what causes problems. That's what breaks up marriages. You know there is enough stress in marriages today without the addition of financial problems. If you have financial problems, I hope today's message will be an encouragement and give direction for what you can do.

**Life at its Best!** Part of **life at its best** is “controlling your money,” your spending, your obtaining of

material possessions and things; that's what it's about. If you want to live **life at its best**, if you're going to "control your money," you need to recognize three priceless truths that come from God's Word that speak to this whole issue and this whole area of concern in a very powerful way.

The first truth is this: Jesus is Lord. We know that to be true. Jesus is Lord! The question is: Is He Lord in your life? Is He Lord of your life? Is He Lord when it comes to the way you handle money in your life? Is He?

In Scripture, God's people in the Old Testament were commanded to tithe or give one-tenth of their incomes to the Lord. The tithe is affirmed in the New Testament (Matthew 23:23), so the tithe is an important guide to our faithful giving. What we are very aware of as part of our stewardship education is that this congregation, the people of the Lord, are not struggling so much with the ten percent as we are with the ninety. Could it be because Jesus is not Lord in our lives? We may be bringing an offering forward, and that's well and good, but what are we doing and how are we handling and controlling the remaining ninety percent? With Jesus as Lord of our lives, we will be better equipped to handle the ninety percent and more able to give ten percent.

I think you know what I mean. The priceless truth that Jesus is Lord means that Jesus is Number One and there is no one else and nothing else, and, any time I catch myself putting something ahead of Him or before Him, I need to deal with it and deal with it decisively. Husbands and wives need to deal with the issue decisively if things are getting out of hand. On the other hand, if you have so much money you don't know what to do with it, you need to deal with that decisively as well. Scripture is full of references to our inability to handle the wealth and the treasures that we have been given in excess of what is needed to take care of life and family and give to the Lord. Sometimes God gives us so much so that we can give much, and He will provide opportunities for that excess to be used. Some of us have found those opportunities and God blesses us for that. Pray for more! He'll guide us. Jesus is Lord!

In Matthew 6:24, we read, *"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."* Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Number One! Jesus goes on to say in verse 33, *"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* Let's seek Him first. Make Jesus Number One. Jesus is Lord!

The reason I chose Joshua 24 for our text today is because of the story behind the story. Maybe you didn't catch exactly what Joshua was saying. Let's go back to that time—to Joshua's day. He must have been standing on some high point with all the children of Israel gathered before him. What they saw in Joshua was a man of God, a man of faith, a man of commitment, a man who had not disappointed the Lord, a man who had not disappointed them, because General Joshua had succeeded by the hand of the Lord in bringing the children of Israel into the Promised Land.

This is what Joshua said to them. It's a simple message, a clear message. Listen carefully. He said, "Now, remember the gods of the people in Egypt? Remember when you were slaves? Remember their gods? Who won, their gods or yours? Remember the ten plagues? Who won? Remember when you turned around, you looked back, and you saw the Red Sea closing in on your enemy who was chasing after you? Who won? Do you want to serve their gods or your God?" (You don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure that one out, do you?)

Then he said, "How about this land we came into, the people who lived here?" The emphasis is on **the people who lived here**, because they're dead; they're gone. God's judgment had been passed on them. They sacrificed children to their god Molech and did other very detestable things related to idolatry. God's judgment was that General Joshua and his forces of Israel should wipe them out. That's what they set about



to do. Those people are gone. Do you want to serve their gods or your God? (Another easy answer, isn't it?) You can see Joshua laying that choice out before the people. I can see someone chuckling and saying, "Did you hear what he said? We're serving our God!" That was their response. Joshua said, *"As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."* The people replied, "We, too, will serve the Lord."

Joshua went on to say that it would not be easy. If you look at the course of history for the Israelites, you'll see he was right. The Israelites' history was one of sinfulness, unfaithfulness, repentance, returning to the Lord, receiving forgiveness, and being restored again and again, following that same cycle over and over again—just as you and I follow that same cycle in our lives: not “controlling our money,” not living **life at its best**, not making sure that Jesus is Lord in our lives, that He is Number One, that we honor Him and give Him glory, and that we please Him with the way we handle the financial resources He has given to us.

The very bottom-line priceless principle of God's Word is to make Jesus Lord, and it is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we wrestle and struggle with that. It's a priceless principle of God's Word, a principle of faith. By putting absolute faith and trust in Him, He will accomplish His will, and He will lead in His way in our lives. Very practically, it means that sometimes we say "no" to an expenditure. It means that, at times, we say, "No, I can't do that now." It means that I make this more important than that, because that's what the Lord would have me do. I really want "this," but "that" has to come before it. These are the kinds of struggles that come with the priceless principle that Jesus is Lord.

When Joshua stood before the people, he made it very clear. *"As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."* Jesus is Lord! What about your household? Can you say it? *"As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."* Say it with me: *"As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."*

The second priceless principle is that we are stewards. Jesus, the Lord of our lives, has given us the clothes we are wearing. He has given us the cars we drove to church this morning. He has given us the homes or apartments in which we live and the employment we have or will have. Jesus has given all of that. He has given us situations in life, whether we have tremendous wealth, something less than that, or whether, at times, we struggle from paycheck to paycheck. Regardless of our what or how much we own, we are stewards of it. If it's \$22,000, then live on that, God may be saying to us. If it's \$40,000, then live on that, and if it's \$80,000, live on that and think about what you can do with the excess and how the Lord might use it as an opportunity in your life to fund ministry in His kingdom.

You see, we've been given someone else's property that doesn't **belong** to us. Nothing here belongs to us! It belongs to God, and He has given it to us to use. We get into trouble when we start thinking it's ours. When is the last time you went out shopping for clothes or a television set or a car and you said, "Lord, what do You think? I'm buying this car for You; I'm buying these clothes for You. What do you think, Lord?" When is the last time you asked that question? It's not a bad thing to do. It may seem a little silly. I find myself asking that question a lot. It reminds me of Whom it really belongs to. Yes, sometimes I forget to ask that question, and I get into trouble, too.

The third priceless principle is that, because Jesus is Lord, there is help and hope for us stewards. There is help and there is hope for us. You know that God's Word makes God's plan of salvation very clear. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16). That's the glorious Good News for sinful human beings.

When Jesus died on the cross, He was thinking about you and me. He knew we would need that forgiveness. He knew that we would need for Him to pay the price, not with gold or silver, but with the shedding of His innocent, precious, holy blood so that our sins could be forgiven. Therefore, we can go in faith to the foot of the cross and receive that forgiveness.

Whatever the area of our lives we're struggling with, the cross means forgiveness. Jesus' full and free forgiveness is ours no matter what it is, no matter how big or how small it is. Forgiveness! He loves us a lot, doesn't He? To do what He did proves that He loves us a lot. Then, on Easter morning, He rose again from the empty tomb, and He has promised us that, because He lives, we, too, shall live. What more can you ask from Him? In fact, we didn't have to ask; He gave it anyway, because He knew we needed it. Forgiveness of sins. Everlasting life. Eternal blessings being in the presence of Jesus forever and ever. Powerful, powerful is the Good News of what Christ has accomplished for us.

In the area of living **life at its best**, we may not tie salvation together with “controlling our money,” but we certainly ought to tie our Lord together with it. He desires to be a part of every situation, every circumstance, and especially when we feel helpless or hopeless in our situations. He is the Lord Who is full of help and hope for all of us. If you're there now, look to Him; He's only a prayer away. He might only be a Christian friend away, a Christian counselor away, or your pastor away. He might only be a resource person away, maybe a community resource that can help you with a financial problem you're experiencing right now.

Maybe you're looking for ways to use to best advantage the dollars the Lord has given you in abundance over and above what anyone would need. Maybe He's given you a certain direction for some of the resources you have that are meant to be used for His kingdom. There is help and there is hope.

**Life at its best** means to recognize these priceless principles that God's Word has provided for us. Knowing that Jesus is Lord, that we are His stewards, and that, through Him, because of Who He is and because He cares for us, there is help and there is hope. May we be mindful of the great and many opportunities He gives us to serve Him by our commitments to give generously, faithfully, and cheerfully.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

## Life at its Best

### Bible Study, Week Five: “Controlling our Money”

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, so much of life revolves around money. Thank You for Your wisdom regarding money and possessions that we find in Your Word. Help us to know Your will and follow it. Bless us with Your wisdom and guidance. Please bless the study that we are about to begin. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

1. Read Deuteronomy 8:17-18. According to these verses what trap can you fall into?
2. Read Psalm 24:1; Haggai 2:8. In what ways will the perspective of ownership affect the use of your money? How does the message here give you security and confidence?
3. How did the following people view the ownership of their money?
  - Rich Young Ruler (Luke 18:18-25)
  - Poor Widow (Luke 21:1-4)
  - Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37)
  - Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11)
4. Read Matthew 13:22. What can happen to people who are wealthy?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6. How does the sowing and reaping principle apply to the handling of money?
6. Read Proverbs 30:8-9. What are the dangers of affluence? Poverty?
7. Read Matthew 6:25-34. What admonitions do these verses convey?
8. Read Matthew 25:14-30. What does the Parable of the Talents exhort you to do?
9. Read 1 Timothy 6:6-10. What does the love of money cause?
10. Read Luke 16:11. What does the unfaithfulness with money cause?

Questions for further discussion:

11. Why is controlling your money necessary for you to live **life at its best**?
12. What are some very important things that money can’t buy?
13. Do your possessions lead to humble gratitude to God Who is the provider of your possessions, or does your ego grow as the stuff you own grows?
14. How would you define possessiveness? Greed? Covetousness?
15. Read Proverbs 11:4. How much help will riches provide on the day of judgment?

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the opportunity that we had to gather together to study Your Word. Help us to control our money before it controls us. Grant us the ability to be disciplined in our spending, saving, and giving, so that our money management honors You. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

## Week Five: Wrapping Up: “Controlling our Money”

We make financial decisions daily. We decide whether to spend our money, give it, lend it, save it, or invest it. Because money is a very important part of life, it's important to come to know what our Lord teaches us about it in His Word. While money itself is neutral, we can make it either a positive or negative part of our lives. When God has first place in our lives rather than money, a big obstacle to an intimate relationship with Christ is eliminated, and we can live **life at its best**.

To supply our needs and to have money to share generously with God and others, we must develop good money management skills. We need to be diligent in goal setting and planning, budgeting, saving, and investing. God expects us to be wise in the management of money that He entrusts to us (Matthew 25:14-30).

Do we understand that money and things provide no lasting happiness? Are we aware of materialistic attitudes that permeate our culture? It is easy to be lulled into the thoughts and lifestyles that our society offers. With God's strength, guidance, and wisdom, we can make the right choices regarding the resources He entrusts to us. God gives us money not for our own gratification, but for His purposes. We need to show self-discipline in our own demands and desires for self-gratification. He wants us to give to others, share what we have, and assist those in need. God also wants us to use our money in ways that extend His kingdom.

### ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS

#### LIFE-ENRICHING

We control money

Peace and contentment with money

Proper planning

Debt avoidance

Wise spending

Couples communicating

Attributes success to God

Helps others

Life with an eternal perspective

Fellowship with God

Contentment

#### LIFE-DESTROYING

Money controls us

Anxiety and tension with money

Little or no planning

Debt abuse

Wasteful spending

Couples not communicating

Attributes success to self

Hoards everything for self

Life with a worldly perspective

Fellowship with things

Always wanting more

## Bible Study 5: Answer guide for “Controlling our Money”

1. Deuteronomy 8:17-18. We take credit for the ability to make money and ignores God Who gives us the ability to earn an income.
2. Psalm 24:1; Haggai 2:8. In both verses, we hear of God’s ownership. We are stewards and not owners of the money and possessions that God entrusts to us. As stewards, we seek to manage God’s blessings according to His will. Knowing that is the owner of all things, we can be confident that He will provide for us.
3. Rich Young Ruler, Luke 18:18-25. His money was his god. Jesus asked him to give his money to the poor, but he was unable to give it away.  
Poor Widow, Luke 21:1-4. She trusted in God so much that she was willing to give all that had.  
Barnabas, Acts 4:36-37. He gave the proceeds from the sale of his property to the disciples.  
Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5:1-11. They lied to God and fellow believers, pretending they’d given all their proceeds while keeping for themselves part of the proceeds. They wanted praise.
4. Matthew 13:22. Some of the seeds fell among thorns which refer to the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of money. The greater the wealth the more time and energy required to manage. It’s so easy to get wrapped up in this activity that we have no time or energy for anything else. especially God.
5. 2 Corinthians 9:6. When we sow or manage money wisely, we will reap the benefits of having more money for our needs and the ability to give more.
6. Proverbs 30:8-9. The danger of affluence is that with a large amount of money we can stop placing our trust in the Lord. We can find our security in money and possessions. The danger of poverty is that we may begin to doubt God’s provisions and resort to stealing and taking what doesn’t belong to us.
7. Matthew 6:25-34. We are not to worry about what we eat or drink or what we wear.
8. Matthew 25:14-30. The Parable of the Talents exhorts us to manage faithfully and increase the money that God entrusts to us. We are stewards who are given blessings that He wants us to use for His purposes. He equips us for the management of His blessings.
9. 1 Timothy 6:6-10. The love of money is a root of all kinds of evils and causes many griefs. When money becomes too important, we become distant from God. The love of money disrupts relationships with family and friends as well.
10. Luke 16:11. Jesus tells us that money is a test. If we are not trustworthy with handling money, God will not trust with true riches which are the people of God.
11. We are either controlling money or our money is controlling us. With God’s help, we can control the lure of money and not become overly attached to it. If money becomes an end, it will prevent us from living **life at its best**. Life at its best is Christ-centered rather than money-centered.
12. Money can’t buy health, a happy marriage, God’s love, forgiveness, salvation, etc.
13. Personal response.
14. Possessiveness: Being selfish with what we own.  
Greed: Wanting more of what we have. Not satisfied.  
Covetousness: Wanting what someone else has.
15. Riches provide no help!!!

## Sunday, Week Five: “Controlling our Money”

### *Controlling Debt*

*The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender” (Proverbs 22:7).*

Possibly the most pressing and immediate money problem facing most of us is the amount of debt we have. This problem can cause life to be at its worst rather than at its best. Credit is highly accessible, and our culture encourages us to take advantage of it. President Franklin D. Roosevelt said, “Any government, like any family, can for a year spend a little more than it earns. But you and I know that a continuance of that habit means the poorhouse.” With so much available credit, it is no surprise that bankruptcies and divorces related to financial tension are on the increase. Debt often causes stress along with mental, physical, and emotional fatigue. Despite all the warnings about excess credit, we are still willing to buy now and pay later. A bumper sticker aptly describes the situation, “I owe, I owe, so off to work I go.”

The advertising industry does a good job of enticing us to buy things by making us feel discontented and woefully dissatisfied with who we are and what we have. We are pulled and pressured from every side to buy things we don’t need, with money we don’t have, from people we don’t know.



We live in a society in which enough is never enough! One of the biggest reasons we get into debt is greed. *“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15).* Jesus was criticizing the notion that the value of life is determined by the number of possessions we own. Things don’t have lasting value, yet greed entraps many Christians. For some of us, it will take a long time to discover that “money and possessions cannot buy happiness.” With God’s help, we can work our way out of debt and begin a path to financial freedom. With discipline, we can spend less than we make and say “no” to many purchases.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help me to budget and spend my money wisely so I don’t become enslaved to debt. Encourage me to spend less than I make. Motivate me to be a saver and a giver. May all that I do with my money give You honor and glory. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

## *Life at its Best*



## *Daily Devotions* *for the whole family!*

### *Week 5*

#### *“Controlling our Money”*

Monday	“Following God’s Financial Wisdom”
Tuesday	“Managing God’s Money”
Wednesday	“Resisting the Perils of Money”
Thursday	“Thanking God for our Financial Blessings”
Friday	“Living the Proper Lifestyle”
Saturday	“Resisting the Lure of Gambling”
Sunday	“Controlling Debt”



## Monday, Week Five: “Controlling our Money”

### *Following God’s Financial Wisdom*

“Watch out! Be on guard against all kinds of greed...” (Luke 12:15).

Jesus knew that money and possessions are more likely than anything else to replace God at the center of our hearts. He said, “*No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve both God and money*” (Matthew 6:24). If we cannot control our money, our money will control us. Many of us need help in keeping money in its proper place.

Unless we honor God in the area of our finances, we are not living “life at its best.” The mismanagement and misuse of money can easily lead to feelings of frustration and despondency. In times of financial turmoil:

- the thing we think about,
- the thing we worry about,
- the thing we talk about,
- the thing we lose sleep over is:

**MONEY!**

If our thoughts are consumed with getting and keeping money, money issues will likely be obstacles to finding the time and peace of mind to be in God’s Word and prayer. Our attention will focus on material matters rather than eternal ones. We may also find that stressful financial issues cause stress in our homes and hurts our ability to witness to others. Because we are consumed with our own problems, we become unable to take advantage of opportunities to serve others.

Money can be either a curse or a blessing. Our relationship with money can enhance our spiritual growth or diminish it. Money is a curse when it separates us from a loving relationship with Christ. When we become preoccupied with having or wanting money, it has become our treasure. “*What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?*” (Matthew 16:26). How we use and view money will influence our ability to find value and purpose in life. We need to be God-centered rather than self-centered in all areas of our lives, especially money. Our goal is to learn and follow God’s Biblical principles regarding money and possessions.

Dear Lord, help me to manage my money wisely and faithfully. Amen.



## Tuesday, Week Five: “Controlling our Money”

### *Managing God’s Money*

“And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?” (Luke 16:12).

The Bible has much to say about the use of money. It may not tell us whether it is proper to purchase an expensive car, house, or a boat for recreation, but it does offer counsel on how we are to faithfully manage the money and possessions entrusted to us. In order for us to handle our money faithfully, we need to possess our possessions rather than let our possessions possess us. Money possesses us when we continually seek more, bigger, and better things.

The possessions we purchase with our money can compete with Christ for the control of our lives. The more we focus on money, the greater potential it has to consume us. More money does not necessarily reduce our burdens; often it increases them. Jesus tells us we must choose between God and money (Matthew 6:24). We are told in Scripture that we should not continue to acquire possessions that have no eternal significance. Jesus said in Luke 12:33, “*Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.*” When we give to the poor, we are storing up treasures in heaven.



Peter, one of Jesus’ disciples, said we are not to be “...*greedy for money, but eager to serve*” (1 Peter 5:2). As God’s people, we can’t give God a disclaimer saying that we and everything we have are His except for our money and possessions. The apostle Paul diminished the value of possessions saying, “...*What I want is not your possessions but you*” (2 Corinthians 12:14). We need to acknowledge that all things belong to God and are to be placed under His control. With God’s strength and wisdom, we can make the right choices regarding the resources He entrusts to us.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help me to avoid the lure of money. Enable me to see that money that You entrust to me can be a tool to help those in need and to help others hear the Gospel. In Jesus name, I pray. Amen.



## Wednesday, Week Five: “Controlling our Money”

### *Resisting the Perils of Money*

“Commit to the Lord whatever you do...” (Proverbs 16:3).

Proverbs 30:8-9 entreats, “...give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown You and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.” These verses indicate the challenge that wealth and poverty present to our faith. Of the two, riches or poverty, we can make a case that wealth can cause Christians a greater problem. The Scottish writer Thomas Carlyle said, “Adversity is hard on a man, but for one man who can stand prosperity, there are a hundred that will stand adversity.” Possibly the easiest time for us to experience failure of our faith is during successful times.

Of all the desires of mankind, one of the strongest is the desire for prosperity. Many people will indicate that wealth or monetary success is their number one goal.



With money comes the ability to buy all the things we think we should have. If we receive monetary wealth, how will we respond? Will God receive the credit for our financial success? Will we use the money for His purposes? Max Anders said, “God wants us all to have wealth; we must be careful not to settle for money.” True wealth encompasses far more than money. There are those who are rich in material goods but poor in spirit. There are those who have vast resources but are destitute of family and friends. True wealth is found only in Christ.

If asked to define wealth, it is likely that each of us would do so differently. Compared to the rest of the world, most of us living in America are wealthy. Many households have two cars, multiple televisions, washers and dryers, microwaves, laptops, etc. Do we really need all these things? According to the world’s standards, especially the “third world,” we are wealthy. We are secure, warm, and well fed. While people in other parts of the world have little or nothing, we suffer from too much. Our luxuries have become necessities, and we refuse to give them up for the sake of others. Is this prosperity affecting our personal relationship with Christ?

Prayer: Father, help me to be content with what You entrust to me. Amen.

## Thursday, Week Five: “Controlling our Money”

### *Thanking God for our Financial Blessings*

“The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it...” (Psalm 24:1)

The account of the ten lepers found in Luke 17:11-19 indicates how a person’s attitude can change when he receives what he wants. Although there is no reference to money in the leper story, there is a unique connection between how the lepers responded when they were cured and those who have obtained financial success.

When nine out of ten lepers received what they wanted most—clean and healthy bodies, they no longer needed nor were interested in what God could do for them. Only one leper gave praise to God for what He had done.

If acquiring wealth is a major motivation, how will we respond if we become prosperous? Will we be like the nine lepers who gave no thanks to God once they received what they wanted most, or will we be like the one faithful leper? The nine lepers thought they had everything they needed once they were cured. In the short-term everything was fine. In the same way, prosperity brings short-term happiness. With money we can go places, do things, and buy many “toys.” Will our money breed a spirit of self-sufficiency and an independence from God? Prosperity is often good news for Satan, because many of us foolishly believe that . . .

- Money will solve all our problems.
- Money will provide us with lasting pleasure.
- Money will give us lasting security.



God clearly warns His people in Deuteronomy 8:11-14 against allowing wealth and success to take center stage in their lives. He warns His people not to forget God when they grow prosperous. In our land of plenty, we would do well to heed the warning God gave His people in Israel not to forget Him when they had the food, fine homes, herds, and all they needed.

Could it be that we want God when He can be helpful, and, after we receive what we’ve been seeking, God is no longer important?

Prayer, Dear Father, grant me a heart of gratitude and praise. Amen.

## Friday, Week Five: “Controlling our Money”

### *Living the Proper Lifestyle*

*“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth” (1 Timothy 6:17).*

Scripture does not dictate that we live in a certain way. God does not tell us what we can or can’t own. He does not list the specifics on the type of home or the number of cars or clothes we are to have, but God does want us to develop certain attitudes within the area of financial responsibility.

God wants us to have an eternal perspective. An eternal perspective leads us to act and live differently. Our lifestyles will reflect our relationship with Christ.

As we acknowledge God’s ownership and love, we respond by being good stewards, using our gifts and financial blessings in God-pleasing ways. An eternal perspective calls us to live modestly and share generously in the work of the Lord. Financial decisions will be spiritual decisions.



God does not condemn being rich, but He warns against greed, a self-centered attitude, and preoccupation with money that can result from wealth or from the goal of acquiring wealth. The Apostle Paul warned, *“Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs”* (1 Timothy 6:10). Our attitudes are more important than our possessions. We must be careful not to be consumed by the desire for money and things. The society in which we live tells us that to be happy we always need more, bigger, and better things. Money and nice things are not the problem, but the love of these things *“is a root of all kinds of evil”* (1 Timothy 6:10). Our goal is to place all things in perspective.

In his book, *Balancing the Christian Life*, Charles C. Ryrie gives us two thoughts on how to make financial decisions that are God-pleasing in any economic situation: (1) Learn contentment in the will of God in every circumstance of life. (2) Love God more than things either owned or desired.

Prayer: Dear good and gracious Heavenly Father, help me to honor You with my life and my possessions. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

## Saturday, Week Five: “Controlling our Money”

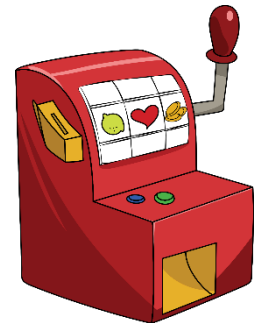
### *Resisting the Lure of Gambling*

*“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21).*

Gambling can devastate an individual and families. Often those who can least afford it are the ones who spend the greatest portion of their incomes on gambling. When the gambler is addicted, God and family lose importance.

Considering this information, the Church is faced with how we should address these problems. Is there an eleventh commandment that says, “Thou shalt not gamble”? Of course not, but there are several Biblical principles that gambling violates. The Bible warns us of the dangers of greed (Luke 12:15), selfishness, and the desire to get rich quick (1 Timothy 6:9-10). Gambling encourages greed, materialism, and “get-rich-quick” thinking.

Scripture also tells us that all good gifts come from above (James 1:17) and that we are to be good stewards of those gifts (1 Corinthians 4:2). Gambling encourages a reckless investment of our God-given resources (Matthew 25:14-30). Gambling says, “I don’t appreciate what God has provided. I deserve and want more.”



We read in the Bible that the greatest commandment is to love God with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength, and the second is to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31). Gambling indicates that the love of money has replaced love for God and has become our basis of trust. Throughout Scripture, the “sluggard” is condemned (Proverbs 10:26; 19:24; 21:25; 22:13; 26:14), but the idea of getting something for nothing (or at least, getting a lot for a little) is the basic premise of gambling.

As the people of God, we need to proclaim to the world the true riches promised through Christ, as opposed to the worldly treasures that are destroyed or stolen (Matthew 6:20). Renewed by the power of Christ, our hearts can turn away from the things of this world.

Prayer: Father, open my eyes to the pitfalls of gambling. Amen.



Life at its Best:  
Living Wisely in an  
Unwise World

Week 6:  
"Shaping Lives  
through Obedience"



## Bulletin Messages, Week Six: “Shaping Lives through Obedience”

### **Life at its Best, Week Six: “Shaping Lives through Obedience”**

“Shaping Lives through Obedience” is our theme for this week as we discuss living **life at its best**. Doing God's will is what is pleasing to God. Sounds simple enough, but, being the sinful people that we are, we know we fall far short of what God demands of us. The writer to the Hebrews tells us what we need to please God: *"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him"* (Hebrews 11:6). Join us next Sunday as focus on the theme “Seeking Contentment.”

### **Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World**

**THE BASIS OF OBEDIENCE TO GOD IS FAITH. FAITH IS WHAT MAKES OBEDIENCE POSSIBLE.**

“If you obey My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed My Father’s commands and remain in His love” (John 15:10).





Lay reader talk (week six)

## Shaping Lives through Obedience

The theme for today, “Shaping Lives through Obedience,” is part of our sermon series **Life at its Best**. What place does obedience hold in the life of a Christian saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, not by our own works (Ephesians 2:8-9)? Isn't obedience an Old Testament concept negated by the freedom that is ours as believers under the New Covenant?

It is true that we are saved by the atoning work of Jesus on the Cross and that He accepts us as we are. It is not true that Christ saves us and then forgets about us, however. It is His will for us that we “...live [lives] worthy of the calling [we] have received” (Ephesians 4:1).

Obedience is not a natural response for most of us. “Have it your way” is a popular slogan of the day. The person we most often seek to please is ourselves. As Christians, however, we do desire to please God. What pleases God, then, is obedience to Him. We have discovered, though, that our own efforts to be obedient are rarely successful. Our efforts to please God fall short. What does God really want from us, anyway? The writer to the Hebrews helps to clarify that question for us. *“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him”* (Hebrews 11:6).

Both the Old and New Testaments mention frequently the rewards for obedience. Deuteronomy 28 begins, *“If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all His commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth.”* The next several verses spell out more blessings which come to those who are obedient. On the other hand, fifty-three verses are required to enumerate curses for disobedience. Thus, we can truly see that our deeds have consequences. We can choose to disobey and suffer punishment, or we can, by the power of the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament, choose to obey and enjoy the most pleasant reward of all: pleasing God.



## Children's Message (Week six)

### “Being Obedient”

Today, we are going to talk about how important it is to obey. You already know how important it is to obey your parents and your teachers. But the most important person to obey is God. God speaks to us through the Bible, so it is important to read and hear what God is saying to us.

In the Bible, I want to talk about Abraham. We read his story in the book of Genesis. Abraham was a man of great faith. God made a covenant with Abraham. A covenant is a promise, and God promised to bless Abraham and make him the father of many nations. God promised Abraham children, but Abraham had to wait 100 years before God gave him a son. Does anyone remember what Abraham and his wife Sarah named their son? Yes, Isaac.

God tested Abraham's obedience. Abraham loved his son Isaac very much, but God told Abraham that he would have to sacrifice his son, give his son back to God. Abraham was obedient because he obeyed what God told him to do. He brought Isaac to the mountain top to sacrifice his son. In the Old Testament, God's people sacrificed animals for the forgiveness of their sins but now God told Abraham to sacrifice his own son instead of an animal. Just before Abraham was going to sacrifice his son, Isaac, does anyone remember what God did to save Isaac? Yes, God provided a sheep to sacrifice.

God gave Abraham faith to obey. That same faith that God gave Abraham He gives to each of you to obey. So when your parents tell you to make your bed, wash the dishes, rake the leaves, or pick up your toys, you can show your parents how much you love them by obeying what they are asking you to do. When you obey, you please God and your parents.

Let's pray. Dear God, thank You for the gift of faith. Through faith, I can be obedient to my parents and to my teachers. Place within me a willing heart to obey. In Jesus' holy name I pray. Amen.

## Sermon for Week Six: "Shaping Our Lives Through Obedience"

**Text:** Mark 12:28-33

This Sunday marks the sixth week of our theme: **Life at its Best**. The text for today is from Mark 12:28-33 and reads as follows:

*One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked Him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"*

*"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."*

*"Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but Him. To love Him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."*

Grace, mercy, and peace be to all of you from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

The dictionary gives the definition of "idol" as "a symbol of an object of worship." Our Catechism describes something as an idol when it is regarded or worshiped as God, but, even today, we commonly think, "I do not worship an idol!" What comes to mind as an idol is a statue or icon, and we are too sophisticated today to think of something like that as greater than God, and certainly we don't worship these objects, we reason, so we feel cleared of any guilt of idolatry.

Now, let us think about this again. We have reasoned that it is acceptable to have a "crush" on someone. We feel emotionally upbeat when we are in the presence of that someone. We recognize that person's voice even from afar and eagerly wait to respond to his call. We modify our lives to imitate what she does and begin to like what she likes. We arrange our schedules so that we can spend as much time near him as possible. Is this not worship? The dictionary describes "worship" as "to regard with great, even extravagant, respect, honor, or devotion."

In either case, have we been obedient to God's most important command: *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength"*? Honestly, and without rationalizing, we must admit that we have not. You might think that I am making a bigger fuss about idols than is necessary. If so, then let us put the idea to a test. Think of something, anything, you like a lot and try these tests on it to see if that thing or that person has become greater than God to you. I am thinking about money for my example.

1. If I take it away so that I cannot or do not have any of it available to me at all, how do I feel? Do I feel empty, powerless, uncomfortable, even frightened?
2. Do I worry about it when it is not around? Are my thoughts centered on getting it back or on arranging my life so I can obtain this person or thing of which I've been deprived?
3. When I have spent a lot of time with it, do I feel drained of all my energy, or do I feel exhilarated and fulfilled? Does it keep asking for more when I feel empty, or does it give me rest from my labor?
4. When I have gone without it for a long time, do I want it back? When not having it for a longer time, do I begin begging for it again? After a long while without it, do I make threats and insist on having it back?

If we answer "yes" or "sometimes" to even one of those tests, what we have done is fall in love with something other than the true God. When we keep on serving something other than the true almighty God, we become attached to it and lose what we have in relationship to God. I realize that some elements of life in this world are important, maybe even very important, but, when we worry about them, have we not placed our hearts in a relationship with them that depends on those things or those people? In that way, then, we are disobedient to God's command to love Him with all every part of our beings. Is this not making them greater than God?

I have known many people who sit in church listless and anxious for the Divine Service to be over, so that they can get to what is important to them with the excitement and energy of new life. When they are done with what excites them, they are so exhausted and disappointed that they hurt physically and emotionally. It has brought them nothing of lasting value for all the time they have given it. Unfortunately, many continue being slaves to these objects that they have set up to worship, never realizing the fulfillment God offers to those who are obedient to His command to love Him above all things or people.

The text asks us: "*Of all the commandments, which is the most important?*" "*The most important one,*" answered Jesus, "*is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'*" We need to fall back in love with God. We need to be restored in a relationship with God that is good, right, and true. Only when we are in that relationship can we live **life at its best**.

The first step is always repentance, changing the way we think and act. God is not the one who left us; it is we who left Him. When we admit our fault and our need for His help, He reminds us that His love for us has never changed. "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:9). He showed that love for us when He sent His Son Jesus to be our Savior. "*God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:8). Through Jesus' suffering and death, the gift of forgiveness is made available to all who repent.

How, then, do we rebuild our relationship with God after we have treated Him so falsely? Consider how we fell in love with other things and notice the difference. Give God a lot of your attention so you may learn His will and His ways. See how being in His presence gives your life motivation. Think back to our prayer of confession. We pray: "Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may **delight in Your will and walk in Your ways** to the glory of Your holy name" (LW p. 158). Many times, in our own weakness, we do not desire to obey God, we do not want to change our ways to put Him first in our lives. Even the **desire** to delight in obeying Him is a gift He offers us.

Learn to recognize God's Word from afar and respond to His voice. Jesus said of Himself, "*I am the good shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me... the sheep listen to [My] voice ...and [My] sheep follow [Me] because they know [My] voice*" (John 10:14,3, 4). Sheep eagerly follow the master who has proven himself to be faithful to them, feeding them, protecting them, and rescuing them. Has our Shepherd been any less faithful to us? Should we not eagerly respond in obedience to Him, knowing that He, too, provides our nourishment, our protection, and our salvation?

Do we arrange our schedules so that we can spend as much time near Him as possible? The more time we spend with the things that are good for us, the more we enjoy their blessings. The Scriptures say, "*But if anyone obeys His Word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in Him: Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did*" (1 John 2:5-6). If we walk in disobedience, our faith and our salvation are in doubt. That's not what I am saying; it's what John said: Our obedience is proof of our living in Christ.

We need to become more familiar with what God has done as we learn to live by His Word. We must adjust our lives to be imitators of what He has commanded us to do so that we can live as His disciples. God's Word puts it this way: *"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God"* (Ephesians 5:1-2).

Obedience to God is the key that helps us appreciate stewardship in the divine sense of the word. When our hearts are buried in disobedience to God, we are never satisfied, no matter how much we have by the world's standards. When our hearts trust in God's promises to take care of us, we never find ourselves spiritually hurting, no matter how little or much we have of worldly things. *"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him Who gives me strength"* (Philippians 4:12-13).

That's a promise. *"I can do everything through Him Who gives me strength."* Through His precious Word and Holy Sacraments, God imparts His strength to us. Through Christ, Who lived the life of perfect obedience in our places, we can love our Lord with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength. Through Christ, Who paid the penalty for our sin in our places, we have been forgiven and *"...set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness"* (Romans 6:18). We are no longer *"...slaves to sin, which leads to death, [but] to obedience, which leads to righteousness"* (Romans 6:16). Through Christ, we can be faithful, obedient, and live **life at its best.**

Now, may the peace of God which goes beyond our understanding keep our hearts and minds secure in Christ Jesus, finding our rest in Him for all the times in our lives, even to life everlasting.





## **Life at its Best**

### **Bible Study, Week Six: “Shaping Lives through Obedience”**

**Prayer:** Dear good and gracious Heavenly Father, You know that we are by nature sinful, selfish and rebellious people who resist obeying You. Thank You for changing our hearts through Your Word and Holy Spirit so that we can be people who want to please You and follow Your ways. Bless our study today. Help us to be obedient and live **life at its best**. Amen.

1. Read Hebrews 11:6. What pleases God and makes obedience possible?
2. Read Zechariah 4:6; Romans 8:6-9. Where do you get your power and willingness to be obedient?
3. Read John 15:4-5. What enables you to show the fruit of obedience?
4. Read Genesis 22:1-19. What was Abraham willing to do to obey God?
5. Read Genesis 6:14, 22. How did Noah show his obedience?
6. Read Exodus 24:12-13. From your prior reading of the book of Exodus, give some examples of Moses showing his obedience (such as 24:12-13).
7. Read Joshua 6:1-21. How did Joshua show his obedience?
8. Read 1 Samuel 3:9-10. How did Samuel show his obedience?
9. Read 1 Samuel 15. In what specific way did Saul disobey God?
10. Read Ephesians 5:6. What do people receive because of disobedience?
11. Read Genesis 9:1; 10:32-11:9. What did the descendants of Noah do in defiance of God and what was God’s reaction?
12. Read Deuteronomy 28. What are the blessings for obedience? What are the curses for disobedience?

Questions for further discussion:

13. Why is obedience an important part of living **life at its best**?
14. Read Genesis 3. Adam and Eve were obedient to God, then became disobedient. Contrast their lives before and after the fall.
15. What did Christ’s obedience do for you?
16. Why is obedience difficult? What are your obstacles?

**Prayer:** Dear Father, thank You for Your words of truth regarding obedience. Send Your Holy Spirit to help and guide us. May we through our obedience give You glory. Amen.

## Week Six: Wrapping Up: “Shaping Lives through Obedience”

Faith is the foundation for obedience, and obedience is faith in action. Just as Christ was faithful to His heavenly Father, He wants us to show our faith and obedience. We are to have faith that says, “*Yet not what I will, but what You will*” (Mark 14:36b), and faith that wants to do God’s will more than anything in our lives. Revelation 2:10b promises, “*Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*”

To be obedient is seldom the easiest or most attractive path to follow. We are by nature very selfish and sinful, so obedience comes with difficulty. In addition to our own nature, the world and the devil pull at us constantly to follow their ways. We need to stay on guard at all times and seek God’s strength and wisdom so we can stay faithful to our calling. By our own power, we are not capable of being obedient, but through the Holy Spirit we have the source of energy. “*Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,*” is God’s promise to us (Zechariah 4:6b) that He will equip us to live **life at its best**.

Our motivation for obedience comes from the Cross and empty tomb. We strive to be obedient out of thanks for what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. When we remain faithful and obedient to God’s Word, we will hear God say, “*Well done, good and faithful servant*” (Matthew 25:21a).

### ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS

<u>LIFE-ENRICHING</u>	<u>LIFE-DESTROYING</u>
Obedience	Disobedience
Humility	Vanity
Trusting in God	Trusting in self
Accepting authority	Rejecting authority
Being responsible	Being irresponsible
Self-surrender	Self-promotion
Accepting God’s commandments	Seeking to satisfy self
Following God	Rebelling against God
Repentant	Self-righteous
Abiding in Christ	Maintaining independence
Affirming God’s way	Insisting on own way

## Bible Study 6: Answer guide for “Shaping Lives through Obedience”

1. Hebrews 11:6. In order to please God, our thoughts and actions need to be done in faith. Faith makes obedience possible.
2. Zechariah 4:6; Romans 8:6-9. The Spirit of God Who lives in us is the source of both our desire to obey and the ability.
3. John 15:4-5. When we, as branches, are connected to Jesus, the Vine, we will bear fruit. Jesus is our strength and nourishment to bear fruit.
4. Genesis 22:1-19. Abraham’s great faith and fear of God was demonstrated by his willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac.
5. Genesis 6:14, 22. Noah built an ark exactly as God told him to do so.
6. Exodus 24:12-13. Moses followed the Lord’s instructions and ascended Mt. Sinai. Examples would be Exodus 4:18 and 7:10 and throughout the plagues.
7. Joshua 6:1-21. Joshua followed God’s orders to have his people march around the city of Jericho for six days and then with loud shouts on the sixth day the wall crumbled.
8. 1 Samuel 3:9-10. Samuel was instructed to lie down and listen for God’s voice. He obeyed.
9. 1 Samuel 15. Saul did not obey God’s instructions. He was told by God to attack and totally destroy the Amalekites. He went into battle, but he spared *“Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves, and lambs—everything that was good.”* (verse 9).
10. Ephesians 5:6. *“God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient.”*
11. Genesis 9:1; 10:32-11:9. They wanted to be like God. To show His displeasure with the people, God changed their languages so they couldn’t understand each other. The people scattered and were unable to finish their self-glorifying tower.
12. Deuteronomy 28. If the people obeyed His voice, God promised to set His people high above all the nations on earth. God promised blessings for the crops, livestock, the defeat of enemies, bless the land, etc.  
The consequences for disobedience, were dire and all encompassing. God would curse those in the city and in the country, wombs will be cursed, the crops will be cursed, etc.
13. God adds greater blessings to faithful and obedient people. It is God’s blessings that make **life at its best** possible.
14. Genesis 3. Before the fall, they had an intimate relationship with God. They were comfortable in the presence of God. After the fall, Adam and Eve knew they were naked and sought covering. Because of their sin, the ground and work were cursed. The consequences to sin were severe.
15. Because of Jesus’ life, death on the cross, and His resurrection, we through faith can receive forgiveness of sins and live eternally with Him.
16. Obedience is difficult because we desire to do things our way. By nature, we are independent, pleasure-seeking people. Personal response.

## Sunday, Week Six: Shaping Lives through Obedience

### *Obedience: Pathway to Blessings*

*“Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).*

Connected to Christ, as branches to the vine, we are enabled to live obedient lives. Scripture makes some exciting promises to those who love and obey Him. In John 15:5, the Savior declared, *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.”* The life we lead will depend on our relationship with Jesus. When He lives within us, we receive His strength to serve and obey Him. When He abides in us, the love of the Lord will be seen through us. *“If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you”* (John 15:7). When Christ dwells within us, God will pour out His blessings upon us.

The blessings of God are given to those who love and obey Him; the curse of God will be on those who are disobedient. Some of God’s blessings or curses, depending on obedience or disobedience, are recorded in Deuteronomy, chapter 28: *“If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all His commands...All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God”* (Deuteronomy 28:1-2). The next twelve verses share God’s blessings to the obedient. Verse fifteen is the first of fifty-three verses relating to God’s curses for disobedience: *“However, if you do not obey the Lord your God...all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.”*

As we face decisions, we need to remember the far-reaching consequences our choices will have. We can choose curses by disobedience, or we can, by the power of the Holy Spirit, choose a blessed life by obedience. An adage says, “We make decisions, and then our decisions turn around and make us.”

**I am thankful  
for Spiritual  
Blessings.**

When we choose to do wrong, we must suffer the consequences of disobedience. When we do right, it is by the Holy Spirit’s power that we choose good over evil, blessings over curses, obedience over disobedience, and harmony over disharmony.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank You for all my gifts and blessings. Amen.

## *Life at its Best*



## *Daily Devotions* *for the whole family!*

### *Week 6*

### **“Shaping Lives through Obedience”**

Monday	“Obedience Is Faith in Action”
Tuesday	“The Importance of Obedience”
Wednesday	“Choosing Self Causes Disobedience”
Thursday	“Obeying God’s Commands”
Friday	“Complete Obedience”
Saturday	“Reproofs”
Sunday	“Obedience: Pathway to Blessings”





## Monday, Week Six: “Shaping Lives through Obedience”

### *Obedience Is Faith in Action*

*“Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (Luke 11:28).*

What is most likely to prevent us from living “life at its best”? Possibly the biggest obstacle we face is obedience. By nature, we are arrogant and vain people; therefore, obedience is not a natural response. As we focus more on pleasing ourselves, we lose the desire to do what pleases God, which is to obey Him. Doing God’s will, being obedient to Him, is what pleases God. It sounds simple enough, but we find our words, thoughts, and actions are often contrary to God’s will. The writer to the Hebrews wrote about what is necessary for us to please God: *“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him”* (Hebrews 11:6).

The basis of obedience to God, then, is faith in Him. Faith is what makes obedience possible. Throughout Hebrews 11, the “Faith Chapter,” the writer makes it clear that all the “heroes of faith” he mentions were able to be obedient because they believed in God, Whom they knew to be faithful. Thus, when we talk about obedience, we must be aware that faith is the foundation.

Faith is more than a belief in God. It is a way of life. Heroes of faith, although imperfect, trusted God and gave their lives to Him, as this chapter points out. Faith is the belief, placed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament, that God is real, and that He is good, and that the One who made it all hasn’t left it all. He still sends light into the shadows, forgiving and restoring us when we fall short. Because of faith, we believe that God will do what is right, and that He is always present to help. By telling about the faith of Old Testament characters, Hebrews Chapter 11 is an encouragement to us to be obedient. In obedience, what are we doing to encourage others?

Prayer: Dear Father, help me to live obediently through faith. Amen.



## Tuesday, Week Six: “Shaping Lives through Obedience”

### *The Importance of Obedience*

*“For just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [Christ] the many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:19).*

Failure to obey God is sin and rebellion. Obedience is our faithful response to God because, as redeemed children, our minds and hearts are open to God’s love, mercy, and grace. As the Holy Spirit does His work of sanctification in us, He causes us to surrender our will to God’s will, and obedience begins. We are given spiritual strength to do what we know we should do and power not to do what we know we should not do. The power to obey resides in God, not in us.

Scripture is very clear on the importance of obedience to the Lord. Jesus said, *“If you love Me, you will obey what I command”* (John 14:15). Obedience to our heavenly Father is paramount, but it is also important that we obey all civil laws and parental guidelines. *“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God...”* (Romans 13:1-3).

God considers obedience to parents of utmost importance. The fourth commandment orders, *“Honor your father and your mother,”* and adds an incentive, *“so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you”* (Exodus 20:12). Deuteronomy 27:16 speaks to the problem of disobedience to parents: *“Cursed is the man who dishonors his father or his mother.”*

The greatest motivating force for obedience is love and trust in the Lord and thanksgiving for His unconditional love. Do our thoughts and actions reflect a love for the Lord? Rather than drifting through the motions of life, are we active in our service and obedience? Oswald Chambers said, *“The best measure of the spiritual life is not its ecstasies but its obedience.”*

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, grant me faith to be obedient. Amen.



## Wednesday, Week Six: “Shaping Lives through Obedience

### *Choosing Self Causes Disobedience*

*“You are my friends if you do what I command”* (John 15:14)

There is a remarkable contrast between the two four-letter words “obey” and “self.” Only with God’s help can we put “self” aside and “obey.” Through faith, we acknowledge that life is doomed unless it is yielded to the complete control of Christ. The surrendering of self to God is contrary to the prevailing attitude of our society. This attitude promotes looking out for “number one.” We are told by those around us that we should do and have whatever makes us happy. Without Christ there is no hope or future, so today is as good as it is going to get. We are told to enjoy life now, because we are not certain about tomorrow. Continued disobedience leads us to a dead end. If we don’t humble ourselves before God, we elevate the status of self, which disregards God’s input. Disobedience, with self in control, causes a perpetual state of sin and distancing from Christ. Romans 2:8 warns, *“But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.”* The cost of obedience is nothing compared with the cost of disobedience.

We are all obedient to someone. If we give our obedience to the wrong person or cause, we will live without God’s peace and joy, leaving us with empty and unfulfilled lives ending in death. Obedience through faith is requisite for fellowship with God.

God expects our love and obedience. *“If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed My Father’s commands and remain in His love”* (John 15:10). Jesus will not leave us or forsake us, but, when we choose to disobey, we remove ourselves from the relationship He has created for us.

The words “obey” and “self” imply opposing directions whereas the words “obey” and “faith” are connected. When we have faith, we obey. The way to spell faith is o-b-e-y. God wants us to be like obedient children who obey their fathers.

Prayer: Father, through faith grant me a submissive spirit. I pray in the name of Jesus my Lord and Savior. Amen.



## Thursday, Week Six: “Shaping Lives through Obedience

### *Obedying God’s Commands*

*“In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight”* (Proverbs 3:6).

The fruit of obedience is a result of the relationship believers have with Christ as He, the Vine, provides nourishment to us, the branches (John 15:5). Christ’s abiding in us and we in Him is our power source for living obediently. By ourselves, we are incapable of being obedient. *“No branch can bear fruit by itself”* (John 15:4). The fruit of obedience comes from being connected to Jesus just as branches are connected to a vine. When we obey, follow, and serve Christ, we will become more like Him. *“Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did”* (1 John 2:6).

Often our disobedience to the Lord is not done consciously and deliberately. We disobey because we aren’t listening to Him. God gives us His commands, but we pay no attention to them. In this way, indifference, rather than hatred, is shown to be the antithesis of love.

We may not be acting in willful disobedience. When we demonstrate our lack of total commitment and love, it is as if we had never known God. Joshua 22:5 instructs, *“But be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you: to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to obey His commands, to hold fast to Him and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul.”*

When we do not keep God’s commandments, we show God disrespect, and we should be filled with regret and shame. To obey God is not an option but a Gospel-imperative. *“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10:5). God patiently waits for us to see His truth so that we will desire to live our lives in obedience to Him.

Prayer: Dear good and gracious Heavenly Father, send Your Holy Spirit to prompt me to be obedient to Your guidance and will. In Jesus’ holy and precious name, I pray. Amen.



## Friday, Week Six: “Shaping Lives through Obedience”

### *Complete Obedience*

*“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power” (Ephesians 6:10).*

Do we carry out God’s commands, or do we modify His Word to suit our preferences or our timing? Delayed obedience is disobedience. Is our understanding of obedience the same as God’s? If we truly love and trust the Lord, we will not hesitate to do what He says. By waiting, we show that something or someone is in competition with Christ. That someone could easily be ourselves.

An example of partial obedience is found in 1 Samuel 15:1-29, where we find the Lord’s instructions to King Saul: *“Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys”* (verse 3). God had judged the Amalekites, and, as God’s servant to carry out His command, Saul was not to let anyone or anything escape.

By sparing the king and keeping the best animals, Saul was disobedient. God expected exact and full obedience, so Saul was removed from the throne of Israel. Saul had not listened to the word of God, so the Lord rejected him. *“Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you as king”* (1 Samuel 15:23b). Saul had incurred God’s curse.



Through His work on the Cross, Christ has made a life of obedience possible for us. His obedience was complete, including death on that Cross. That obedience gives us hope, strength, and life. Paul tells us in Romans 5:19, *“For just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [Christ] the many will be made righteous.”* It is Christ’s perfect obedience that makes our obedience holy and acceptable to the Lord. Because Christ lived the perfect, obedient life in our places, we have hope. Apart from a close relationship with Him, any attempts at obedience will fail. God’s presence gives us strength to be obedient. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we can obey.

Prayer: Dear Father, help me to be obedient from a thankful heart. Amen.

## Saturday, Week Six: “Shaping Lives through Obedience

### *Reproofs*

*“My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).*

By nature, we are bent toward willfulness and disobedience. We want to do things our own way. We are able to counteract our tendencies and learn to be responsive and obedient to God’s calling through the power of His Spirit Who lives in us and works in us through Word and Sacrament.

God brings wisdom into our lives through reproofs. God’s nudges tell us when we’ve done something wrong. Listening to God’s reproofs prompts us to correct our ways and keeps us from further error. When we resist God’s wisdom, we lose. Proverbs 3:11-12 admonishes, *“My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline and do not resent His rebuke [reproof], because the Lord disciplines those He loves, as a father the son he delights in.”*

We can live “life at its best” when we willingly accept God’s discipline, which will put us in the direction He wants us to go. Why do we ignore what we believe are God’s reproofs?



1. Stubbornness: *“But since you rejected Me when I called...”* (Proverbs 1:24). God is calling, but stubbornly we reject His call. Not to obey God’s calling will put us on the path to live life at its worst, instead of “life at its best.”
2. Inattentiveness: *“...and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand”* (Proverbs 1:24). We may be more prone to dullness of mind than stubbornness. By not being attentive, we will miss God’s reproofs for us.
3. Indifference: *“...you ignored all my advice...”* (Proverbs 1:25). God’s reproofs do not reach us when we are unconcerned or apathetic about listening to Him.
4. Defensiveness: *“...and would not accept my rebuke”* (Proverbs 1:25). When we are too consumed with making excuses for ourselves, we are too proud to yield to God.

Prayer: Dear Father, equip me to live “life at its best.” Amen.



"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything,  
by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present  
your requests to God."

Philippians  
4:6 (niv)



## Week 7: "Seeking Contentment"

Life at its Best:  
Living Wisely in an Unwise World

## Bulletin Messages, Week Seven: “Seeking Contentment”

### **Life at its Best, Week Seven: “Seeking Contentment”**

Is contentment something the Christian should strive for? Perhaps it's a gift God would like to bestow on each of us. He invites, *"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls"* (Matthew 11:28-29). In order for us to live **life at its best** we need to learn to be content in the circumstances the Lord gives us. Realizing and rejoicing in what we have (the presence of God), rather than lamenting what we lack (nothing, if we have Christ), brings us contentment. In both our worship and Bible study we will be focusing on the part that contentment plays in living **life at its best**.

### **Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World**

**ONLY CHRIST CAN TAKE AWAY A COVETOUS SPIRIT AND REPLACE IT WITH THE SPIRIT OF CONTENTMENT.**

“I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him Who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:12-13).



## Seeking Contentment

What would it take for you to experience contentment? If you lived in your dream house and the mortgage was paid, would you be content? When you've achieved that promotion, and the fat paycheck arrives every month, would you be content? Perhaps having all your children happily married and enjoying their work bring you contentment.

The Apostle Paul had none of those things and, in fact, wrote the following words from prison: *"...I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or want. I can do everything through Him Who gives me strength"* (Philippians 4:11b-13).

"Seeking contentment" will be our focus today as we explore living **Life at its Best**. Is contentment something toward which we should strive? Does everyone thrive on contentment? Is it God's will for us to be content? How did Paul learn contentment, and can we learn his secret? These are questions we will consider.

The Bible will be our source as we expose enemies of contentment such as materialism, greed, and ingratitude, and how we can combat those enemies. We will look to Scripture to learn what real treasure is and what can satisfy our longings and dispel our discontentment. In our search for contentment, we may find that we need to experience discontentment in the areas we're looking. It is likely that we will find that less of something—possessions, power, or status—can result in our having more of what we really want which is peace of mind, quietness of spirit, and communion with God. "Seeking contentment," we will respond to Christ's invitation found in Matthew 11:28: *"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."*



## Children's Message (Week seven)

### "Being Satisfied"

Hello boys and girls! I hope everyone is having a good day!

Raise your hand if you have ever told your mom or dad, "It's not fair!" I've been thinking that each of you has said "It's not fair" many times. Maybe you told your mom or dad that "It's not fair that my sister got a bigger piece of cake than I did" or maybe you said, "It's not fair that my brother got a nicer birthday gift than I did."

Can anyone think of a time when you said, "It's not fair." (wait for answers).

We say "It's not fair" when we are not satisfied, when we're not content with the way things are. That is what we are going to talk about today. Being satisfied or being content.

In the Bible, God talks about being content. God tells us that whether we have a lot of things or a few things we can be satisfied. We are told that being contented is something that we learn. Just like we learn to ride a bike, we can learn to be content. With God's help, we can learn too be satisfied with what we have and not always expect and want more.

When you are content, you won't be saying "It's not fair" as often because you will be thankful for what you have.

Let's pray. Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for all Your gifts to me. Please give me a thankful heart. Help me to be satisfied with what I have. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

## Sermon for Week Seven: "Seeking Contentment"

**Text:** Philippians 4:11-13

Much grace, mercy, and peace be to all of you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In week seven of our series on living **Life at its Best**, we will let God's Word help us discover how we can learn the secret of being content. The text for today is taken from Philippians 4:11-13: *"I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him Who gives me strength."*

Every once in a while, we all like to indulge in a bit of fantasy, wondering what it would be like to win millions in a lottery or a sweepstakes. Many years ago, people would hear stories of a man by the name of Ed McMahon along with Publishers Clearing House knocking on doors and declaring people winners of "Ten million dollars!" Everyone fantasizes about what it would be like and what they would do with all that money. Some people have even said to me, "Pastor, if I ever win the lottery, I will help the church build the new building we have always wanted." Not every thought is of greed and materialism. Some think of giving to the church. They say, "I can help people in need. I can become a professional philanthropist." All these thoughts of what we would do if we won that kind of money. Then we are suddenly snapped back to reality when it dawns on us that we have a better chance of being hit by lightning.

Let's try for a moment to keep the fantasy alive and wonder, "What if?" "What if you did win millions?" One thing is sure: you would not lack for money or many of the things it can buy. You would have the option of quitting the job you have always hated. You could build your dream house, help your family and friends out of poverty, and take the trips you always wanted to take but could not afford. Perhaps you could buy a new wardrobe, automobile and boat, vacation home, etc. You would have more money and more of the things it can buy, and, therefore, a higher standard of living than you once were accustomed to.

You are now a millionaire; you have everything life has to offer. Not only are your basic needs met but exceeded. You enjoy some of the amenities of life, which preciously were out of your reach. You want something, you get it. You don't have to say "No," "Wait," or "Not now, we have to save for it."

The sixty-four-thousand-dollar question is: Are you more content than you were before you won the lottery, or sweepstakes, or whatever? Perhaps, but not necessarily. What is the secret to contentment? Is contentment to be found in satisfying every desire, every impulse, or every appetite? Is it having the "best of everything"? Do we live **life at its best** when we have "everything"?

According to the Apostle Paul, the key to contentment is to be found in God, not in ourselves and what we possess. Listen to again what St. Paul wrote: *"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living plenty or in want"* (Philippians 4:12). Paul had lived with an abundance of things, and he had lived in need. He had learned to be content in every situation. The key to being content with abundance is to learn to be content with having little. If we are not content with what we have, we will not be content with what we will have. In other words, if we are not content before winning the lottery, we will probably not be content after winning the lottery. We need first to be content with who we are before we will be content with what we have. Contentment does not come from having more. If it did, there would be a

whole lot more happy people out there.

I heard of a woman who was the guest in the home of a very wealthy individual, one who had it all, she thought. There on a table lay a book titled *How to Find Happiness*. Apparently, the wealthy person had discovered the truth spoken by Jesus, "...a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15b).

Contentment is the satisfaction that we have enough, even if, for a season, our immediate needs are unmet. The reason we are content in the face of being without is that we realize our greatest need in life is a need of the heart, a need for God. As long as his need for God is met, all else is incidental. Contentment, therefore, comes from God and not from things. Since contentment does not come from things, we can remain content even in the absence of material things. Without contentment, we can never have enough money, wealth, or material possessions. Whatever enough is, it will always be just beyond our reach. Have you ever noticed that the amount of money needed to be content is "just a little more"? If there is such a thing as too much money, it must be more than I am making! An old Roman proverb states, "Money is like salt water—the more you drink, the thirstier you become." Contentment comes only from God.

The opposite of contentment is covetous. Covetousness is an insatiable appetite for things. There is never enough. The New Testament uses a Greek word, *pleonexia*, which means to have more. It is a spirit of covetousness. Covetousness has been defined as that lust for having which is in the heart of man who finds happiness in things rather than in God. Plato said that the desire of a man is like a pierced vessel, which he ever tries to and can never fill. *Pleonxia*: to desire more; the baneful appetite for that which belongs to another. It is that spirit which snatches at things, not to hoard them like a miser, but to spend them in lust and luxury.

Paul was not covetous; rather, he was content with whatever he had. Why? Because he found his contentment in God. How was it possible for him to find true contentment? "*I can do everything through Him Who gives me strength*" (Philippians 4:13), Paul wrote.

The Greek uses the word *autarkes* which means entirely self-sufficient. It is here that Paul uses a great word of pagan ethics. By *autarkes*, the Stoics meant entire independence from people or things. The Stoics believed that contentment did not consist in possessing much, but in wanting little. "If you want to make a man happy," they said, "add nothing to his possessions, but take away from his desires."

Having does not stop us from wanting. Because money cannot satisfy, income levels do not guarantee happiness. At first, we may covet what others have. In pursuit of what others have, we are driven until we achieve our goals. Upon achieving our goals, we may momentarily sense satisfaction, but soon we find that our satisfaction is found in having others covetous of what we have. Jesus takes away our covetousness and replaces it with contentment. When Jesus fills our lives, then there is no inner void to be filled with materialism. Thus, contentment comes from our relationships to Christ. Paul further realized that contentment comes from the knowledge that God knows our needs and, in Christ, is able to meet those needs. "*My God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:19). Notice that Paul wrote that God will supply our every need, not our every **greed**. Although God has promised to meet our needs, we generally find that God gives to us far more than we need. There are times when we must realize that all we have is from God and that He always provides more than we deserve, and, most often, more than we need. The road to contentment begins when we realize God is the source of all that we have and that He always gives us more than we deserve.

In order to understand that God provides for our needs, we have to arrive at some type of an agreement with God as to what our "needs" are. His definition of needs may not be the same as our own. As our society becomes wealthier and our standards of living become higher, our definition of "needs" changes. The more

we have, the more needs we seem to develop. I do need to eat, but I do not have to eat out. God will always provide for our need for food, but we do not have to eat the king's rich foods. Some things that were once considered luxuries or options suddenly become needs. I will die if I do not eat, but I will not die if I do not have a car. However, since our society has been built around the automobile, a car has become a "need." God may provide that need, although it may not be a new car or a luxury car. Society is built around the telephone; it is almost a necessity, and it can be a lifesaver. God may provide for your need, but it does not have to be a cellular phone; it may be a simple black telephone with an old-fashioned rotary dial. If we are to learn contentment, we must distinguish between need and greed. God defines our basic "needs" in 1 Timothy 6:8 where Paul writes, *"But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that."* God promises to meet those needs, but He always seems to exceed our basic needs and blesses us abundantly.

At any given time, we may have needs that apparently are going unmet. This situation can be a source of anxiety. It may even lead us to question whether God does indeed meet our needs. However, it may be our greed that has kept us from seeing that our needs have already been met. Let me explain. At any given time, if one has a need that is not being fulfilled, it may not be because of God's failure to meet the need, but because of poor stewardship. God may have already provided for our needs, but, to get ahead, we have lived beyond our means (credit cards, deficit spending, etc.). God has called us to be good stewards of His gifts. That is, He calls us to be wise managers of His gifts. Most people think that, if they had more, it would be easier to manage. Perhaps, but if I am not faithful with a little, I will not be faithful when I have more. Perhaps in our quest for the best, in our search for more, what we defined as a need, God may see as a greed. In His love for us, He may not grant us our greed but will, in His time, meet our need. It is natural to want the best, but the best is always what God provides, not necessarily what costs more.

What happens when we do have a real need that is unmet? We do not worry or fret, but we entrust it to God Who provides for our needs. St. Paul tells us to pray about our needs. When we pray about our needs, it is not to inform Him of our needs, for He knows them already. When we pray, we acknowledge our dependence upon God and our need for Him. Listen to what St. Paul writes in Philippians 4:6-7: *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* As contentment is the antithesis of covetousness, prayer is the antithesis of worry. In the face of need, the greatest way to enter into God's provision is to pray. It is better to commit our need to God than to worry. Why? Because worry has no power to accomplish anything! Worry never paid a bill or healed an illness. Worry never added to one's life expectancy. When we commit our need to God, He will give us His peace that will stand like a sentinel on guard at the door of our hearts. God's peace can sustain us even as we await His gracious provision.

My prayer is that God will provide for all your needs according to *"...the incomparable riches of His grace...in Christ Jesus"* (Ephesians 2:7). May He give you peace and contentment as you walk with Him. Only Jesus can do this. Only Christ can take away a covetous spirit and replace it with the spirit of contentment. Only Christ can take away our baneful appetite for those things which belong to another. Only He can deliver us from the accursed love of having. Only He can cause you to be content in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. Only God's gift of contentment can give us **life at its best**.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

## Life at its Best

### Bible Study, Week Seven: “Seeking Contentment”

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, we ask for Your blessings as we discuss what it means to live as contented people. Help us all, like the Apostle Paul, learn the secret of being content whether in plenty or in want. Through faith, let us see that all we are and have are gifts from You and to be thankful for our blessings. In Jesus’ holy name we pray. Amen.

1. Read Philippians 4:11-13. How do you define contentment? What did Paul mean that he had learned the secret of being content in every circumstance?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 11:23-29. What did Paul endure and still find contentment in the Lord?
3. Read Ecclesiastes 2:1-11. What contentment did Solomon’s herds, flocks, houses, vineyards, gold and silver, etc. provide?
4. Ecclesiastes 5:10-11. What does Solomon say about those who love money?
5. Read 1 Timothy 6:8-9. What warning is found here? With what should you be content?
6. God warns you about money becoming overly important and your tendency to use it to provide for your contentment. What do the following verses tell you?  
Hebrews 13:5  
Luke 12:15  
Mark 10:23-27  
Matthew 6:24
7. Read Matthew 6:33. What will God do when you seek fellowship with Him?
8. Read Romans 8:28. What comfort do you find in this verse?
9. Read the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21). Most people are wealthy without realizing it. Could God be calling you foolish? Why or why not?
10. Why do you need to learn to be content in order to live **life at its best**?

Questions for further discussion;

11. How do advertisers try to make you discontent?
12. Do any “if onlys” exist in your life that prevent you from being content?
13. Read Colossians 3:5. What is it about greed that makes it idolatry?
14. How do you distinguish between a need and a want?
15. How content are you?

**Prayer:** Dear Father, change us from being discontented people to be people who find their contentment in You. Thank You for Your promise never to leave or forsake us. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

## Week Seven: Wrapping Up: “Seeking Contentment”

In the “have it now and enjoy life” society in which we live, we want contentment, but we often settle for self-gratification. Many seem to believe that contentment can be bought in department stores or through travel agencies. Society at large is seeking “things” that provide temporary happiness rather than peace. Pleasure is more important than contentment. If all we care about is ourselves, we will never be satisfied, and we will keep telling ourselves we need and deserve more.

Accumulating more will never be enough, because money and things cannot buy contentment. Being satisfied with less and using what we have in a God-pleasing way make us more content. We can’t become truly contented by acquiring more possessions. Unfortunately, for many of us, the focus tends to be on our present state, while Jesus is concerned about our eternal state.

Of all the gifts God gives us, contentment may be one of the most important, yet least understood and most elusive. To find the source of contentment, we may need to experience discontent in the places many of us search for it. It is contrary to our thinking that less of something, material goods, power or fame, results in having more of what we really crave: peace, reliance on God, and being known by Him.

Our relationships with Christ make it possible for us to be content in all circumstances. Without Christ, we will never be satisfied. We are, by nature, people who have insatiable appetites for more things, success, and power. A relationship with Christ quenches our worldly appetites and brings about a redirection of interests to eternal things. We become willing to accept God’s design for our lives and learn to be satisfied with what God gives us. We are thankful for what we have rather than dwelling on what we don’t have. Without contentment, we can’t have **life at its best**.

God has made us as we are and has placed us where we are so we can best serve Him. We need to stop looking at the other side of the fence. To live **life at its best** means we don’t dwell on what we are not but enjoy the opportunities and advantages that God gives to us.

### ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS

<u>LIFE-ENRICHING</u>	<u>LIFE-DESTROYING</u>
Is content	Is discontent, restless
Has inner peace	Has outward satisfaction
Accepts circumstances	Wants to change circumstances and asks, “what if?”
Desires less	Desires more
Looks out for others	Looks out for self
Seeks God	Seeks things
Trusts God	Trusts himself
Has cup half full	Has cup half empty
Develops talents	Squanders abilities
Is disciplined	Meanders
Has long-range focus	Lives for the moment



## Bible Study 7: Answer guide for “Seeking Contentment”

1. Philippians 4:11-13. Contentment is trusting in the Lord and being satisfied with the gifts that God has entrusted to you. In a sense it is like seeing your life as a cup half full rather than half empty. Paul tells us that contentment is not determined by the amount of material blessings that we have or don't have.
2. 2 Corinthians 11:23-29. Paul has suffered prison, floggings, beaten with rods and stones, shipwrecked, hunger and thirst, and danger from bandits and from his own people.
3. Ecclesiastes 2:1-11. Solomon denied himself nothing. Yet he said, “*nothing was gained*” from his fortune.
4. Ecclesiastes 5:10-11. Whoever has money is never satisfied. He/she will always want more.
5. 1 Timothy 6:8-9. Wanting to get more money leads people into harmful and foolish desires that plunge them into ruin. If we have food and clothing, we should be content.
6. Hebrews 13:5. Be free from the love of money.  
Luke 12:15. Be wary about greed in our lives.  
Mark 10:23-27. Wealth can prevent the wealthy from entering heaven. It can be a god.  
Matthew 6:24. We can't serve God and money. There is room for only one master in our lives.
7. Matthew 6:33. When we seek God, He will provide for us and give us what best for us.
8. Romans 8:28. God works for good to those who love Him
9. Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21). Personal response.
10. If we are dissatisfied with God's gifts, we will not be able to live **life at its best**. Understanding that it is only by God's grace that we are given life and life's blessings should lead us to be thankful for who we are and the blessings that God entrusts to us. Like Paul, we need to learn to be content.
11. Advertisers want us to believe that we are missing what is needed for our happiness and security and that, if we buy their products, our lives will be satisfying and fulfilling.
12. Personal response.
13. Colossians 3:5. Money and possessions can become overly important. Having money and possessions can occupy our thoughts and energy. Wanting and enjoying lots of money and what money can buy can replace God in our lives and become an idol.
14. Needs are those items that are basic to live our lives. We need food, shelter, and clothing. Food is essential, but we can choose to dine out less. We can drive a Ford or a Chevrolet rather than a Mercedes Benz.
15. Personal response

## Sunday, Week Seven: "Seeking Contentment"

### *Finding Rest in the Lord*

*"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened,  
and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).*

Discontentment with ourselves is also a hindrance to our relationship with God. It arises from the sin of pride, whereby our self-love keeps us looking inward, comparing ourselves with others, and results in both striving to be better than another and being bitter or resentful that we aren't. Humility teaches us that, in God's sight, we are of utmost importance. Then we can find contentment in being who we are without the drain of attempting to be richer, smarter, and more powerful than our neighbors. By placing importance on what God thinks of us rather than how we impress others, the burden of hypocrisy is lifted as we realize that God accepts us as we are. *"But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).*

*Have  
Faith  
in  
GOD*

We benefit by following the example of Paul, who constantly thirsted after God. *"...I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for Whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ..."*

(Philippians 3:8). David poured out his heart in Psalm 42:1-2: *"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."* A.W. Tozer, wrote, "Complacency is a deadly foe of all spiritual growth...I want deliberately to encourage this mighty longing after God." David, in Psalm 63, spoke of seeking God: *"O God, You are my God, earnestly I seek You; my soul thirsts for You, my body longs for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water."* Verse 5 proclaims the joy and contentment he found only in God: *"My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise You."*

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help me to live 'life at its best' by not dwelling on what I'm not but enjoying what You have given me. Open my eyes and heart to the opportunities You place before me. Amen.

## *Life at its Best*

*"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything,  
by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present  
your requests to God."*

*Philippians  
4:6 (niv)*



## *Daily Devotions for the whole family!*

### *Week 7*

#### *"Seeking Contentment"*

Monday	"We Learn to Be Content"
Tuesday	"Dangers of Materialism"
Wednesday	"If Only"
Thursday	"Striving for Success"
Friday	"How Much Is Enough?"
Saturday	"Truths about Contentment"
Sunday	"Finding Rest in the Lord"

## Monday, Week Seven: “Seeking Contentment”

### *We Learn to Be Content*

*“My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest”* (Exodus 33:14).

What an irony it is that while we pursue a higher quality of life—taking this class, reading that book, achieving this goal, and obtaining that promotion—it still eludes us. When we arrive at the goal toward which we’ve strived, we still find ourselves dissatisfied. On we go in a cycle of accomplishment, temporary pleasure, and then the nagging sense that something is still lacking. Could it be that what we’re seeking is contentment? The very word conjures up mental images of rest and satisfaction, hardly a state of mind to be obtained through frantic activity. Contentment, rather than being a prize we win or a goal we attain, is another of God’s gifts.

The Apostle Paul knew both the secret of contentment and how to receive it. He wrote, *I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him Who gives me strength* (Philippians 4:12b-13). Paul had learned the secret of contentment, of being satisfied with every circumstance in which God placed him. Paul was in prison when he wrote these words. He had been at the point of death several times. If anyone could have said he was in need or want, it was Paul. He had suffered much, yet he said, *“I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.”* Contentment involves learning to love God and trusting His will regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves. We are content because we are satisfied with whatever God gives us.

In order for us to live “life at its best” we need to learn to be content in the circumstances the Lord gives us. Paul learned contentment through realizing and reminding himself that contentment comes from relying on God, trusting that His strength enables us to do “everything.” When we abide in Christ, we are content. Realizing and rejoicing in what we have (the presence of God), rather than lamenting what we lack (nothing, if we have Christ), brings us contentment.

Prayer: Dear Father, help me to be satisfied with my blessings. Amen.



## Tuesday, Week Seven: “Seeking Contentment”

### *Dangers of Materialism*

*“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith...”* (1 Timothy 6:10).

We live in a land of plenty, which promotes its own twist on contentment, which is “buy and possess.” Our culture emphasizes the material far more than the spiritual. Our society tells us that we need and deserve more, and that life is not complete unless we have not just our needs met, but all our wants as well. We seek the finest homes and cars as well as wealth and success. We are led to believe that happiness and contentment are within our reach if we just acquire a few more things. Advertisements are designed to make us feel discontented.

Greed will not allow contentment, because it always urges us to acquire more. No matter how hard we try, we cannot satisfy ourselves by worldly things. The love of money has the potential to possess our lives like no other emotion can. We can spend our lifetimes chasing prosperity that, when found, often destroys us.

Money has been called the “the god of those who have too much, and the goal of those who have too little.” Blessed indeed is the person who avoids these extremes. Jesus spoke to the issue of greed in Matthew 16:26 when He asked, *“What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?”* The things we possess will contribute only to fleeting happiness, not an enduring peace and contentment.

Our focus on things can blind us to the emptiness of our faith. The one who is blessed materially is not necessarily discontent, but those who depend on their wealth to bring them contentment will be disappointed. Only God’s presence in our lives can give us true contentment. Discontentment is a spiritual problem. It affects the rich and the poor and all those in between. Psalm 116:7 invites us, *“Be at rest once more, O my soul,”* and then it tells us why we can rest, *“for the Lord has been good to you.”*

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help to focus on You not material things. Like Paul, help me to learn to be content. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



## Wednesday, Week Seven: “Seeking Contentment”

### *If Only*

*“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).*

Most discontented people believe they can correct their problems through some external changes. They focus on what they don’t have and what they believe needs to be acquired rather than acknowledging and appreciating the blessings they do have.

Contentment or discontentment is a state of mind. Even though contentment has little to do with outward circumstances, we still focus on “if only things would change.” The “what ifs” or “if onlys” are not going to make a meaningful difference, but we persist in thinking that changing circumstances will change everything.

Do we find ourselves complaining if only...

- we owned a nicer home?
- we had more money?
- we lived in a different neighborhood?
- we had married someone else?
- we had more friends?
- we had a different career?
- we belonged to a different church?
- we have what others have?



The list of “if onlys” can be endless. Until we find our rest in Christ, we are going to continue our search for contentment in the wrong places. The theologian Augustine said, “Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.” People or things will never fill us; only God’s presence and its accompanying contentment will allow us to live “life at its best.”

When we depend on the Lord and place our trust in Him, we can be content in all circumstances. We won’t need to dwell on “if only.” God’s grace gives us the ability to persevere in life’s toughest situations. God does not say that we shouldn’t try to improve our quality of life or acquire any luxuries, but we are to be content and thankful to Him for what He has given us.

Prayer: Father, at all times and in all circumstances help me to be content. You are my rock and salvation. In Jesus’ precious name I pray. Amen.

## Thursday, Week Seven: “Seeking Contentment”

### *Striving for Success*

*“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might...” (Ecclesiastes 9:10).*

We value success so highly that we become willing to put an inordinate amount of effort into being successful. To achieve success, some of us may do almost anything, including trampling on competitors who get in our way. Could our desire to get ahead of the pack allow us to scheme, deceive, backbite, intimidate, or do whatever works? Unfortunately, some of us measure success only by...

- what we own.
- the authority we command.
- the power we wield.

Instead of loving people and using money, we love money and use people.



With all this pressure to become successful, our lives often begin to lose balance. There is an enormous challenge to juggle our time among work, family, community, church, friends, and relaxation. In order to move up the corporate ladder and make more money, families and time for God may be ignored. The result of success without God is loneliness and despair.

Many have climbed the ladder of success to find only money and sorrow at the top. Looking down the ladder, they see destroyed marriages, broken homes, and unhappiness.

*Webster’s New World Dictionary* defines success as “A favorable result; the gaining of wealth, fame, etc.; a successful person.” Scripture does not give a precise definition, but we know that it is God Who grants success. “*As long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success*” (2 Chronicles 26:5b). We can climb the ladder of success, but we are to climb it God’s way. As God’s people, our success in life begins...

- when we acknowledge that God created us for His benefit.
- when we understand that He loves us beyond our comprehension.
- when we abide with Him in reverence and obedience.
- when we faithfully serve Him by serving others.

Prayer: Dear good and gracious Heavenly Father, help me to understand that intimacy with You should be my primary goal. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



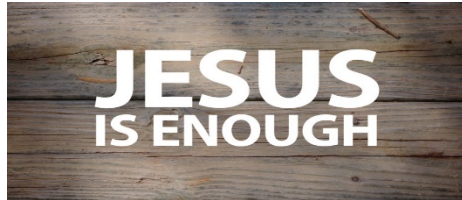
## Friday, Week Seven: “Seeking Contentment”

### *How Much Is Enough?*

*“But godliness with contentment is great gain.” (1 Timothy 6:6).*

A bumper sticker said, “Money isn’t everything, but it’s right up there with air and water.” We live in a money-driven culture that often determines a person’s value by how much he earns and possesses. To be labeled successes, many are driven to possess more and more. To gain wealth is often an obsession. *“Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint” (Proverbs 23:4).*

If we could choose between living our lives in poverty, in moderation, or in wealth, which would we choose? Of the three lifestyles, Scripture shares how wealth may be more of a curse than a blessing. God, speaking through His prophet Hosea, said, *“When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot Me” (13:6).* Jesus tells us that we can’t serve God and money (Matthew 6:24). Jesus knew that, for many, money had become a god.



To live “life at its best” we need to appreciate and recognize God’s gifts to us. We may not have all we desire, but we do have all we need. The glass is not half empty, but rather half full. To appreciate what we have and not dwell on what we don’t have is a blessing. What the Joneses have or what our culture says we need should not affect our way of thinking. When we allow the love of stuff to become overly important, the love we have for God is replaced by the love for money and possessions. Driven by desires for more wealth, we work long days, leaving us no time or energy to devote to God and spiritual growth.

Our happiness is not dependent on what we have or own. Asaph, the Psalmist, had an intimate relationship with God Who enabled him to be content with what He had provided. We would do well to meditate on his words, *“Whom have I in heaven but You? And earth has nothing I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Psalm 73:25-26).*

Prayer: Father, help me to understand that Jesus is all I need. Amen.

## Saturday, Week Seven: “Seeking Contentment”

### *Truths about Contentment*

*“I can do everything through Him Who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13).*

We are told by the Apostle Paul that whether he was “*well fed or hungry*” he was content (Philippians 4:12). In the same way, our contentment is determined by what is inside of us, not the circumstances around us. People are happy when their lives are pleasant and free from problems. However, they soon discover that this happiness is superficial and fleeting. As soon as the conditions change, the shallow contentment that they enjoyed will disappear.

Do you ever feel a nagging hunger, an emptiness that demands to be filled? The philosopher Pascal wrote, “There is within every man a God-shaped emptiness that only He can fill.” In Christ alone we will find peace, joy, comfort, happiness, and contentment. (Matthew 11:28-30). Jesus said, *“Come to Me...I will give you rest...I am gentle...you will find rest...”* He invites us to come to Him.

Paul also tells us that contentment is need-oriented, not want-oriented. God promises us in His Word that He will provide for our needs. *“And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).* God promises us that He will supply us with shelter, clothes, and food. Most of us will be given even more than our basic “needs,” but God does not promise that He will supply all our “wants.”

Paul understood that contentment was a matter of trust. Trusting God and believing that in all situations He is in control and will take care of us, we will be content. We believe that nothing under God’s control can be out of control. Contentment is trusting God when things around us seem to be in chaos. Through faith, we know that whether in plenty or want we do not need to worry because God will provide.



Prayer: Dear good and gracious Heavenly Father, I commit my ways to You and trust in You. I pray that You will grant me the contentment that I desire. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



## **Week 8: “Faithful Giving”**

**Life at its Best:  
Living Wisely in an Unwise World**



## Bulletin Messages, Week Eight: “Faithful Giving”

### **Life at its Best** **Week Eight: “Faithful Giving”**

In Acts 20:35 we read Jesus' words, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."* Generosity is an important part of living **life at its best**. God uses our generosity to build His Church. Our giving funds the missions of our churches; it provides for the needs of others; it supports our pastors and other church workers.

Bought by the blood of Christ and brought into faith by the Holy Spirit working through Word and Sacrament, we are also called to be stewards of God's gifts to us. We are to give our firstfruits to God, a proportionate amount of our incomes. We are to give regularly, generously, even sacrificially. As we give, we find ourselves enriched. We experience the joy of giving, the satisfaction that comes from being a channel of God's blessings to us. God promises that He will sustain us as we give. *"You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God"* (2 Corinthians 9:11). *"Freely you have received, freely give"* (Matthew 10:8).

### **Life at its Best, Week Eight: “Faithful Giving”**

*"God loves a cheerful giver,"* Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 9:7. God wants us to give thoughtfully, voluntarily, and enthusiastically. We will be concentrating on “Faithful Giving” as part of our discussion of living **life at its best**. What, when, how much, and to whom should we give? What is “faithful” giving? Doesn't the command to give smack of works righteousness rather than grace? What are proper Christian motives for giving? These questions and many more will be addressed according to the light of God's Word. Join us next week when we focus on the theme “Resisting Temptations.”

### **Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World**

**WE CAN CHOOSE TO BE CHANNELS OR TERMINALS OF THE GIFTS GOD GIVES US. WHAT WE DO WITH GOD'S MONEY DEMONSTRATES OUR SPIRITUAL MATURITY.**

“But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving” (2 Corinthians 8:7).



Lay reader talk (week eight)

## Faithful Giving

The focus for this week in our **Life at its Best** sermon series is “faithful giving.” Giving plays an important part in living **Life at its Best**. “Faithful giving” is an expression of heartfelt love. It is not an act of duty, although Christians are commanded to give. It is the joyful response to Christ from those who have been redeemed from slavery to sin and death for eternal life both here on earth and in Heaven forever. The size of the gift is not what Christ is looking at, but the motive of the giver.

Jesus said, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive"* (Acts 20:35). Many of us have experienced just that blessing as we have given a gift to someone we love. Unfortunately, however, it is a human tendency to grasp at wealth, sometimes in a vain attempt to achieve security, many times for the status we think it will bring us, and often just because of our greedy natures. Our human logic is at variance with the words of Proverbs 11:24-25. *"One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed."*

God promises that we will always have enough; He will meet our needs. In fact, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God"* (2 Corinthians 9:11). Giving, then, is based on trust. As we trust that God will provide even beyond our needs, even to the point that we will have enough to be generous to others, our grip on things of this earth will loosen. Not only will we be able to help others in need, but we will bear witness to our Lord as He is given the glory for our generosity. Truly, we will begin to live **Life at its Best**.

## Children's Message (Week eight)

Hello boys and girls! Thank you for coming up for the children's message.

Today our theme is "Giving Faithfully."

Hold up an offering plate or offering basket with two pennies in it (let them see what is in it). What is it this that I am holding up? What do I have in the offering plate?

These offering plates are passed through the church during every service so we can worship the Lord through the giving of our money. Do you know the person in the Bible who was very faithful and gave to the Lord her last two coins? (wait for answers) She gave away all that she had. She is called the Poor Widow (Luke 21:1-4). The Bible tells us that Jesus was watching what she gave, and we are told the wealthy gave offerings that were not very meaningful.

All of you here are still quite young. Maybe you don't have a lot of money to put in the offering plate. How should you give then?

Maybe we want to give our teacher a gift, so a dollar is collected from each student for the gift. Sometimes each of us is asked to bring one canned good for the food bank. We give what we can.

Sometimes we give what someone expects us to give. Your mom may expect you to pick up your toys, but she may expect your big brother, because he's older and stronger, to sweep out the whole garage.

All of us, though, can give out of love, just like the widow did. The widow didn't give an amount equal to what others gave, because she didn't have as much as others. She didn't give what was expected of her either. No, she gave much more than what was expected! Would God expect her to give her last coin? God doesn't ask us to do what the widow did, but He does ask us to be generous and to give out of love for Him. Money is not the only gift you can give. God is happy to accept your gifts of love when you help someone else, when you're kind to someone, when you make a card for someone who's sick, or whatever you find to do. You have lots to give!

**Let's pray together.** Dear heavenly Father, thank You for all You've given me, especially Your Son Jesus. Help me to want to give generously and to help others whenever I can. Help me to love others just like You love me. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

## Sermon for Week Eight: “Faithful Giving”

**Text:** Luke 12:13-21: “How to Be Rich Toward God”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

This is the eighth message in our series on living **Life at its Best**. In the past Sundays we talked about such themes as “Fellowship with God,” “Using Time Wisely,” “A Life of Service,” “Controlling our Money,” etc. This week we are discussing “Faithful Giving.”

Jack Benny, a comedian from the past, used to joke about his stinginess. In one of his routines a mugger holds him up, shoves the cold steel of a gun barrel into his back, and commands with a shrill voice: “Your money or your life!” Silence. The mugger repeats his line. Silence. Repeats again! Jack finally blurts out: “I’m thinking, I’m thinking!” This line is funny because it contains so much truth. We can become so attached to money and material things...wanting more...bigger...fancier...that it seems as important as our very lives!

In our text, which is the Parable of the Rich Fool found in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke, a man asks Jesus to command his brother to divide the family inheritance with him. Jesus ignores the argument, and, instead uses this situation to teach a vital lesson about greed. *“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”*

Jesus goes on to tell the story of an extremely successful and wealthy farmer. His fields produce abundant crops; he knows how to strike the most lucrative deals with the produce brokers. He loves his work; he is energized by it; everything he does seems to turn to gold! I don’t know what opportunities he had to develop his spiritual life, but apparently, he considered doing bigger and bigger deals a more valuable use of his time and energy than seeking God! This is an easy pattern to fall into, is it not?

The farmer’s fields continue to produce spectacularly! His operation grows beyond his wildest dreams. Eventually, he has to tear down his barns and build bigger ones to hold all his grain and goods! Bursting with satisfaction, he exclaims, “I’ve got tons of money in the bank; my future is secure; now I’ll eat, drink and be merry!”

Then God said, *“You fool!”*

This is shocking! A fool? At his funeral, everyone said, “He was a genius, a shrewd business man, a wise investor!”

Notice that the world looks at things in a much different way than God does. Our Lord goes on to say, *“You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you!”*

The question, then, is what good did his barns full of grain and goods do him then? What good did all his business deals do? He invested prime time and energy in storing up mountains of riches, but he had invested nothing in what mattered the most, and he stood before God empty-handed.

Jesus concludes, *“This is how it will be with **anyone** who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”*

So here is what is important: we need to be RICH TOWARD GOD! What does that mean? It simply means to invest our lives into a relationship with God! We spend so much time and money investing in education, work, friends, families, pleasures, and we may be rich in these things, but are we rich toward God? Jesus taught, *“Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...”* (Matthew 6:20). A disciple, one who is learning to be more like Jesus, needs to learn to invest his life in loving God and meeting the needs of others. Then he truly can live **life at its best**.

Let me offer three principles of financial giving guaranteed to make you rich toward God:

1. We are rich toward God when we give to God **first**.

Exodus 23:19: *“Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God.”*

In a non-agricultural society, rather than bringing in our crops, we give from the firstfruits of our income. We are to honor our commitment to God **before** buying the things we desire. Our great God does not value leftovers.

Our greediness can cause us to spend everything and be rich in possessions, but not have any left over to give. Budget the money to give to extend God’s Kingdom FIRST. That is not to be touched!

How much should be budgeted?

°Is your goal to tithe, which is giving one-tenth of your income to the Lord? The Old Testament community of believers were commanded to tithe (Leviticus 27:30). Though tithing is not commanded in the New Testament, many Christians see tithing as a healthy goal, but I don’t believe this is God’s °goal for us in the area of giving.

So, again we ask how much should be budgeted?

°It has something to do with your income! I Corinthians 16:2: *“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income...”*

Luke 12:48: *“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded.”*

°The greater the income you have, the more you are expected to give!

2. We are rich toward God when we **give generously**.

2 Corinthians 9:11: *“You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”*

You might reason: “I’ve worked up to tithing, and now I can coast!” Not really! Ten percent is not the goal. Giving generously is the goal!

SHOCKING: Ephesians 4:28: *“He...must work, doing something useful with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with those in need.”*

The reason you have what you have is not to experience a higher standard of living, not to buy a bigger house and bigger cars, but to **give generously**! God doesn’t prosper your business so that you can buy newer furniture, but so that you can have a greater impact on spreading the Gospel! Stunning!

When we get a raise, we normally think, “Now I can afford that 42” TV.” We ought to think differently! A raise, now I can **give more**! In other words, having a \$100,000 salary does not have to be accompanied by a \$100,000 lifestyle. We need to think as disciples and ask ourselves, “How do I honor God by my lifestyle and my giving? How can I be rich toward God?”

What is a generous percentage of your income? If you live in poverty, three percent may be generous; if you are wealthy, 30 percent may not be generous. If our mortgage payments, or any other payments, are so high we cannot afford to give generously, we may need to downsize!

Now you should know that the Bible is not teaching us not to invest or prepare for emergencies and retirement, etc. We are to plan wisely for the future. Nor is the Bible teaching that we can’t have luxuries. I Timothy 6:17, 18: *“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, Who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.”*

We need to keep a balance. We are to enjoy the pleasures of life as gifts from God and to be generous in giving.

3. We are rich toward God when we **give cheerfully**, *“...for God loves a cheerful giver”* (2 Corinthians 9:7).

The Greek: *hilaros*. God loves a hilarious giver! The church should never make people feel guilty about giving. It is the hilarious giver who knows how to live **life at its best**.

The principles of giving generously and cheerfully are beautifully illustrated in the following story:

Two brothers shared a field and a mill, and each night they evenly divided the grain they had ground together during the day. One brother lived alone; the other had a wife and large family. The single brother started thinking, "It isn't really fair that we divide the grain evenly, because I have only myself to care for and my brother has children to feed." So, each night he secretly took some of his grain to his brother's granary to see that he was never without.

The married brother said to himself one day, "It isn't really fair that we divide the grain evenly, because I have children to provide for me in my old age, but my brother has no one. What will he do when he is old?" So, every night he secretly took some of his grain to his brother's granary. As a result, both of them always found their supply of grain mysteriously replenished each morning. Each brother gave generously and cheerfully from loving hearts.

When we generously give our firstfruits to God with a proper attitude (cheerfully), we become rich toward God. So, how much should we give? Well, here's the bottom line: 2 Corinthians 9:7: "*Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*" God wants us to give thoughtfully and cheerfully in proportion to how God blesses us.

Very few of us give as generously as we should; I know I don't. Very few of us obey God in any area as we should: Bible study, prayer, spiritual gifts, loving others—I don't do any of that very well, yet God still loves me. Even if you didn't give a cent, God would not love you any less. Christ died for all our sins, including our lack of generous giving! The Bible says, "*But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:8). Christ effected the redemption of all mankind in that act of sacrifice. Therefore, we now count ourselves "*dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 6:11), and the Holy Spirit working through Word and Sacrament, continues His work of sanctifying us that we might live **life at its best**.

As we grow as disciples, as we understand more and more what God has done for us in Christ, as we see the infinite love of God shown to us by the death of His Son, as we see that Jesus gave Himself, we are prompted by the Holy Spirit to respond by sharing the resources that God has given us to provide for those in need and to extend His kingdom.

We give because it is a visual expression of the depth of our relationship with God, our maturity as disciples, our understanding of what is important in life. It is becoming "*rich toward God!*"

In Jesus' name. Amen.



## **Life at its Best**

### **Bible Study, Week Eight: “Faithful Giving”**

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, You have withheld nothing that is needed from us. Help us to respond to Your loving gifts with generous and giving hearts. Grant us the joy that comes from giving. We ask for Your blessings on the study that we are about to begin. In Your precious name we pray. Amen.

1. Read Genesis 4:2b-7 and Hebrews 11:4. Why was God pleased with Abel’s gift and not with Cain’s?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 16:2. What three points regarding giving does this verse make?
3. Read 1 Chronicles 29:10-18. What can you learn from David’s prayer?
4. Read Luke 19:1-10. How can you tell that Zacchaeus had a new and generous heart?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-7. What made it possible for the Macedonians to give in the midst of their hardships?
6. Read 2 Corinthians 9:8-10. What assurance do you have that God will give you the means to give?
7. What Biblical truths of giving do the following verses reflect?
  - Proverbs 3:9
  - 2 Corinthians 8:12
  - 2 Corinthians 9:6-7
8. Read 2 Corinthians 8:7. What does it mean to excel in the grace of giving?
9. Read 2 Corinthians 8:8. How does giving test the sincerity of your love?
10. What kind of giving attitude did the following people have and what portion did they give?
  - Widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:7-24)
  - New Christians (Acts 2:42-47)
  - Poor Widow (Luke 21:1-4)
  - Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11)

Questions for further discussion:

11. How does faithful and generous giving help you live **life at its best**?
12. Is giving an obligation or opportunity for you?
13. How can a lack of giving block your spiritual growth (Matthew 6:21)?
14. Read Malachi 1:6-14. Why was God angry with the people of Malachi’s day?

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, we give what You have first given to us. Thank You for Your generosity toward us. Loosen our grip on our money so we faithfully and generously give of our firstfruits. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

## Week Eight: Wrapping Up: “Faithful Giving”

Our faithful giving honors and glorifies the Lord. The act of giving is discussed extensively in both the Old and New Testaments; both the poor and rich, both young and old gave. We are not to give out of duty or for recognition. Rather, faith in and love for God motivate us to give, and giving generously is evidence of our faith. God’s grace empowers us to be faithful with our lives and resources. God’s love and generosity are seen through our giving. We live **life at its best** when we joyfully share God’s gifts with Him and others.

A foundational truth about Christian giving is that it comes from the heart, not just from the pocketbook. It is an expression of love and care. We are to be compassionate and eager to share God’s blessings with those in need. Giving springs from the recognition that the bountiful blessings of our lives are from God. Our giving recognizes that God is the ultimate Giver. We are not only to enjoy the blessings God gives us, but to share them as well. In addition, Scripture promises us that God will enrich us when we are faithful in our regular and proportionate giving (Malachi 3:10; Luke 6:38). God asks us to give for the ministry of the church, to spread the Gospel, to help those in need.

Of course, God, Who owns everything, is not in need of our money. He graciously allows us to take part in building His kingdom and accepts our offerings as an act of worship. By God’s grace, we can sever our firm attachment to things of this earth. We can grow to love the things that endure. Things come and go, but our service and gifts to the Lord last forever. We offer our gifts to the Lord through the Church because the Church is Christ’s body on earth, commissioned by Him to tell others about God’s love and forgiveness. Giving can be viewed as an investment in God’s kingdom. We may invest some of our money in stocks, bonds, CDs, homes, or businesses, but the most important, the only lasting investment we can make with our money is what we give to the Lord. This is the only investment that will pay both present and future dividends that cannot be surpassed.

### ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS

#### LIFE-ENRICHING

Gives  
Is generous  
Helps  
Rejoices in giving  
Has an eternal perspective  
Is a channel of God’s blessings  
Surrenders self and money  
Sees the needs of others  
God is our treasure  
Gives cheerfully  
Sees life as a partnership with God  
Shares

#### LIFE-DESTROYING

Keeps  
Is selfish  
Ignores  
Rejoices in having  
Lives for the moment  
Is a terminal of God’s gifts  
Takes and keeps  
Is blinded by own needs and desires  
Things are our treasure  
Gives grudgingly  
Lives for himself  
Hoards

## Bible Study 8: Answer guide for “Faithful Giving”

1. Genesis 4:2b-7; Hebrews 11:4. Abel gave the best part of his flock, whereas, Cain gave just some of his harvest. Through faith, Abel gave a better sacrifice.
2. 1 Corinthians 16:2. Each of us should give each week in proportion to our blessings.
3. 1 Chronicles 29:1-18. David states that our wealth and blessings come from God, so we are merely returning to God what He has already given to us.
4. Luke 19:1-10. Zacchaeus’ willingness to give half of his possessions to the poor and repay four times to anyone he may have cheated showed his new heart.
5. 2 Corinthians 8:1-7. In spite of their hardships, the Macedonians gave generously because they first had given themselves to the Lord.
6. 2 Corinthians 9:8-10. God’s grace makes it possible for us to give, and His grace gives us the motivation to give. He will supply what we need to give.
7. Proverbs 3:9. We are to give the first portions of our income.  
2 Corinthians 8:12. When we willingly give in proportion to the blessings that have been given us to us our gifts are acceptable.  
2 Corinthians 9:6-7. If we give generously, we will receive generously. We are certain to receive spiritual blessings for our generosity and possible material blessings as well. *“God loves a cheerful giver.”*
8. 2 Corinthians 8:7. We excel in the grace of giving when we see giving as an opportunity rather than an obligation. We excel in giving when we make giving a priority and give generously. We excel in giving when we see the needs of others and give toward those needs. We excel when we give to further God’s kingdom.
9. 2 Corinthians 8:8. Giving, possibly more than anything else, gives evidence to our faith and heart.
10. Widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:7-24). She demonstrated her faith and obedience by giving the last of her oil and flour.  
New Christians (Acts 2:42-47). They all gave of what they had so no one was in need.  
Poor Widow (Luke 12:1-4). She trusted God and gave all that she had.  
Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). They promised a gift and pretended to give all but kept some for themselves. The problem lay with their desire for recognition and their hypocrisy.
11. God promises a special blessing to those who give faithfully and generously. Giving gives evidence to a loving and giving heart which is needed if we are to live **life at its best**. It is impossible to live **life at its best** if we would hoard God’s blessings for ourselves.
12. Personal response.
13. Matthew 6:21. Jesus said, *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:21). Our hearts follow our treasure. If we don’t give our money or treasure to the Lord our hearts will not follow. Giving is part of spiritual journey. Loving Jesus and others compel us to give. Giving is a natural response of gratitude for God’s gifts to us.
14. Malachi 1:6-14. The people did not give their best. In fact, by giving their leftovers and diseased animals, they gave their worst.

## Sunday, Week Eight: “Giving

### Money and the Great Commission

*“...I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others” (2 Corinthians 8:8).*

Jesus’ parting command was: *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”* (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus was very direct and explicit with His mandate. The love God gives to us is to be shared with all people everywhere. He has given us our marching orders, and, in His strength, we can give ourselves fully to His work.

Because God has chosen to use us as His tools to bring salvation to all people, we are called to use our lives and gifts to spread the Good News. One of the tools that God gives us to use in our mission of reaching out to others with the Gospel is our money. According to an old stewardship phrase, “Stewardship without mission is unnecessary and mission without stewardship is impossible.”

Stewardship and mission are inseparable. The funding of the Great Commission needs to come from believers. The money which God entrusts to us has many purposes, and the funding of mission work is of first importance. Through the giving of our money, we demonstrate our obedience to Jesus’ command to reach out to all people.

The giving of money is done begrudgingly out of a sense of obligation by nonbelievers and those who lack spiritual maturity. By the grace of God, our attitude toward giving is a “want to” rather than a “got to” give. We view giving as a privilege and an opportunity to spread the Gospel through our money. Our giving expresses our gratitude for who God is and all that He has done for through His Son. Through faith, we hold onto our money loosely and then are privileged to experience the joy of giving as we give God our first and best. As Christians we understand that God has a claim on all that we have, so we willingly and cheerfully give our money to help all people hear of God’s love. The giving of money is an important tool for God’s mission.

Prayer: Dear Father, use my money as an instrument of love. Amen.



## Life at its Best



## Daily Devotions for the whole family!

### Week 8

#### “Faithful Giving”

Monday	“Blessed to Be a Blessing”
Tuesday	“Giving Prompted by Love”
Wednesday	“Examining our Giving”
Thursday	“Called to Imitate God’s Generosity”
Friday	“Excel in the Grace of Giving”
Saturday	“Giving a Cup of Cold Water”
Sunday	“Money and the Great Commission”

## Monday, Week Eight: “Faithful Giving”

### *Blessed to Be a Blessing*

*“God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7),*

The sainted Reverend Billy Graham wrote, “God has given us two hands—one to receive with and the other to give with.” We all enjoy receiving gifts, it is often even more meaningful to give them. When we give, we quickly discover the true joy in giving. We have all experienced the excitement and thrill of giving someone a special birthday, Christmas, or anniversary gift. We can’t measure the joy of watching the happiness that our gifts bring to others.

Experiencing this joy in giving, we understand why Jesus said, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35). God only wants the best for us when He asks us to give. We are fulfilled and enriched through a generous, giving spirit. He uses our generosity to build His kingdom and to strengthen and bless us. Generosity is an important component of “life at its best.” When we give freely and fully, we discover the key to living. Giving is a privilege and a joy and can change our lives.

We can choose to be channels or terminals with the gifts that God entrusts to us. What we do with God’s money demonstrates our spiritual maturity. Some of us share sacrificially with God and others, others give proportionately from our incomes, and still others hoard what we receive. God wants us to be channels of His blessings, and He enriches us so we can be blessings to others. We are blessed to be a blessing.



Those who do not share, but hoard, become terminals, rather than channels, of God’s gifts. They get no satisfaction except for fleeting happiness in using the things of this world. Those who do not share will never experience the joy of giving. The miracle of giving is that the more we give, the more we receive. Although we are not likely to receive in kind, or dollar for dollar, what we receive is more precious than what we give. God’s gifts to us are always greater than our gifts to Him.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help me to acknowledge that You are the source of all my blessings and grant me a generous spirit. Amen.

## Tuesday, Week Eight: “Faithful Giving”

### *Giving Prompted by Love*

*“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8).*

Giving is a natural expression of love. If we dearly love and give ourselves to others, we will do everything possible not to forget occasions or opportunities to share with those individuals. Loving spouses show their love for one another through gifts and acts of kindness. The young man who loves his girlfriend never thinks he has given enough to her. Parents who love their children will give whatever they can to contribute to their well-being. Followers of Christ who truly love Him are eager to express that love through their giving. If our hearts are opened to the Holy Spirit, we will grow spiritually and desire to give.

Love causes us to do thoughtful, kind, and sacrificial things. The more love we share, the more love is returned to us. We gain when we give (Proverbs 11:25). We live “life at its best” when God’s love and generosity are seen through us.

*“We love because He first loved us”* (1 John 4:19). The Lord set the example of giving motivated by love. *“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). First God loved; then He gave. We know how to express our love because we have experienced the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ, Who gave His life for us. Our giving is a way to show our appreciation to God for the greatest gift of all—our redemption.



God is concerned with more than the giver’s gift. He is more concerned with the love of the giver. That is why, when we give God our money without giving Him our hearts, we have missed the purpose and joy in giving. Our willingness to give should be guided by two truths: First, everything God asks of us is based on something He has already given to us, and everything He asks of us will benefit us as well as the recipients of our gifts.

Prayer: Dear Father, may Your love in me overflow to others. Amen.

## Wednesday, Week Eight: “Faithful Giving”

### *Examining our Giving*

*“For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have” (2 Corinthians 8:12).*

Have you ever considered the fact that we can give at three different levels? We can give at a lower level than we are able to give, we can give proportionately according to our abilities, or we can give sacrificially beyond our abilities. Our checkbooks and/or credit card statements reveal whether we are self-centered or God-centered? When we give faithfully and generously, we are giving from our hearts not just from our pocketbooks. Giving springs from the recognition that our blessings are from God. Through faith, we understand that God is the ultimate giver. Giving expresses our gratitude to God Who is the source of all good things. The level of our generosity, whether equal to, above, or below our abilities, reflects the condition of our hearts. Our financial statements will reveal what is important and what our priorities are.



God calls each of us to give. Second Corinthians 9:10-11 says, *“Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so you can be generous on every occasion and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”* This verse tells us that God will not only meet our needs, but He will provide more than we need. God does not limit His gifts to His people but rather provides abundantly, with blessings that may, or may not be material in nature. If God chooses to bless us financially, He is putting us in a position to be even more generous. The more we give, the more we can receive so we will be able to keep on giving to bring thanksgiving to God.

With God’s help, we are empowered not only to give according to our ability but even above. Giving above our ability reflects our willingness to place our trust in Him.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for Your generosity toward me. Help me to be generous what all that You entrust to me. Open my eyes and heart to opportunities to share my blessings with others. Amen.

## Thursday, Week Eight: “Faithful Giving”

### *Called to Imitate God’s Generosity*

*“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15)*

Giving reflects the heart of God. Unfortunately, our flesh, the world, and Satan interfere in our ability to imitate God’s generous nature. In our sinful state, we are selfish, self-centered people who are inclined to keep our money for ourselves rather than to give it.

Through the working of the Holy Spirit, God fills our hearts with a spirit of generosity. We stop seeing the money we have as just for our needs and entertainment. By grace, we understand that the money God entrusts to us has the potential to be used to support mission starts and missionaries so they can share the life-saving Gospel in this land and overseas. Our money has the potential to help those who are hungry and homeless. It has the potential to support our Christian schools and agencies. It supports the mission and ministry of our church. God uses and multiplies the money we give in many wonderful ways.



Through God-given faith and new attitudes, we see that our generosity is made possible by and rooted in His generosity. We are empowered to give because of God’s generosity to us. Knowing that He doesn’t limit His gifts to us and experiencing His generosity at work in our lives, we respond to His appeal to give generously.

God’s people live with an abundant perspective trusting in His provisions. In Scripture, we see over and over again how God’s people demonstrated their trust in His abundance. Abel, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, David, the Poor Widow, Zacchaeus, and Barnabas demonstrated their faith and trust by giving back some, or even all, of what God had given them. In 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9, we read how our bounteous God richly bestowed on the Corinthians the capacity for generosity. He can do the same for us. In our generosity, we bring joy to our Heavenly Father as we display His image.

Prayer: Dear Father, use me as a channel through whom You can bless others. Help me to be more Christ-like in my giving. Amen.



## Friday, Week Eight: “Faithful Giving”

### *Excel in the Grace of Giving*

*“You will be rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion...” (2 Corinthians 9:11).*

In his letter to the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul wrote, *“But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving”* (2 Corinthians 8:7). Paul is seeking the generosity of the people in Corinth for the distressed Christians in Jerusalem. He wants them, as he wants us, to excel in the grace of giving.



In 2 Corinthians 8:7, Paul included giving alongside excelling in faith, speech, knowledge, and complete earnestness in your love. Giving is not an afterthought. Paul didn’t say that if we have love and faith, we can ignore the part about giving. Unfortunately, some Christians choose to live their lives as if they are in a buffet line in a cafeteria where they can pick and choose how they will serve the Lord. In a skewed way, it’s as if they are saying that they want God to provide them with the ability to excel in faith and love, but they don’t seek God’s grace of giving. As our faith matures through Word and Sacrament, we will seek God’s presence in every area of our lives, including the area of our finances. Because of God’s grace and love, we are compelled to give. Love motivates us to be givers rather than takers. Giving puts our love into action.

Because of God’s love and grace, we have a relationship with Him. This relationship affects every aspect of life such as our politics, how we raise our children, our views on the environment, how we handle our money, and certainly our giving. Through God’s grace, our attitudes toward giving change from “got to” give to “want to” give.

God’s grace changes everything. Good stewardship and giving come from Christians who are studying God’s Word and growing spiritually. Only as the Holy Spirit changes our minds and hearts through reading and applying God’s Word will we adopt God’s way of giving.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help me to hold onto my money loosely so I can excel in the grace of giving. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

## Saturday, Week Eight: “Faithful Giving”

### *Giving a Cup of Cold Water*

*“I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink” (Matthew 25:35).*

During Jesus’ last three years on earth, He spent much time nourishing and teaching His disciples. Only when they were prepared to go out into the world to preach, teach, and heal did He send them. Leaving without provisions, the disciples were totally dependent upon those whom the Lord would send them for their support. The disciples relied upon the power of the Gospel to move the hearts of their listeners who would willingly provide for their needs. They were to travel light and trust in the Lord.

In Matthew 10:40-42 Jesus, referring to His disciples, said, *“He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives the One who sent Me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man’s reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is My disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.”*

Jesus told His disciples that whoever gives to others is also giving to Him.

Just as the work of the 12 original disciples was funded by other believers, we assist the spreading of the Gospel by supporting today’s disciples and missionaries around the world. As we provide for church workers locally and abroad in the name of Jesus, we are serving the Lord Himself.



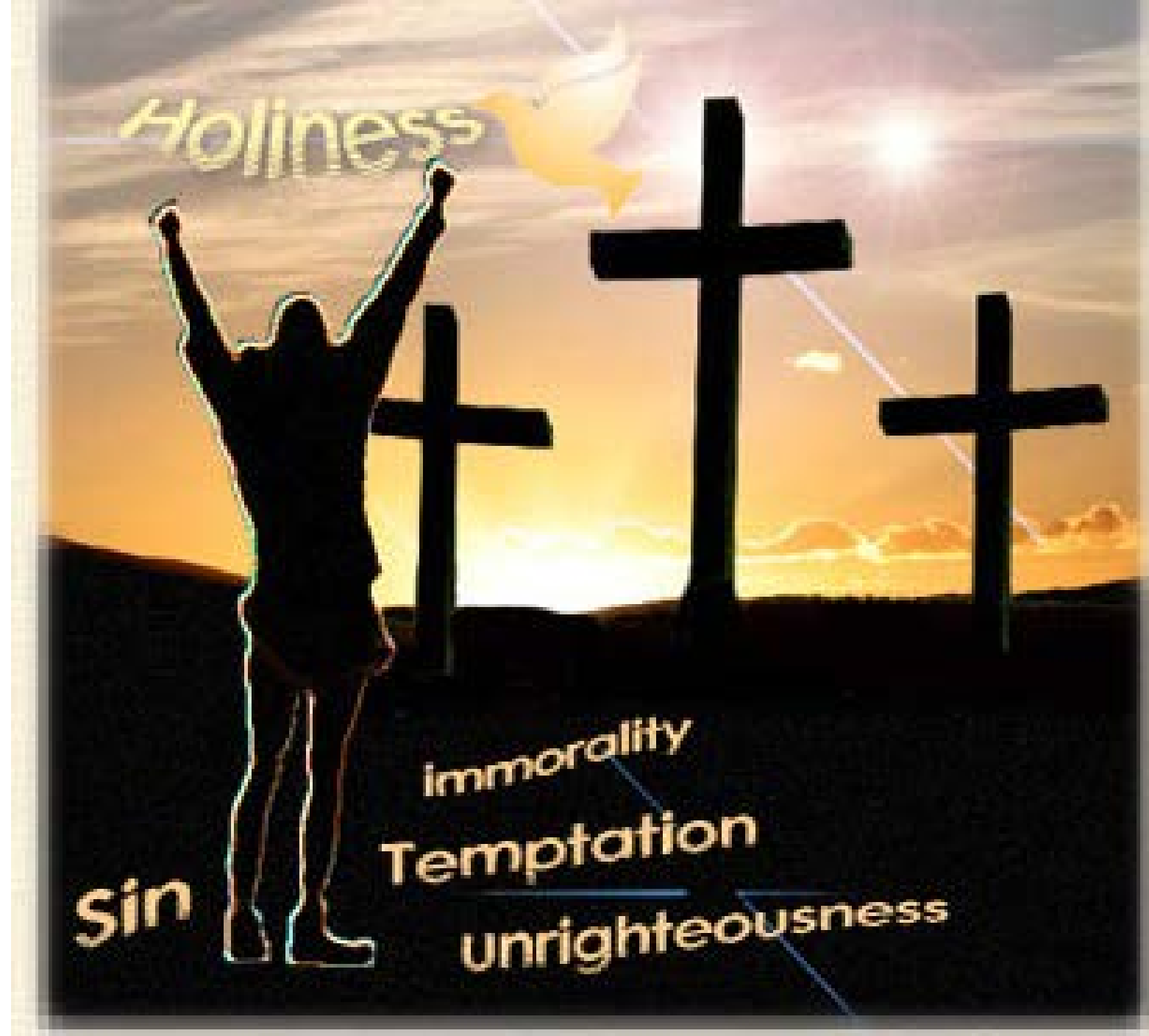
As we express our Christian faith through our giving and serving, God is pleased. God notices every act of compassion and kindness that we express. Even the simple gesture of giving a cup of cold water to a thirsty person is an act God blesses. Through our faith, we are empowered to do acts of service. When we act in response to the Lord and not for recognition, God blesses us. Having already been assured of salvation by God’s grace through faith, blessings such as peace, contentment, patience, and hope are added rewards.

May God bless us as we give food to the hungry, and water to the thirsty.

Prayer: Father, help me to show mercy and kindness to all people especially to those who are need. In Jesus’ holy name I pray. Amen.

Life at its Best:  
Living Wisely in an  
Unwise World

**Week 9:  
“Resisting  
Temptations”**



## Bulletin Messages, Week Nine: “Resisting Temptations”

### **Life at its Best, Week Nine: “Resisting Temptations”**

“Resisting Temptations” is a universal problem that does not exclude the Christian. We will be studying what God desires of us as well as His plan for enabling us to fulfill His will for our lives as we seek to live **life at its best**. *“And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it”* (1 Corinthians 10:13). With God’s strength, we can resist sin, and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be faithful. Join us next Sunday with our concluding Sunday in our theme living **life at its best**.

### **Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World**

**AS GOD’S REDEEMED CHILDREN, WE KNOW THAT GOD’S STRENGTH IS MORE THAN SUFFICIENT TO DEFEAT THE SINFUL PULL OF THE WORLD.**

“But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).



## Resisting Temptations

As part of our **Life at its Best** emphasis, today our theme will be “resisting temptations.” Oscar Wilde once said, “I can resist everything except temptation.” This humorous statement holds more truth for us than we’d like. We’ve all faced temptations and resisted them with varying degrees of success.

The Bible says we should expect temptation and that we can have victory over it. *“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”* We learn a few things about temptation from that quote from 1 Corinthians 10:13. First, the temptations we are experiencing are nothing new. Second, it is God Who is faithful. This is not a pep talk about how we can do it: we can’t. God will not allow anything unbearable to come into our lives, and, beyond that, He will provide strength for us to resist whatever temptations we face.

Jesus Himself faced temptation every day of His life on earth. The most memorable occasion is probably when the devil approached Him in the desert after He had fasted for forty days. Satan attacked Jesus when He was most vulnerable, and he used the same tactics with Jesus as he tried with Eve back in the Garden of Eden.

Satan surely is hard at work, deceiving and lying, and trying to separate us from our heavenly Father, but the world and our own human natures offer challenges just as great as we try to live the Christian life that honors God. When we with God’s help renounce our self-interests and follow Him, He is ready to set us free from a life of selfishness and worldly interests so we can live **Life at its Best**. We must remember that as Christians we have already overcome the evils of the world “...because the One Who is in [us] is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

## Children's Message (Week nine)

### "Resisting Temptations"

(Use a shield for a prop)

Good morning boys and girls! Is everyone having a good day?

Today we are going to talk about a big word. The word is "temptations." We face many temptations every day. Can anyone give me an example of a temptation? (wait for responses)

I remember when I was younger like you boys and girls, I would sometimes lie to my mother when I told her I had cleaned my bedroom when I hadn't. It was a big mistake, and I was very wrong. You may face the temptation to steal candy from your brother or sister or friends. You may be tempted to cheat on a test in school. You may lie to your parents when you tell them that you brushed your teeth when you haven't.

(Hold up shield). Does anyone know what a shield is used for? (wait for response). Yes, a shield is for protection. A soldier would hold it over his chest so his enemy couldn't hurt him.

What in the world does a shield have to do with temptations? Well, let me help you understand. Jesus told us to "*take up the shield of faith (hold up shield), with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.*" (Ephesians 6:16). What Jesus meant is that because we're His children, He protects us and helps us not to give in to temptations. When you are ready to yell mean things at your friend and something inside you says "Don't," that's the shield of faith keeping you from doing wrong. May you give in, though, to that temptation and you do say those nasty things. Then what? (wait for response). Yes, you tell your friend and Jesus that you were wrong and ask them to forgive you.

Let us pray: Dear Father, thank You for sending Your Holy Spirit to be my shield and protection from all temptations. Please give me the strength that I need to please You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

## Sermon for Week Nine: “Resisting Temptations”

**Text:** Matthew 4:1-11

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our message today is our ninth message in our sermon series living **Life at its Best**. Our text for today is found in Matthew 4 where Jesus spends 40 days in the desert to be tempted. I will share parts of this text throughout my message.

Dear People of God: We all have a particular identity. It's found in our names especially, but also in such items as our addresses, types of work, and social security numbers. Our spiritual identity as "Christians" comes through knowing Christ as our Savior. For some, that happens as adults after they've spent many years wandering around aimlessly and finally coming to the conclusion that Christ is The Way. They believe and are baptized. Probably for most of us here today, however, we became identified as Christians when we were baptized as infants. The seed of faith was planted through water and Word. We don't remember that day, but we have been told by our pastors that its importance rivals our birth from our mothers' wombs. Whether coming to faith as adults or infant, we have a unique identity. Each one of us is "Christian," or "a child of God." That title means more than our individual names, our addresses, or social security numbers. It identifies us more than our fingerprints, photographs, or scars. As fundamental as this identity is, however, it does not go unchallenged. Indeed, we are often challenged to be someone completely opposite from what God has called us to be.

When Christ was tempted in the wilderness, His identity was also challenged. Just before His temptation, Jesus was baptized. His Baptism named Him and gave Him His destined identity. God the Father spoke as the Spirit of God descended on Him in the form of a dove. He said, *"This is My Son, Whom I love; with Him I am well pleased"* (Matthew 3:17). That Fatherly voice, that indelible identification stuck with Jesus throughout His ministry. Everything He said and did fell under that title. Yet, Satan challenged His most basic identity as God's Son, just as our most basic identity as "God's child" is challenged by Satan.

If we had our choice, we would not be challenged. It's a lot easier to be named, identified, and then live the rest of our days in the glory of the title. That's not the way it works, though, not for Christ and not for us. It's almost as if, because Christ was baptized, He had to be tested. True character comes to the surface only when put to the test. All the inherent qualities of divine Sonship would show themselves true and genuine when confronted with just the opposite—with whatever Satan could throw in His face to renounce His Father's naming. It happens that way with us, too. Baptized, then tested to prove that each one of us is, in fact, a "child of God."

Satan tested Jesus in three ways: with material security, with manipulating God, and with prestige or power. He did it to challenge His identity with a mistaken identity. In order to keep us from living **life at its best**, Satan tries the same thing with us.

### **Material Security:**

Jesus was driven by the Holy Spirit out into the wastelands. As a human being, Jesus got hungry. He couldn't go to McDonald's or throw a frozen meal into the microwave. He was on His own with nothing to fix. Besides, forty days of nothing leaves you desperate for anything to eat or drink. This was no one-day fast, knowing the next day He could feast. Jesus, on the brink of starvation, was faced with an immediate temptation. *"If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread,"* suggested Satan. Jesus' human hunger might have cried out, "Yes!" His identity as God's Son was challenged. Though tempted, He remained true to His identity and refused to turn into some "bread manufacturer." Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, *"It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of*



*God.'"* For one on the brink of starvation, it might have seemed like the natural thing to do, that is, to use His divine power to turn the stones into bread. Yet, that action would not fall into line with Who He really was. Life does not consist in bread, no matter how hungry one is, but in God's Word.

Let's look at ourselves. We spend most of our time making sure we do not live in the wastelands or deserts. We work and earn money to put food on the table, clothes on our backs, and roofs over our heads. The bills come in; we pay them. If we go into debt, the reason often lies in our going for things beyond the bare necessities. Luxuries appeal to us, and we'll acquire them either by cash or by debt. Why? The simple reason lies with our obsession with physical security. The more we have, the more secure and fulfilled we think we'll be, but do you remember the experience of thinking that if only I had—whatever it was you wanted, and then you got that "whatever"? How long did it take before that "whatever" left you feeling empty again? Not long, right? Satan deludes us into thinking that we can live **life at its best** when we have an abundance of possessions. Indeed, we cannot. Instead, **life at its best** rests on the Word of the Lord, specifically when we were baptized and named a "child of God." When our identities are challenged, and we fall to mistaken identities, may the call of our Baptism bring us back to Jesus and God's Word. Luther instructs us: "We must adhere to the bare Word; for God does not forsake us but, like a mother, most lovingly cherishes and carries us. Go out of yourself and go to Christ Who is the Lamb of God and the Sacrifice for our sins." Though Jesus' identity was challenged, He never gave in. He went on to die for us and save us. He alone can restore us so that we live in the security of being God's child.

### **"Holy" Manipulation**

The second challenge to Jesus' identity fell to some "holy" manipulation. Once again, Satan proposed an "if" statement: *"If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down."* Then he proceeded to quote the Holy Book, *"For it is written: 'He will command His angels concerning You, and they will lift You up in their hands, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.'"* What could be more convincing than quoting God's Word, but what could be more deceitful than to quote it wrongly? Yes, God's angels protect, but they were never commissioned to protect one from foolishly manipulating supernatural power. That's what Satan tried to get Jesus to do—and under the guise of His divine identity as God's Son!

Let's imagine the kind of dialogue that might have taken place:

"Go on! What are You afraid of: You are the Son of God, aren't You?"

"Yes."

"Are You sure?"

"Yes."

"Really sure?"

Silence.

"Absolutely sure?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, why not jump?"

Silence.

"Are You sure You're not afraid?"

"Yes."

"Yet You won't jump. How interesting! Look, I'll put it to You straight: Do You firmly trust Your Father?"

"Yes."

"All right, then, prove it. Jump! Go on, jump!"

But no deal! No jump. Who's the foolish one? Not Jesus. Instead, the deceiver ends up the foolish one. Jesus can quote the Book too (Psalm 91:11-12), and only in correct context, never twisting its intended meaning.

*"Do not put the Lord Your God to the test."* The true Son of God would never do that. It is precisely because He is the Son of God that He will not succumb to such misuse of holy powers. Jesus would rely

solely upon His Father's absolute power without ever trying to twist His arm to perform some dazzling magical act. Instead of being sucked in by Satan's clever tactics and thereby blemish His identity, Jesus remained true to His Sonship without "holy manipulation" of the title or the text. As God's Son, not even on the agonizing cross would He miraculously jump down to safety.

And you, "child of God," does that alien voice ever say to you in pious tones, "Since you are God's child and the angels promise to protect—you can bet God's Word on it—go jump off the cliff, go throw yourself to the shifting winds and currents of this world. You won't get hurt. God and His angels will protect you—no broken legs, no bumps nor bruises, nary a scratch?"

It's one thing to be a hang-glider. That's dangerous enough, hanging from a parachute after touching off from a cliff, lifted by under-currents until touching down. It's quite another to just jump off, pretending to have wings like a bird, and expecting God to come to rescue. That's putting God to the test. People also test God by pumping themselves up with many possessions or big bank accounts or dream homes, or they might take everything they've got and squander it for the jackpot. After they've made the big jump by investing every fiber of their beings into their bizarre moves, they expect God to prevent the inevitable crash. God doesn't work that way. He knows they need to crash. Through their pain and suffering, they'll learn not to test Him, but to trust Him and discover the depth of their identity as "children of God."

### **Prestige and Power**

The third attempt by Satan, which challenged Jesus' identity, was a last-ditch effort to get Him to worship, not the Father, but him. The bait? Possession of the kingdoms and their power. What a lie! Who owns them? Satan pretends they're his. He claims for his own what belongs to another. Deceivers are that way. They'll promise anyone the whole world, even when they have nothing to give, just to get allegiance to themselves. The deal sounds so attractive. Prestige and a sense of power feed the ego, make one feel important, indispensable. However, once one bites, prestige turns to shame, and power turns to weakness. Even though Jesus' stay in the desert offered no comfort or rest, and the thought of power and luxury must have struck a chord, He refused to give an inch. Worship Satan? Never! In fact, Jesus exorcised the devil. *"Away from Me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'"*

How many times aren't we impressed by those who have it all? People who gain success and do it ethically, giving glory to God and sharing their wealth, can be respected, but, most of the time, kingdoms of power and prestige are stolen or purchased with dishonest and deceitful tactics. Jobs are lost, careers destroyed, and families fractured. If these cheats were accused of worshiping Satan, they would call their accusers crazy, but the accusation would remain accurate, for following Satan's tactics amounts to the same.

When our identity as God's children is being challenged with grandiose, but empty, promises, forget the sweet talk. Take note of exactly what's happening. Satan gives it all he's got to get you to worship him. Don't budge. Grab on to God's Word. *"Away from Me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'"* Cast him out with the same exorcism used at your Baptism when parents and godparents renounced the devil and all his works and evil ways. Satan will be tossed out on his ear, for Jesus Who met Satan's challenge head-on is the One Who died on the cross and then took the big plunge all the way to hell. There He did not continue the battle but showed Himself victorious over Satan and began His upward soar to the opened grave. In Easter glory, we worship the Lord alone, and, through faith, His whole glorious resurrection becomes our own! Who needs the glitz and fame of this world when you're God's kid? As God's kids, we can live **life at its best** without the glitz and the fame.

### **Conclusion:**

Life is full of challenges. Challenges help us become strong. The most fundamental challenge of our lives, though, is questioning who we are in God's eyes. Jesus was challenged by Satan to question His being the Son of God or to use that identity in some God-forsaken, demented, perverted way. Though tempted, Jesus remained faithful to His Baptism. When it comes to us, we are not only tempted, we often cave in to

temptation and take on a mistaken identity found in physical security, a sinister attempt to manipulate God, and puffed-up power or prestige. When you wake up in the desert of your own ruined world, remember Who stands by you. It's Jesus. Because He remained true to His identity throughout His ministry and gave His life on the cross, He is able to forgive us for so foolishly accepting mistaken identities. Turning to Him in confession and sorrow, He will most definitely restore us. We realize that the only thing that really matters to us in this life is our identity as "God's child." We understand that, with that identity, we can live **life at its best**. With the sign of the cross marked on our foreheads and settled in our hearts, that identity stands forever and, with every future challenge, because of Christ, our identity cannot help but become clearer and clearer!

May the peace that passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus now and forever. Amen.

## Life at its Best

### Bible Study, Week Nine: “Resisting Temptations”

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the victory that Jesus has won for us through His death and resurrection. Because of what Jesus has done, we can **life at its best** and overcome the temptations that we face. We ask for Your blessings on this study. May our time together draw us closer to You and to one another. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

1. Read 1 Peter 1:14-15. What does God expect of You? How is it possible?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13. What is God’s promise to you?
3. Read Hebrews 2:18. What comfort does this verse provide?
4. Read James 1:13-14. Where do temptations originate?
5. Read Titus 2:11-14. How does God keep you safe?
6. Our own sinful nature (the flesh), Satan, and the world are the sources of temptations.  
The Flesh: Read Romans 8:5; Galatians 5:19; James 4:1. What are the acts of the sinful nature?  
The World: Read James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17. What is friendship with the world?  
The Devil: Read Ephesians 6:12; John 8:44. What was Satan’s first lie (see Genesis 3)?
7. Read Matthew 4. How did Satan tempt Jesus in the desert? What was Jesus’ response? Where is your desert?
8. Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. Where did the Apostle Paul get his strength?
9. Read Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:16. What do these passages say about bringing others into your struggle with temptations?
10. Read Colossians 3:5-10. What are you told to do? How can we do this (see verse 10)?

Questions for further discussion:

11. Why is it so important to rely on God’s strength against temptations so you can live **life at its best**?
12. Where/how are you most easily tempted?
13. Why does God allow temptations to occur? What can you learn from being tempted?
14. What is Satan’s primary goal?
15. Read 1 John 1:8-9. What can we do when we succumb to temptations?

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for this study on temptation. Thank You that we can live in confidence knowing that You live within us, and, by relying on Your strength, we can resist any temptation whether big or small. Thank You for forgiving us and lifting us up when we fall. May all that we do give You honor and glory. Amen.

## Week Nine: Wrapping Up: “Resisting Temptations”

Since the fall of Adam, man has been tempted and tested and has failed. Temptations exist, and, by our own strength, we can’t resist. God gives us discernment and wisdom to see temptations as they are. His strength enables us to resist the pulls of the flesh, the world, and Satan. God gives us the spiritual strength to say “no.” God does not keep us immune from problems, but He promises, “*I will be with [you] in trouble...*” (Psalm 91:15b).

The difference between falling to temptations and following God’s ways is analogous to traveling an unsafe road versus a straight road. When we hold fast to God’s ways, we are on His straight road of life that offers blessings and protection. The unsafe road is full of dangerous curves and potholes that lead to curses and death.

God shows all of us the way, but we are allowed to pick the road. If we seek life, peace, and happiness, we need to pick God’s road. If we follow God’s way, love Him, and put our trust in Him, we will avoid the unsafe road and the miseries of this life.

*See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God... (Deuteronomy 30:15, 19-20).*

Christ is calling us to renounce our self-interests and follow Him. He is willing and ready to set us free from a life of selfishness and bondage to our own pride. When in faith we surrender ourselves, we take God’s high road and live **life at its best**. Our lives are enriched as we follow God’s way. Life is maximized when we understand that our purpose is not to serve ourselves but to please Him and assist others. When God is in control, His generosity, compassion, and Spirit will be seen through us.

### ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS

#### LIFE-ENRICHING

Is tempted and able to say “No”  
Perseveres under trial  
Is faithful  
Takes path of honesty and integrity  
Makes correct choices  
Associates with those of high character  
Receives strength from Christ  
Is prepared, on guard, and discerning  
Stands up to the crowd  
Sees the evil in the world  
Steers clear of danger  
Does what is honorable and right

#### LIFE-DESTROYING

Is tempted and willing to say “Yes.”  
Withers under trial  
Lacks commitment  
Takes crooked paths  
Makes poor choices  
Makes poor choices of associates  
Depends on himself  
Has no preparation or concern  
Follows the crowd  
Is oblivious to evil  
Plays with fire  
Omits what should be done

## Bible Study 9: Answer guide for “Resisting Temptations”

1. 1 Peter 1:14-15. To live **life at its best**, we need to tap into God’s strength and wisdom to overcome the enticements of the world. The Holy Spirit gives us strength.
2. 1 Corinthians 10:13. With God’s strength we can resist temptations. God is faithful
3. Hebrews 2:18. Because Jesus was tempted and suffered, He is able to help when we are tempted.
4. James 1:13-14. No temptations come from God. The desire to sin comes from our flesh, the world, and Satan.
5. Titus 2:11-14. God’s grace teaches us to say “no” to temptations and to live self-controlled lives.
6. The Flesh: Romans 8:5. Those who live according to the flesh indulge their flesh and have no interest in God. Galatians 5:17. Their minds are set on the sinful nature. The acts of the flesh are sexual immorality, idolatry, etc. James 4:1. Those who live according to the flesh indulge their sinful passions.  
The World: James 4:4. Friendship with the world is hatred toward God. A friend of the world is an enemy of God. 1John 2:15-17. Those who love the world have no room for God in their lives.  
The Devil. Ephesians 6:12. The real enemy is Satan, who is the power of the dark world and the spiritual force of evil. John 8:44. The devil is a murderer and a liar; he is the “*father of lies*.” Genesis 3:4. “*You will not surely die.*”  
Personal response.
7. Matthew 4. Satan tempted Jesus three times. 1. “Tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus said that man is to live on God’s Word. 2. At the highest point of the temple, Satan said, “*If you are the Son of God, throw Yourself down.*” Jesus responded by saying that we are not to “*put the Lord your God to the test.*” 3. Satan asked Jesus to “*bow down and worship me.*” Jesus said, “*Away from Me, Satan.*”
8. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. Paul knew that Christ’s power rested on him by Paul’s grace.
9. Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:16. We are expected to carry each other’s burdens. We are to restore those who have sinned gently. We are to confess our sins to each other and pray for each other.
10. Colossians 3:5-10. We are to put to death whatever belongs to our sinful nature and put on the new self. This happens only by God’s grace.
11. God calls us to live holy and fruitful lives. When we succumb to temptations, we miss out on living **life at its best**. Following and serving God enables us to live **life at its best**.
12. Personal response.
13. Through faith, we know that we live in a sinful world. In order to resist temptations, we know that we need to rely on God’s strength (1 Peter 1:6-9).
14. Satan wants to separate us from our trust and faith in Jesus.
15. 1 John 1:8-9. We can repent and believe wholeheartedly that we receive God’s forgiveness and cleansing.

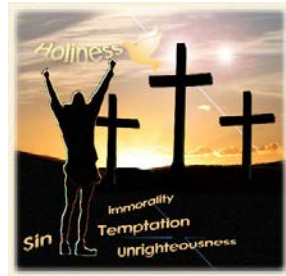
## Sunday, Week Nine: “Resisting Temptations”

### *Tapping into God’s Strength*

*“I have hidden Your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You” (Psalm 119:11).*

In Scripture we learn that wrong thoughts, desires, and temptations affect everyone (1 Corinthians 10:13). We aren’t weak because temptations come our way. Temptations are part of life. *“So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me”* (Romans 7:21). Even the Apostle Paul struggled with wrong thoughts and prurient interests. He realized that he was incapable of dealing with his desires by himself. Paul accepted his weaknesses and looked to God for His help. He longed for God’s wisdom and strength to enable him to overcome his self-interests and desires. *“But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong* (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

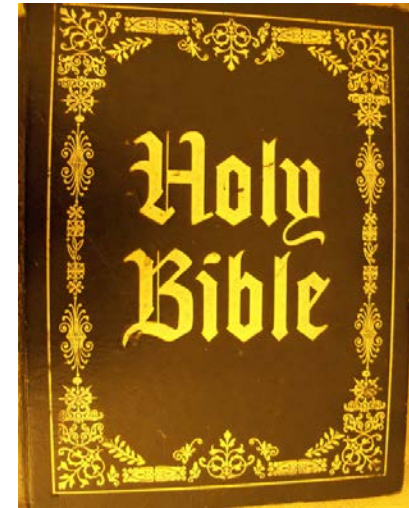
As God’s redeemed children, we know that God’s strength is more than sufficient to defeat the sinful pull of the world. God’s Spirit gives us discernment and wisdom to alert us when we head in the wrong direction. The Holy Spirit, working through Word and Sacrament, enables us to do what God wants us to do.



The battle with temptations is a battle of the heart. Which will have the upper hand: the message of the world or the Word of God that we’ve hidden in our hearts? Our inner beings need to rely on God’s wisdom and strength for us to live in God’s light. When we experience God’s wisdom, we see Him in all aspects of our lives, even in trials and sufferings. In addition to granting us wisdom, He fills our need for love and support, which sustain and help us in the face of evil. Facing trials helps us realize our own weaknesses and how much we need His strength. As He opens our hearts to Himself, He teaches us the futility of depending on other sources.

Prayer: Father, help me to rely on the sufficiency of Your strength. Amen.

## *Life at its Best*



## *Daily Devotions* *for the whole family!*

### *Week 9*

#### *“Resisting Temptations”*

Monday	“Meetings Temptations with God’s Strength”
Tuesday	“Saying “No” to Temptations”
Wednesday	“Jesus Has Overcome the World”
Thursday	“God’s Word Protects”
Friday	“Calling Upon Jesus”
Saturday	“The Sources of Temptations”
Sunday	“Tapping into God’s Strength”



## Monday, Week Nine: “Resisting Temptations”

### *Meeting Temptations with God’s Strength*

*“Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you,  
and you will honor Me” (Psalm 50:15).*

Oscar Wilde once said, “I can resist everything except temptation.” How we face and handle temptations are major factors in the directions our lives take. To succumb to temptations will lead to despair and emptiness. We are called to be faithful and not misdirected by the world, our flesh, or Satan. *“As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as He Who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do”* (1 Peter 1:14-15). To live “life at its best,” we need to tap into God’s strength and wisdom to overcome the enticements of the world. Only because of God’s presence in Word and Sacrament can we meet temptations head-on and be victorious. *“Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God promised to those who love Him”* (James 1:12).

What most of us want out of life is a meaningful relationship with our Lord, families, and friends. Only a relationship with Christ will fill our emptiness and give life meaning. In order to be intimate with the Lord, we need to walk with Him, be willing to serve, obey, and follow. *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—His good, and pleasing and perfect will”* (Romans 12:2). Are we able to say “yes” to Him and “no” to the temptations of the world?



We all know what it is like to face compelling temptations. Some temptations are significant and noticeable, whereas others are insignificant and subtle, but *“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it”* (1 Corinthians 10:13). God promises that, when we call on Him, He will give us strength to overcome any temptations.

Prayer: Father, strengthen my resolve to face my temptations. Amen.

## Tuesday, Week Nine: “Resisting Temptations”

### *Saying “No” to Temptations*

*“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature”* (Galatians 5:16).

We are tempted daily. It is not easy to fight the good fight. To experience temptations is not a sin, because temptations are part of being human. However, as believers, we don’t have to yield to them. God does not shield us from temptations, but He sustains us while we are facing them. *“Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted”* (Hebrews 2:18).

Our faith is paramount in our battle to stand up to temptations with courage and conviction. Peter urges us to stand firm in the faith knowing that our *“brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings”* (1 Peter 5:9). When we stand firm in our faith, we can echo the words of the Apostle Paul’s testimony shortly before his death, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith”* (2 Timothy 4:7).

Paul showed that he had developed the character to withstand the powerful influences that threatened to take over his life. Just as Paul was tested hundreds of years ago and kept the faith, today our faith and character are being tested. The goal for all believers is to be men and women of integrity who, empowered by the Spirit through Word and Sacrament, combat temptations with the character that God has developed and nurtured within each of us. *“The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out”* (Proverbs 10:9). Remaining strong in our faith will bring us into God’s joy, peace, and freedom. Through the Holy Spirit Who lives in us, we can say “no” to temptations. Making proper choices builds our Godly character and makes us more effective in our lives of service to Christ.



Prayer: Dear good and gracious Heavenly Father, I am inundated with suggestive thoughts and images daily. Help me to follow Your ways rather than the ways of the world. Strengthen me to face and overcome each temptation that I face. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

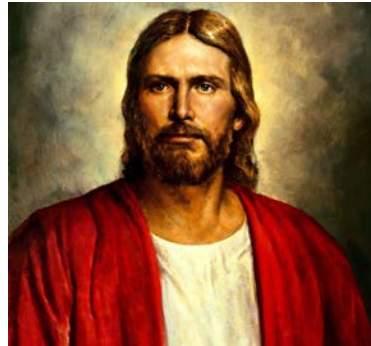
## Wednesday, Week Nine: “Resisting Temptations”

### *Jesus Has Overcome the World*

*“...Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).*

Since the possibilities for sin are endless, we need depth of faith and strength of character to face today’s temptations head-on and to live “life at its best.” To live a life worthy of His calling (Colossians 1:10), we need to call on God’s strength within us to withstand the pressures we face. That strength will enable us to be selective in choosing the things that we will allow into our minds and hearts. That strength will also keep us on guard against the desensitizing of our consciences that comes from information or entertainment that does not promote, but rather ridicules, a Godly perspective. Paul’s warning to the Corinthians is applicable to us today. *“But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ”* (2 Corinthians 11:3).

We must ask ourselves what we are putting into our eyes, ears, hearts, and minds. A phrase used in connection with computers is: “Garbage in, garbage out.” We can choose to fill our thoughts with God’s Word, or we can drown ourselves in the world’s ideas and values. If the activities of life crowd out time spent with God in prayer and reading His Word, we cannot expect to



stand up to the temptations of Satan and our world. Even Jesus, God Himself, knew the importance of prayer and made time alone with His Father a priority (Matthew 14:23; 26:36).

Jesus said that we should not be surprised about our trials. *“I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33). Jesus told His disciples that in this world they would experience trouble, but He comforted them with the fact that He would overcome the world. He did this on the Cross of Calvary. God’s love never stops. He died for us all!

Prayer: Father, thank You for Jesus and my forgiveness. Amen.

## Thursday, Week Nine: “Resisting Temptations”

### *God’s Word Protects*

*“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to Your Word” (Psalm 119:9).*

We can often predict where temptations will come, but sometimes we are blindsided by the least likely things. We will be trapped unless we are on guard. *“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”* (Romans 12:21). Scripture gives direction on how to face, endure, and overcome temptation:

1. Pray. *“And lead us not in to temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”* (Matthew 6:13). *“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak”* (Matthew 26:41).
2. Hate sin. *“...Hate what is evil”* (Romans 12:9). Love God. *“...Cling to what is good”* (Romans 12:9). *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength”* (Deuteronomy 6:5).
3. Stay away from evil. *“Avoid every kind of evil”* (1 Thessalonians 5:22). *“I will set before my eyes no vile thing. The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me”* (Psalm 101:3).
4. Stand against Satan. *“...Resist the devil, and he will flee from you”* (James 4:7).
5. Use God’s Word. *“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to Your Word”* (Psalm 119:9).



We must be constantly aware of Satan’s enticements to sin, because he makes evil things look inviting and harmless. Satan is a master of deception. Without God’s protection, it is impossible to prevent Satan from sneaking into our lives. Satan will attack us, as he did Jesus, in the wilderness, when we are most susceptible. Satan knows our weak points. It is necessary to have an intimate relationship with Christ to withstand the everyday trials of life. We should never allow tribulations, or the worries of this life cause us to forget that God loves us and will protect us (Matthew 13:22).

Prayer: Father, thank You for Your word and its strength for me. Amen.

## Friday, Week Nine: “Resisting Temptations”

### *Calling Upon Jesus*

*“And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear” (1 Corinthians 10:13).*

When Jesus was being tempted by the devil in the desert, He used the Word of God to combat Satan. Paul calls the Word the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17), and it is our main weapon in the battle with temptation. God’s Word helps us distinguish the true voice of God from the counterfeit enticements of the world. The areas in which Jesus was tempted (Matthew 4:1-11) are points where we, too, are vulnerable. First, Satan appealed to Jesus’ physical desire: “...*tell these stones to become bread.*” Relying on the Word, Jesus deflected that attack. The next one was aimed at a desire for status: “*If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down,*” for, Satan jeered, the angels would hold Jesus up. Again, the Word is Jesus’ sword. Finally, Satan issued the temptation to attain power: “*All this I will give You if You will bow down and worship me.*” Jesus’ final words were, “*Away from Me, Satan!*”



Our desires are similar: desire to satisfy our bodily needs, desire for status, and desire for power. Studying Satan’s cunning schemes helps us see through the falsehoods and rationalizations that could deceive us. Meditating on Jesus’ response alerts us to the danger of thinking: “Everybody’s doing it,” “Just once won’t hurt,” and “I can do this and still be a good Christian.” We need to know God’s truths to expose Satan’s lies. Immersed in the Word and strengthened by the Sacraments, we have the knowledge to differentiate the whispers of temptations from the true voice of our heavenly Father and the strength to live “life at its best.”

Jesus’ victory over temptations in the desert is our victory. Because Jesus stayed faithful and obedient even to the point of death, we have victory over Satan, the world, and the flesh. Scripture helps us handle every temptation Satan sends our way. Filling our minds with the Word, as Jesus did, we will be protected and well-equipped to overcome temptations.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank You for the victory over sin that Jesus has won for me. Help me to live a life worthy of His sacrifice. Amen.

## Saturday, Week Nine: “Resisting Temptations”

### *The Sources of Temptations*

*“Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted” (Hebrews 2:18).*

Since the fall of Adam, man has been tempted and tested and has failed. God gives us discernment and wisdom to see temptations as they are. There are three main sources of temptation: our own selfish nature (the flesh), Satan, and the world.

**The Flesh.** With the fall of Adam, we have become sinful people. Because of our inner sinful nature, we are drawn towards worldly pleasures and activities. Within the human spirit exists a condition of self-sins that separate us from dependence on the Lord. This condition exists not so much in what we do, as who we are at the very core of our beings. Paul wrote, “*Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires...*” (Romans 8:5).



**The Devil.** When we read about the Temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4, it is the devil who is called the tempter (Matthew 4:1-3). From the beginning of creation, the devil has been at work trying to separate us from God. “*The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.*” (Revelation 12:9). Scripture attests to the fact that the devil is in continual conflict with the people of God. “*For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan stopped us*” (1 Thessalonians 2:18).

**The World.** When Jesus told the Parable of the Sower to the crowds beside the sea, He talked about how the cares and temptations of the world choke the Word of God and cause us to be unfruitful (Matthew 13:22). Martin Luther, referring to the source of temptation, wrote that the world “assails us by word and deed,” urging us to conform to its standards, falling to envy, pride, and hatred.

God equips us to resist the temptations of the flesh, the devil and the world.

Prayer: Dear Father, help me to resist the temptations that I face.. Amen.



Life at its Best:  
Living Wisely in an Unwise World

Week 10:  
“Letting God’s  
Light Shine”

## Bulletin Messages, Week Ten: “Letting God’s Light Shine”

### **Life at its Best, Week Ten: “Letting God’s Light Shine”**

A major component of living **life at its best** is the Christian witness we share with those around us. Jesus, the light of the world, promises, *“Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”* (John 8:12). As followers of Jesus, we reflect the light that comes from Him. God prepares us to be *“the light of the world,”* the light that we should *“shine before men, that they may see [our] good deeds and praise [our] Father in heaven”* (Matthew 5:14, 16). This is the tenth and last week of our series living **life at its best**.

### **Life at its Best: Living Wisely in an Unwise World**

**GOD HAS DESIGNED US TO SHARE  
OUR FAITH AND TO LET HIS LIGHT  
SHINE BRIGHTLY.**

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.  
Whoever follows Me will never walk in  
darkness, but will have the light of life”  
(John 8:12).



Lay reader talk (week ten)

## Letting God's Light Shine

Our topic today will be "letting God's light shine" as we conclude our theme of **Life at its Best**. Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"* (John 8:12). We have no light of our own; as we follow Christ, His light provides illumination that brings us life. Jesus called us lights. He said, *"You are the light of the world...let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven"* (Matthew 5:14,16).

Only God's elect, His redeemed children, His "chosen people," whose lives declare *"the praises of Him Who called [us] out of darkness into His wonderful light"* (1 Peter 2:9), are able to let God's light shine. To be God's light in this world means that we show His love, His compassion, and His forgiveness to those around us.

God loves all of us, as we are, with backgrounds too sordid to admit to anyone, with sinful thoughts reeling through our minds, with deeds of kindness left undone. Christ didn't wait for us to become lovable before He loved us. He loves us with no expectation of anything in return. It is this love, this extravagant, unconditional love that flows through us from Christ to those He chooses to be the recipients. God shows no favoritism but showers us all with His love and forgiveness. We show no favoritism, either, but let His light shine through us wherever He directs. Jesus said, *"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you"* (John 15:12).

God's light shines through us as the Holy Spirit, working through Word and Sacraments, develops Godly character in us. The Apostle Peter exhorted his readers to *"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us"* (1 Peter 2:12). Character is just that: it is doing what is right despite false accusation; it is doing what God wants of us even when He's the only one watching. The purpose, of course, is that God may be glorified.

## Children's Message (Week ten)

### "In God's Light"

Hello boys and girls! I'm happy to see you!

Did you know at first that the world was all dark, and God made the light? He made it so we have light and darkness.

- How many of you are afraid of the dark?
- What's bad about the dark?

(Wait for responses)

Thank goodness for darkness or night when we want to sleep. Sometimes it's hard to fall asleep what it is still light outside. Night is not so good if we want to do something like play outside, because we can't see what we're doing. We could run into each other and get hurt. We couldn't hit the ball with the bat because we can't see it. Lots of things we like to do during the daylight we just can't do at night.

Have you ever heard someone say that somebody else is "in the dark" about something? What they mean is that they don't know about it. If you bought a present for your mom and kept it a secret from her, you could say that she's "in the dark" about it.

You know a lot of people are in the dark about Jesus. They don't know anything about Him. God tells us that it's our job and purpose in life to tell others about Jesus. God wants us to tell others about His love and light, so that others don't have to be "in the dark" about Him.

You're still quite young, but you can invite your neighbors to come to Sunday school and church with you. You can tell them that Jesus cares about them and can help them when they're sad or sick. You can tell them that Jesus died to take away their sins so they can be in Heaven forever with Him. That's how you can proclaim His praises and help others not to be "in the dark" about Jesus and His love.

Let's pray. Repeat after me. Dear Jesus, thank You for being my friend and for helping me when I'm sad or sick and for forgiving my sins. Help me to tell others about You, so they, too, can declare Your praises. In Your name I pray. Amen



## Sermon for Week Ten: “Letting God's Light Shine”

**Text:** Matthew 6:14-16

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

This is our tenth and final message in our sermon series on living **Life at its Best**. I hope that you are disappointed that the series is coming to an end.

There is a story of a mother who was preparing pancakes for her sons, Kevin, five, and Ryan, three. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw the opportunity for a moral lesson. "If Jesus were sitting here, He would say, 'Let My brother have the first pancake. I can wait.' Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, "Ryan, you be Jesus."

Sharing doesn't always come easy, and we don't always let Jesus' light shine too brightly. As hard as it can be to share something as insignificant as a pancake, to share our faith seems sometimes almost impossible. It's easier and tempting just to say, "Let someone else be like Jesus. Let someone else do it."

Yet, God has placed you and me strategically in the lives of certain people to make an eternal difference for Him. God has designed us to share our faith and to let His light shine brightly. You and I have something to share that is needed by others, and that is our relationship with Christ. We live **life at its best** when God's light is reflected through us.

How, then, can we be more motivated to share that light? How can we become more effective in sharing our faith and reflecting God's love? How can our lives impact the life of someone else for Christ? Let's talk about **three things that impact our letting God's light shine**.

### 1. The accuracy of our beliefs:

What do we really believe is true about the people around us? The first core belief that impacts **letting God's light shine** through our lives is that **people without Christ are lost**.

One of the fundamental beliefs that we have to own, and must own us, is that people without Christ are lost! Apart from a living relationship with Jesus Christ, people cannot be made right with God and receive eternal life. That's all the Bible gives us. It doesn't answer the question for those who have never heard the message of the Gospel. Instead, God says, "I'll take care of them and judge them justly, but this is what I will tell you: *'Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved'* " (Acts 4:12). *"No one comes to the Father except through Me"* (John 14:6).

We think, "People, as long as they're good enough, or good people, well, they're going to be saved. Everyone is someday going to go to heaven—God isn't going to send anyone to hell. God's just not like that."

The truth is that there are a lot of good people who are NOT going to be spending eternity with God in heaven, because, despite all their good, the relationship they need with Jesus never happened, and so all the wrong in the lives was never dealt with, and it judged them to eternal damnation. You and I know that we're not saved by what we do. No one else is either. You see a part of what will motivate you and I is our belief that people around us who don't have Jesus are going to die and enter a Christ-less eternity, forever separated from God and His love. We must have this as a core belief.

### 2. The second core belief is that people without God matter to God.

God's heart is breaking for every person on this planet who does not have a relationship with Him. You and

I may not care about them (and they may be people we don't even want to care about), but God does; they matter to Him. In the same way that God gave Himself to have you back, God gave Himself in the Person of His Son Jesus, to have them back as well. They matter to Him.

The Bible says, "*The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost*" (Luke 19:10). Jesus took the initiative "to seek"; Jesus paid the price "to save." Therefore, we conclude by saying that **reaching people is not optional; it's central.**

In the economy of the Church and in our relationships with Christ, reaching is not optional; it's central. God didn't say, "There are people out there who need Me, and, if you get around to it someday or feel like it, go for it." He didn't say that. He said, "*GO!*" It's not optional. This is a matter of life and death. "I need you to go, go make disciples, go and share your relationship with My Son Jesus that is unique and true for you." God wants to us the gifts and stories that you have, because God needs you! "You're My plan A," God is saying. "You're the one I'm counting on to reach the people in your life."

Folks, the mission of the Church is not up for a vote. What Jesus has given us, as our primary assignment is His passion, His heart. It's not optional. It's not just about what we believe; it's also, about what we're willing to do, and that leads us to our next major point. The second thing that impacts our **letting God's light shine is the depth of our compassion.**

*"The Lord said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of My people...and I am concerned about their sufferings' "* (Exodus 3:7). Being willing to share Christ with someone else is not just a matter of our beliefs, it's also about the depth of our compassion. What am I willing to do? Do we care in our hearts about people who don't have Jesus Christ? Does that matter to us?

When He lived on this planet, *"Jesus went through all the towns and villages...preaching the good news of the kingdom...When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them...because they were ...like sheep without a shepherd"* (Matthew 9:35-36). I can only imagine what God feels in His heart when He looks down on our communities.

Fly over a large city and imagine what God feels in His heart as He looks down on the millions and millions of people who live there—people who don't have Him in their lives. God's heart is breaking. He has compassion for them. He's angry at sin because it is destroying people and their lives, but He's not angry with His children who are lost without their Shepherd. God loves people, and He has compassion for them.

Sometimes we don't share because people don't want what we have, but whether or not people want it should not influence whether or not we share it. People around us who are looking to connect with God need to know who to ask! If we're hiding our faith under a bushel basket of fear, pride, or shame, they're never going to know whom to talk with to find out how to believe. Not **everybody** is going to want what you have to offer, but **somebody** does. They're a reason to share it.

All of us grew up much of our lives not wanting to be parented. I didn't always want to do what my parents wanted me to do. You probably didn't either, but our parents would have been irresponsible, unloving parents if they hadn't parented us, just because we didn't always want them to. They did it because they loved us.

If we love people, we will share what we have in Christ. Love compels us to make the offer. Our love will overcome our fears. Our compassion can overcome our inhibitions.

3. Finally, the third thing that impacts **letting God's light shine is the brightness of our reflections.**

The Bible says, "*Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise YOUR*

*FATHER in heaven"* (Matthew 5:16). The question we must ask is "How clearly and how brightly are we reflecting Christ in our lives," because there are a lot of things that diminish our reflections—things such as willful disobedience to God's will, unconfessed sin in our lives, grudges and anger, grief, and guilt diminish and tarnish our reflections. You and I were never meant to be God, but we were designed to be reflections of God, and what is happening in our lives, in our hearts, in our minds, and in our actions affects our reflections.

We only need to think of the orbits of the planets, especially the sun, our earth, and our moon. They can be a powerful illustration of what can happen to our reflections when we think of the sun as Christ (Christ is the Light, the source of Light and Life), and ourselves as the moon that goes around the earth. God wants us, like the moon, to reflect the Son's light back to the earth.

Unfortunately, sometimes a SOLAR eclipse happens. What happens is that you and I get between the sun and the earth. We get in the way of God's love and light. Our attitudes, our actions, what we saw, what we do, get in the way of people being able to see Christ.

We also get in the way when we spend our time trying to be the focus of the world's attention. We want to be what people look at, what people see. It's "Look at me!" instead of "Look at Christ!"

At other times, we get behind the world and experience a LUNAR eclipse. We can't reflect the light, because the world with all its promises of power, pleasure, and possessions get in the way and block out the light. There's no light reflecting off us because we're hidden in the shadow of the world. Our focus is on the world and what the world can give to us. Our passion is not for God; instead, our passion is for the things and people around us, the stuff we want, and, when we're consumed by the world, there is no more light to reflect back to the world.

Where God wants us is alongside of that world and in the beam of His light, so that we can reflect Him to the dark side of our world and lift their eyes and hearts upward back toward God. Where we are with God in our own relationships with Him matters a lot when it comes to **letting God's light shine!**

For you and me to be reflections means that we have to be in relationship with God, and, when we are, then these words from Paul begin to come to life: *"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with every increasing glory..."* (2 Corinthians 3:18). *"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ"* (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Is there anything going on in your lives right now that is diminishing your reflections because it's coming between you and your relationship with God? Is there anything between you and the source of Light, Jesus Christ?

You and I are going to leave here today and busy ourselves with a lot of activity, things that are important to us, and rightly so. We are going to be investing our time and energy in many things, and so, the question I would leave with you is, "How much are you investing Christ in others?"

How many of you could raise your hands and say that you know someone who is struggling with whether or not to believe in Christ or does not have a faith relationship with Jesus? How many of you know someone in that situation? Raise your hands.

Almost all of you. Can I share something with you? One of the most valuable things you could do is to strengthen your relationship with Christ and strengthen your relationship with that person. Pray to God to give you hearts of compassion for them. It may be someone close to you, and you may be angered more than tender. You need to pray that God will give you hearts of compassion for what others need in their

lives and that you will be reflections that can help turn them toward Him.

Of all the things you and I could invest ourselves in, of all the things you and I could exchange our time or energy for, there is nothing more valuable than investing in people to help them know Jesus Christ. It's an investment that lasts forever. When we reflect God's light to others, we live **life at its best**.

Let us pray:

Lord God, You have placed us in relationships with families, friends, and co-workers. Those relationships are not only ones to enjoy, but they're also ones to invest in with You.

For those who are parts of families here this morning, I pray that they would have the heart and desire to invest YOU in their families. For those who are parents, to invest YOU in their children, to help their children know and love YOU.

For those who work with people who do not know You and may even be antagonistic toward You, help them listen and also live in such a way that they would be tender, prayerful, and skillful in making You real for them, patient to wait for opportunities to share a bit about You and the difference You have made in their lives.

Father, with our neighbors and friends, we know people who are struggling in their relationship with You. We ask that You help us and equip us in our witness.

People don't need us to be perfect, but they do need us to be authentic in our walk with You. Help us to be genuine and help us, Lord, to be humble. Help us to be patient and kind with those who need You. Help us to be available, so You can use us to reflect Your light and life to others.

Give us accurate beliefs, compassionate hearts, and bright reflections as we go about **letting God's light shine**.

In Jesus' name, amen.

## Life at its Best

### Bible Study, Week Ten: “Letting God’s Light Shine”

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, place within us the confidence and boldness to proclaim the Good News to those around us in all places and at all times. Help us to be Your light both in what we say and do. We pray that the Holy Spirit will bless us as we gather together to study Your Word. Thank You for the joy that we receive in telling others about Your love and goodness. Amen.

1. Read Matthew 5:14-16. In the Sermon on the Mount, what did Jesus tell you that you are?
2. Read 1 Peter 2:9. Where were you and where are you now?
3. Read 1 John 1:7. When you walk in Jesus’ light, what does He do for you?
4. Read Psalm 119:105. What does God’s light provide?
5. Read Romans 13:12b. What is the night? The day? What are you to put on?
6. 6. Read John 8:12b. What does Jesus promise?
7. Read 1 Peter 3:15. For what should you always be prepared to do?
8. Read 2 Corinthians 3:2-3. What does it mean to be a letter for Christ?
9. Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Galatians 2:20. What made the Apostle Paul a light for Jesus?
10. Read Philemon 6. How can you, by witnessing, come to a better understanding of “*every good thing [you] have in Christ*”?
11. Read Ephesians 5:8-14. How do “*children of light*” live?

Questions for further discussion:

12. Why is it important for people to see God’s light through you in order for you to **live life at its best**?
13. Read Psalm 27:1. What does God’s light do for you?
14. What is required of you to be a light?

**Prayer:** Dear Father, thank You for bringing us out of darkness into Your light. Help us to be instruments of Your light in a dark world. In Jesus’ holy and precious name we pray. Amen.

## Week Ten: Wrapping Up: “Letting God’s Light Shine”

Can people see God’s light through us? Actions, words, and lifestyle are visible indicators of God’s presence within our lives. Our character, compassion, gratitude, humility, perseverance, and faith reflect God’s light when He is glorified and honored above all things. The Holy Spirit has placed within each Christian a light that can show others God’s love and compassion. We are to let that light shine. Our light may seem to us like a twinkling candle in a dark world, but God will use it and magnify it.

*“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light”* (1 Peter 2:9). It is our purpose to reflect our Redeemer in the midst of an unbelieving world. By word and actions, we are to acquaint those around us with the wonders of His love and the redeeming power of His death upon the cross.

We live **life at its best** because the Spirit of God lives within us. When Christ is within us, we are dead to sin, and our spirits are alive because of His righteousness. With Christ, we live confidently knowing that *“In all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose”* (Romans 8:28).

Through Christ, our lives can be lights that don’t flicker, fade, or glow dimly but with light that radiates bright intensity. He is the light of the world; He brings life to us all. In fervent gratitude, we are to hold up His light.

Hopefully this book has helped us and will continue to be an encouragement in our Christian journeys to live **life at its best**. We do not take this journey alone, because God has promised to be with us wherever we go (Joshua 1:9). God wants good things for all of us, and we are to do all things in His name and to give Him thanks. To live life abundantly, we need to put our trust and faith in Him alone. In our walk with Him, He will be with us every step of the way until we *“win the prize for which God has called [us] heavenward in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 3:14).

### ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS

#### LIFE-ENRICHING

Follows God’s light  
Is concerned for Godly character  
Resists temptation  
Has high standards and expectations  
Pleases God  
Is a Good Samaritan  
Shows gratitude to God and others  
Perseveres  
Is prayerful  
Is humble

#### LIFE-DESTROYING

Lives in darkness  
Is concerned for popular reputation  
Indulges self  
Has low standards and expectations  
Pleases man  
Is a priest or a Levite  
Is self-centered  
Lacks tenacity  
Depends on self  
Is arrogant

## Bible Study 10: Answer guide for “Letting God’s Light Shine”

1. Matthew 5:14-16. We are lights who are to let our lights shine.
2. 1 Peter 2:9. We were once in darkness, but now we are people who belong to God and are filled with His light.
3. 1 John 1:7. Walking in God’s light enables us to fellowship with one another. Through the blood of Jesus, we receive the forgiveness of sin.
4. Psalm 119:105. God’s light provides a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.
5. Romans 13:12b. The night is the darkness that we live in with God. The day is light that God provides. We are to put on the armor of light. Light is always associated with good, while darkness is associated with evil.
6. John 8:12b. Because Jesus is the light of the world, and, because of Him, we will never walk in darkness while we walk with Him.
7. 1 Peter 3:15. We should never be speechless regarding the hope that we have in Jesus.
8. 2 Corinthians 3:2-3. We are a letter not written with ink but the way we live our lives.
9. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Galatians 2:20. As a reflection of Jesus’ light, Paul learned to relate with different people in order to witness for Christ. Christ lived within Him, and he lived by faith.
10. Philemon 6. By sharing our faith, we develop a better understanding of every good thing we have in Jesus.
11. Ephesians 5:8-14. “*Children of light*” produce the fruit of light which consists in goodness, righteousness and truth and gives effective witness to the Gospel.
12. God exhorts us to share the light of the gospel with all people. We are God’s hands, feet, and mouth. To live **lift at its best**, we need to be God’s instruments and live out the commission to share God’s light and love.
13. Psalm 27:1. “*The Lord is [our] light and our salvation!*”
14. We let God’s light shine when, by God’s grace, we live in Him in humble obedience, doing the good works He prepares for us to do.



## Sunday, Week Ten: “Letting God’s Light Shine”

### *The Light of Gratitude*

*“Let us come before Him with thanksgiving...” (Psalm 95:2).*

One of the least respected, most disliked people in the Bible became, after an encounter with Jesus, one who is now held up as that light on a hill that Jesus told us we should be. His name was Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). He was a tax collector, one who gathered money from his own Jewish people for the Roman government. Tax collectors were notoriously dishonest, most often demanding more than the law required so they could line their own pockets with the extra amount.

Very likely Zacchaeus upheld the reputation of his occupation. However, all that changed one day when Zacchaeus, hearing that Jesus was coming, had a strong desire to see this Man everyone had been talking about. Unfortunately, Zacchaeus, being short in stature, couldn’t see over the crowds. Being resourceful though, he climbed a tree for a perfect view. How embarrassing it must have been when Jesus saw him there and called to him. Everyone must have looked and giggled at Zacchaeus’ undignified position.

When the Spirit of the Lord calls us, as He called Zacchaeus, we would do well to respond as Zacchaeus did. His hunger and thirst were great, and, sensing Jesus could satisfy it, he had no thoughts of pride or position. His focus was on Christ. Jesus said, *“Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today”* (Luke 19:5). Zacchaeus was overwhelmed with gratitude. To the poor, he gave half of what he owned and four times to those who may have been cheated.

Gratitude shows itself in thankful words and benevolent actions. You’ve heard the saying, “Put your money where your mouth is.” It’s a way of asking for proof of sincerity, and it could have originated with this incident with Zacchaeus. As evidence of his gratitude, Zacchaeus gave generously of what was most meaningful—his monetary wealth. In the same way as Zacchaeus, we can with God’s help show our gratitude in our thoughts and deeds.

Prayer: Father, help me to live with an attitude of gratitude. Amen.

*Thank  
You*

## *Life at its Best*



## *Daily Devotions* *for the whole family!*

### *Week 10*

#### *“Letting God’s Light Shine”*

Monday	“Jesus Is the Light”
Tuesday	“Letting Jesus’ Light Shine Through Us”
Wednesday	“The Light of Love”
Thursday	“We Are Christ’s Ambassadors”
Friday	“The Light of Character”
Saturday	“The Light of Compassion”
Sunday	“The Light of Gratitude”

## Monday, Week Ten: “Letting God’s Light Shine”

### *Jesus Is the Light*

*“The Lord is my light and my salvation...”* (Psalm 27:1)

In the beginning “*God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.*” God saw that the light was good (Genesis 1:3-4). Light is so basic, so needed, and so wonderful. We take light for granted until we are in complete darkness. Light is essential for us to get things accomplished and for life to survive. At times, even a small amount of light is all we need. The light from a small, two-watt bulb in a nightlight will keep us from injuring ourselves. We need light for many purposes, one of which is showing us the way.

As great as the physical presence of light is, the spiritual light God has given us is significantly greater. As God changes night into daylight, so He brings us out of spiritual darkness into His light. “*You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light*” (Psalm 18:28). God’s light enables us to live “life at its best.” We are a “chosen people” whose lives declare “*the praises of Him Who called [us] out of darkness into His wonderful light*” (1 Peter 2:9).

Jesus is the light. He is our power source. Without Him, we live meaningless lives without purpose. With Him, we have power to change our lives. In His light we can turn away from self-centered and self-indulgent lifestyles. He recreates us as selfless and generous people. As we live in His light, we have not “*...a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline*” (2 Timothy 1:7).



Through the Gospel, God brings our hearts and minds out of darkness. With His light He guides our steps. “*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path*” (Psalm 119:105). God uses His light for our protection. “*For the Lord God is a sun and shield,*” wrote the psalmist (Psalm 84:11). With His light surrounding us like a shield, we are protected. Paul directs us to “*...put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.*” (Romans 13:12b). Jesus, “*the light of the world,*” has saved us. He promises, “*Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*” (John 8:12).

Dear Jesus, thank You for being my light and my source of power. Amen.

## Tuesday, Week Ten: “Letting God’s Light Shine”

### *Letting Jesus’ Light Shine through Us*

*“We have the word of the prophets...pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place...”* (2 Peter 1:19).

The light of God’s Word outshines all other light:

- His light guides us.
- His light protects us.
- His light saves us.



Being a light means more than going to church. It means more than “busyness” in church work. Being a light means to share Jesus so others will come to know Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus called us lights! He said,

*You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven* (Matthew 5:14-16).

What are we doing with the light God has put in us? Is His light that is in us shining through us, or are we blocking its path? Those who live “life at its best” hear, accept, and willingly obey God’s directive to be the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). Our lights are to shine in our homes and at our work places. Our lights are to shine in our neighborhoods. Our lights are to shine everywhere. God’s light shining through us is a testimony of what He accomplished for all mankind in Christ. The purpose of our light, Matthew wrote, is to point others to our heavenly Father so that He may be glorified. We are to be light so that people will have light for their way.

Being God’s lights does not mean that we need to be successful business people, nor do we need to be great athletes or musicians. Being God’s lights does mean that we show the world His love, His compassion, His unselfishness, His forgiveness, and His love in our lives. God calls us to be illuminating lights because we live in a spiritually dark world that desperately needs His light.

Prayer: Dear Father, always help me to keep my light shining. Amen.

## Wednesday, Week Ten: “Letting God’s Light Shine”

### *The Light of Love*

*“We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).*

To speak of love, we must begin with the source of love. “*God is love,*” John wrote in his letter (1 John 4:16). He also told us something about the extent of God’s love for His creation. “*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16). Think of all the people in the world – the good and the bad, the just and the criminal, the atheist and the agnostic, the Hindu and the New Ager, the Christian and the hypocrite. These are the “world” for whom Christ was sent. Even if all would reject the Son, the Father would still give His Son, so great is the Father’s love for His creation.

Paul, too, emphasized God’s unconditional love. He wrote, “*But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8). This love exceeds the limits of our understanding. Our pragmatic minds weigh the cost against the prize: “*Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die*” (Romans 5:7). The great love of the Father, however, is extravagant, and perfectly timed: “*You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly*” (Romans 5:6). He demonstrated the sacrificial nature of love.

God loves us not because we are lovable people, but because He can’t help but do so. It is His nature to love. God created us and gave us dominion over the rest of His creation. When our sin destroyed our fellowship with Him, the light of God’s love led Him to sacrifice His Son so that fellowship with Him could be restored.

God created us for the purpose of sharing His love with all people. As parents experience pleasure in loving their children, God, in a much more profound way, finds joy in loving us. He knows each of us intimately.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for Your unconditional love for me and all people. Enable me to share Your love with others. I pray in the name of Jesus my Lord and Savior. Amen.



## Thursday, Week Ten: “Letting God’s Light Shine”

### *We Are Christ’s Ambassadors*

*“I desire to do Your will, O my God” (Psalm 40:8).*

David, the Psalmist, wrote, “*O Lord... You know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; You perceive my thoughts from afar*” (Psalm 139:1-2). David proceeds in his psalm to describe how we cannot escape from God. Even if we try to hide from God in the darkness, the light of His love illuminates that darkness (Psalm 139:11-12). He sees how helpless we are, “*...like sheep without a shepherd*” (Matthew 9:36), so He goes searching for us (Matthew 18:12-14). He reminds us how valuable we are to Him and that we are never out of His care (Matthew 10:29-31).

It is true that sin changed the course of God’s creation. “*But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear*” (Isaiah 59:2).

We don’t deserve God’s love, but we desperately need it! God provided a solution to the problem of separation that our sin created. “*God made Him Who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God*” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Paul asked the question, “*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword*” (Romans 8:35)? Paul tells us that nothing shall separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:39).

Yes, “*God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them*” (2 Corinthians 5:19). Paul followed that sentence with a sobering exhortation to us, his readers: “*...And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us...*” (2 Corinthians 5:19-20).

This, then, is what our response should be to God’s great love for us: to carry His light of love to the world. He demonstrated His love for us, so we show our love for Him in our actions. We reach out to others with that message of reconciliation so that they, too, may know the love of God and walk in His light.

Pray: Dear Father, use me as Your mouth to those in my midst. Amen.

**Ambassadors  
FOR CHRIST**

## Friday, Week Ten: “Letting God’s Light Shine”

### *The Light of Character*

“...but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength” (Isaiah 40:31).

Through Word and Sacrament, we develop a more Christ-like character. Character is what we are. Character guides conduct and conversations, and, at the same time, the combination of thoughts, actions, and habits develops character. Character is what we are when no one is looking. Character is also doing what we must do even while we are being watched.

Charles Stanley, in his book *The Glorious Journey*, defines character as doing what is right because it is right. As Christians we are motivated to do what is right in response to Christ’s love for us. Christians will want to do the right thing even when no one is looking



In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches that our heavenly Father expects moral behavior from His people. Moreover, He expects that behavior to be motivated by proper motives and attitudes. “*Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us*” (1 Peter 2:12). God is looking for us to do the

proper things not because we want to please others, but because we want to please Him. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “*We are not trying to please men but God, Who tests our hearts*” (1 Thessalonians 2:4b). As redeemed people, we strive to do right, because God deserves nothing less from us.

No one is born with character. The attitudes and habits we develop form our characters. We develop Godly habits through God’s power and wisdom working within us through His holy Word and Sacraments. God’s grace continually gives us the strength to obey and to seek habits that are good. We are not perfect, yet God’s open arms through the Cross of Christ welcome us. Those with Christ-like character will have a passion for Him. Oswald Chambers said, “Your priorities must be God first, God second, and God third, until your life is continually face to face with God and no one else is taken into account whatsoever.”

Prayer: Father, place in me a desire to please You. Help me develop a God-like character. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

## Saturday, Week Ten: “Letting God’s Light Shine”

### *The Light of Compassion*

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10).

“I see God in every human being. When I wash the leper’s wounds, I feel I am nursing the Lord Himself. Is it not a beautiful experience?” These are the words of Mother Teresa, the embodiment of compassion in this century. For fifty years this tiny woman, compelled by Christ’s love, carried out the words of James 1:27: “*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*” Not every person is called to live exactly as Mother Teresa did, but we, too, can respond faithfully to the Christ who motivated her to live compassionately. “*Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful,*” commanded Jesus (Luke 6:36).

To an expert in the law who was trying to test Him, Jesus spoke the Parable of the Good Samaritan. A man was beaten, robbed, and left for dead beside the Jericho Road. First came a priest, then a Levite, both passing on the other side of the road. They probably had their reasons for not stopping. Perhaps they were late for synagogue or afraid the perpetrators of the crime were still lurking nearby. Maybe they did not wish to become ceremonially unclean or were being careful not to “catch something.” Finally, along came, of all people, a Samaritan. Jews could hardly speak the word, much less be touched by someone of this despised race.



This Samaritan traveler, however, seeing the beaten man, “...took pity on him...bandaged his wounds...took him to an inn and took care of him” (Luke 10:33-34). Only after he had personally dispensed compassion did he leave the victim in the care of another. He promised additional financial support upon his return trip (Luke 10:35). The expert in the law concluded that the one who was the neighbor was the one who showed mercy. To this day, one who shows compassion is called a Good Samaritan. Compassion is more than an act of mercy; it is an attitude of life. It is another way that we can be light, directing the world to the Savior.

Prayer: Father, help me to be a good Samaritan. Amen.



A photograph of a massive, rugged mountain peak with a steep, rocky face and a forested base under a blue sky with clouds.

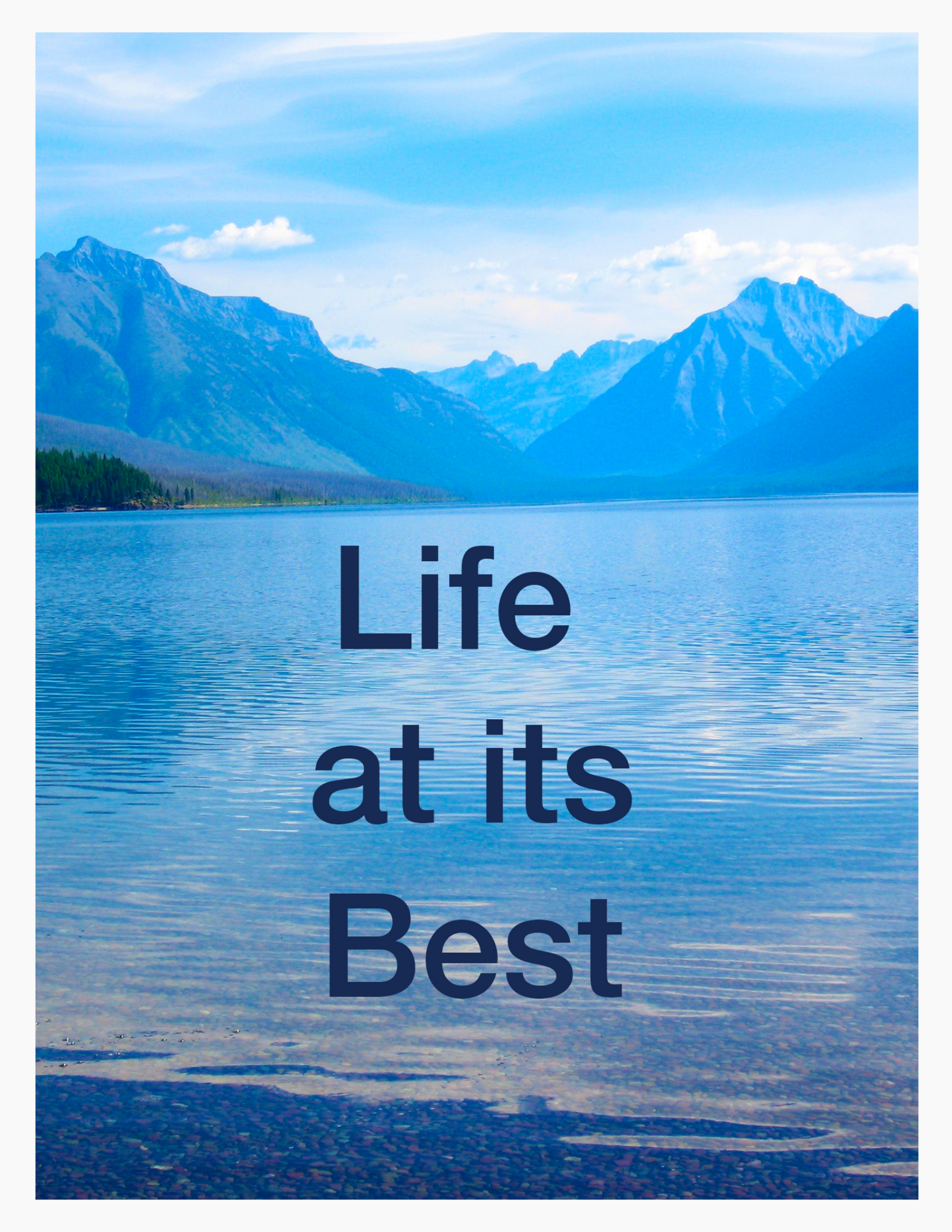
**Life at its Best**





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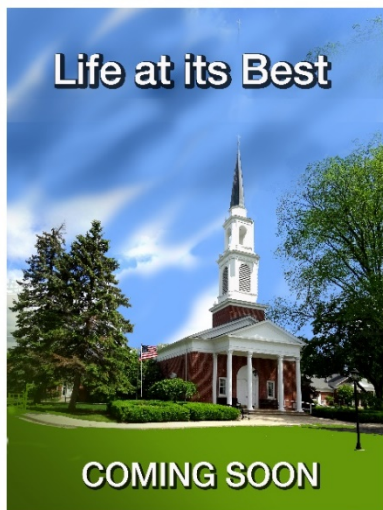
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# Life at its Best







## *Life at its Best:* *Living Wisely in an Unwise World*

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Jesus said, *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."* In this verse, Jesus is telling us that He supplies significance and value to our lives. He provides strength, satisfaction, purpose, joy, and hope. Whereas Satan comes to steal our joy, kill our faith, and destroy our hope, Jesus comes so that we may live **life at its best**. Through faith in Jesus, we live **life at its best** now and we will live forever with Him in eternity.

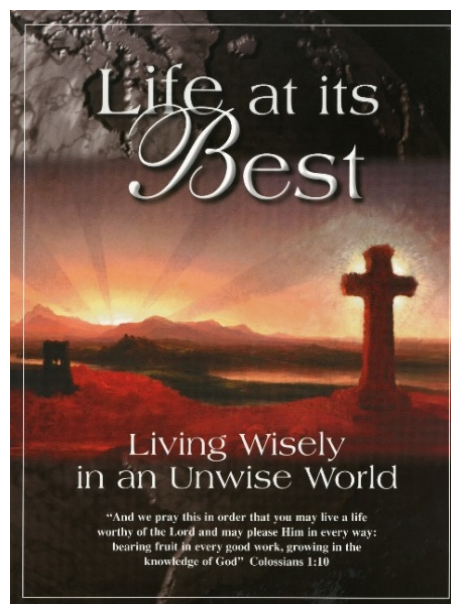
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