



WORD TO THE CITY  
**Daily Devotionals**

February 23 - April 4



Belongs to: \_\_\_\_\_



Worshipping at Johnston Elementary School  
Sundays at 9:30 and 11:00

[www.cityonahillumc.org](http://www.cityonahillumc.org)

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From the perspective of the Bible, faith is NOT endorsing a certain set of religious concepts. It is also NOT necessarily “feeling” spiritual or particularly close to God. Instead, faith IS action. Faith IS doing. Faith is...

This 40 day season of Lent, where Christians purposely elevate the path of their spiritual journey in order to get in better “soul-shape,” we invite you to join us at CITY ON A HILL as we define in detail what faith in God through Jesus Christ actually looks like.

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*Word to the City* is a daily devotional from CITY ON A HILL church based on Sunday’s sermon. Have you missed a sermon in the series? You can listen to sermons from this and past series online at: [http://www.cityonahillumc.org/sermon\\_library](http://www.cityonahillumc.org/sermon_library).

## Faith Is...

Forgiving When I Don’t Feel Like It • February 22-26

Thanking When I Don’t Appreciate It • March 1-5

Trusting When I Don’t Understand It • March 8-12

Obeying When I Don’t Like It • March 15-20

Giving When I Don’t Have It • March. 22-26

Hoping When I Don’t Feel It • March 29 - April 2

Believing When I Don’t See It • April 5-9

**MONDAY**

**Genesis 45:1-4; 14-15** (MSG - The Message paraphrase)

1-2 Joseph couldn't hold himself in any longer, keeping up a front before all his attendants. He cried out, "Leave! Clear out—everyone leave!" So there was no one with Joseph when he identified himself to his brothers. But his sobbing was so violent that the Egyptians couldn't help but hear him. The news was soon reported to Pharaoh's palace. 3 Joseph spoke to his brothers: "I am Joseph. Is my father really still alive?" But his brothers couldn't say a word. They were speechless—they couldn't believe what they were hearing and seeing. "Come closer to me," Joseph said to his brothers. They came closer. "I am Joseph your brother whom you sold into Egypt..."

14-15 Then Joseph threw himself on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. He then kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Only then were his brothers able to talk with him.

Forgiving someone who has wronged us is not easy. We rarely "feel like" forgiving; in fact, forgiveness is a rather "unnatural" act. The story of Joseph and his brothers recorded in the Old Testament book of Genesis captures much of this sentiment and is an incredible testament to the power of forgiveness and reconciliation. If you have time this week read the whole story in Genesis 37, 39-50. Although in his heart Joseph wants to forgive his brothers (the very brothers who planned to kill him and then sold him into slavery instead), he struggles with it many times before finally being able to do so. Have you struggled in this way?

**TUESDAY**

**Luke 22:54-61** (MSG - The Message paraphrase)

54-56 Arresting Jesus, they marched him off and took him into the house of the Chief Priest. Peter followed, but at a safe distance. In the middle of the courtyard some people had started a fire and were sitting around it, trying to keep warm. One of the serving maids sitting at the fire noticed him, then took a second look and said, "This man was with him!" 57 He denied it, "Woman, I don't even know him." 58 A short time later, someone else noticed him and said, "You're one of them." But Peter denied it: "Man, I am not." 59 About an hour later, someone else spoke up, really adamant: "He's got to have been with him! He's got 'Galilean' written all over him." 60-62 Peter said, "Man, I don't know what

you're talking about." At that very moment, the last word hardly off his lips, a rooster crowed. Just then, the Master turned and looked at Peter. Peter remembered what the Master had said to him: "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." He went out and cried and cried and cried.

**John 21:15-17** (MSG - The Message paraphrase)

15 After breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Master, you know I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." 16 He then asked a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" "Yes, Master, you know I love you." Jesus said, "Shepherd my sheep." 17-19 Then he said it a third time: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was upset that he asked for the third time, "Do you love me?" so he answered, "Master, you know everything there is to know. You've got to know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep..." And then he commanded, "Follow me."

**Matthew 16:17-18** (MSG - The Message paraphrase)

17-18..."God bless you, Simon, son of Jonah! You didn't get that answer out of books or from teachers. My Father in heaven, God himself, let you in on this secret of who I really am. And now I'm going to tell you who you are, really are. You are Peter, a rock. This is the rock on which I will put together my church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out.

In addition to forgiveness being an "unnatural act" for we humans, from the perspective of our own self-absorbed, self-defined morality it also appears to be rather "scandalous". There are many reasons we can convince ourselves not to forgive: the person needs to learn a lesson, it will do them good, it's not up to me to make the first move, they're not even sorry, and so on. Yet God, who is a God of grace and forgiveness, commands us to forgive, just as He has forgiven. Forgiveness, undeserved and unearned, launched the Apostle Peter into his earth changing, life changing ministry – the ministry that would build Christ's church! Why do you think God instructs us to forgive? What pragmatic reasons might there be to do so? How does forgiveness affect both the one forgiven and the one doing the forgiving?

### WEDNESDAY

**Matthew 18:21-22** (NLT - New Living Translation)

21 Then Peter came to him and asked, “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?” 22 “No, not seven times,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven!”

In Jesus’ day, rabbis taught that people should forgive those who offended them, but only three times. We can imagine that Peter sure thinks he is something as he steps out in faith and says we should forgive someone seven times. Jesus responds – no, more like 70 times seven! Our human way of thinking “big” doesn’t even come close to the incredible magnitude of God’s great mercy. God doesn’t keep track of our mistakes once we’ve repented of them; forgiveness is beyond calculating. Are you keeping track of someone else’s mistakes? How about thinking “big” and letting Christ live in you and work through you...forgive, and don’t keep track of how many times!

### THURSDAY

For the rest of this week we will read the parable Jesus told his disciples to help “amplify” his answer to Peter about how many times we should forgive. The parables of Jesus are stories of everyday life that illustrate profound spiritual truths. The title some scholars have given this parable is “The Unforgiving Debtor”.

**Matthew 18:23-27** (AMP - Amplified Bible)

23 Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a human king who wished to settle accounts with his attendants. 24 When he began the accounting, one was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents [probably about \$10,000,000], 25 And because he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and his children and everything that he possessed, and payment to be made. 26 So the attendant fell on his knees, begging him, Have patience with me and I will pay you everything. 27 And his master’s heart was moved with compassion, and he released him and forgave him [cancelling] the debt.

A debt of several million dollars is a debt so large that clearly even confiscating the man’s family and possessions couldn’t come close to paying it off. This man has lost everything and will still owe more for the rest of his life – this debt is really “unforgivable”. Imagine how incredible it would be for such a debt to be forgiven! Does it seem fair? Does it seem a likely story in our world today? In our world economy sayings like “no pain no gain”, “there’s no such thing as a free lunch”, “demand your rights”, “get what you pay for”, and “I work for what I

earn” are the guiding principles. We want people to get what they deserve – no more and no less. How is this different from God’s “economy of grace”? We’ll read the rest of the story tomorrow.

### FRIDAY

**Matthew 18:28-35** (AMP - Amplified Bible)

28 But that same attendant, as he went out, found one of his fellow attendants who owed him a hundred denarii [about twenty dollars]; and he caught him by the throat and said, Pay what you owe! 29 So his fellow attendant fell down and begged him earnestly, Give me time, and I will pay you all ! 30 But he was unwilling, and he went out and had him put in prison till he should pay the debt. 31 When his fellow attendants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and told everything that had taken place to their master. 32 Then his master called him and said to him, You contemptible and wicked attendant! I forgave and cancelled all that [great] debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 And should you not have had pity and mercy on your fellow attendant, as I had pity and mercy on you? 34 And in wrath his master turned him over to the torturers (the jailers), till he should pay all that he owed. 35 So also My heavenly Father will deal with every one of you if you do not freely forgive your brother from your heart his offenses.

**Ephesians 4:32\*** (AMP - Amplified Bible)

32 And become useful and helpful and kind to one another, tender-hearted (compassionate, understanding, loving-hearted), forgiving one another [readily and freely], as God in Christ forgave you.

Wouldn’t we like this story more if it had ended where we stopped reading yesterday – a great debt magnanimously forgiven? When we take Jesus’ words to heart – when we read the Bible as a mirror, rather than a window – this parable is hard to hear. The Gospel shows us that we did not get what we deserved, for we deserved punishment, but received forgiveness. Deserved wrath, but received love; deserved a debtors prison, but received instead a “clean credit history”<sup>3</sup>. The next time we don’t feel like forgiving, think about the way that “the Lord God has forgiven you”. (Ephesians 4:32)

## Thanking When I Don't Appreciate It • March 1-5

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### MONDAY

#### **1 Corinthians 10:30-31** (NLT – New Living Translation)

30 If I can thank God for the food and enjoy it, why should I be condemned for eating it? 31 So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

The Bible gives us a varied and fascinating view of thanksgiving (or thanking). We're all familiar with "saying grace" before meals, but what is the reason? To thank God for his faithful, daily supplying of our needs. Make time this week to thank God for the small-unexpected things such as finding a misplaced dollar in a coat pocket, a green light when in a hurry, or a kind word at work.

### TUESDAY

#### **Ephesians 5:4** (NLT – New Living Translation)

4 Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God.

#### **Ephesians 5:19-20** (ESV – English Standard Version)

19...addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...

Thanking is also one way to live a God-pleasing life on a daily basis. Paul says believers can avoid obscene, coarse, and foolish talk by focusing on thanking God. Paul also shows us that giving thanks to God is an important way to encourage our fellow believers. How can you live these Scriptures with your family, your friends, and other believers?

### WEDNESDAY

#### **Philippians 4:6\*** (NLT – New Living Translation)

6 Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.

#### **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18\*** (NLT – New Living Translation)

16 Always be joyful. 17 Never stop praying. 18 Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

Giving thanks is an important part of prayer as well. In fact, it is "God's will for you" that you give thanks. How can giving thanks to God help you during both good times and hard times? Take some time and memorize Philippians 4:6 this week.

### THURSDAY

#### **Revelation 11:17** (NLT – New Living Translation)

17 Each of these living beings had six wings, and their wings were covered all over with eyes, inside and out. Day after day and night after night they keep on saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty—the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come."

#### **Revelation 4:8-11** (NLT – New Living Translation)

8 Whenever the living beings give glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever), the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever). 9 And they lay their crowns before the throne and say, "You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things, and they exist because you created what you pleased." 11 "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign."

Giving thanks is a big part of how we worship God. In fact, the angels and other creatures in heaven glorify God by giving thanks without ceasing. Is giving thanks a part of how you worship God? If not, why not? Can worshipping God help in times of trouble and stress?

**FRIDAY**

**Colossians 3:15-17** (NLT – New Living Translation)

15 And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. 17 And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.

This week we've seen that giving thanks should be a part of many of our daily activities. Why is giving thanks so important? Do you think giving thanks to God was part of the reason why Jesus came to earth and died for us on the cross?



**MONDAY**

**1 Corinthians 4:2** (NLT - New Living Translation)

2 Now, a person who is put in charge as a manager must be faithful

**1 Corinthians 4:2** (NIV – New International Version)

2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful

Consider this verse, and each translation, in the context of God and our trust in him. As Christians, we believe that God is in ultimate control of our lives – he manages our lives. A manager is someone who is responsible for directing the work of others. Taking this to a perspective about faith in God: “a manager must be faithful” holds a standard that God must be faithful to his followers. Furthermore, the NIV translation specifically mentions trust. Those who are given it must prove faithful. This is a word of hope for those having difficulty trusting when they don't understand something. Today, as you go about your day and various events occur (both good and bad), consider that putting trust in God means he will be faithful, but you have to take the first step.

**TUESDAY**

**James 1:6-8** (ESV – English Standard Version)

6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Just as the sea controls a wave, when we doubt, we are easily swayed by our fears and worries. We are called as Christians to pray with intent and strength. These passages describe a doubting person as unstable and double-minded. If we don't trust, then we cannot focus. Trusting God means that we can focus on our individual callings in life. Make a commitment to pray with intent, expectation, and confidence; make a commitment to trust God with everything you have.

**WEDNESDAY**

**Romans 15:13** (NLT – New Living Translation)

13 I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Take a look at the language used in this verse: “because you trust” and “then you will overflow.” Take note of the connectivity between the sentences: God will fill you with joy and peace because you trust, then you will overflow. We cannot overflow with “confident hope” if we are not first filled with joy and peace, but we cannot be filled unless we trust in God. Who doesn't want to be filled with confident hope?! But, like in many aspects of our faith experience we have to start the process. Challenge yourself to find small areas where you can truly begin to trust God that will start your process to confident hope.

**THURSDAY**

**1 Corinthians 13:7\*** (NLT – New Living Translation)

7 Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

As Christians, we are called to love God with everything we have. Think about what this passage says about love. Though usually used in marriage ceremonies, think about its significance for your love for God. The idea that “love never gives up” and “endures through every circumstance” illustrates how we should act in the midst of circumstances we don't understand. When we have true love for God, it never gives up; it endures through every circumstance.

## FRIDAY

**Isaiah 28:16** (NIV – New International Version)

16 So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed.”

This passage says, “the one who trusts will never be dismayed.” A synonym for dismayed can be disappointed. What does that mean for your trust in God? If you trust in God, you will never be disappointed. We may travel through journeys that are difficult and we do not understand, but we will never be disappointed in what God has for us. When have you experienced this in your own life? As we travel through our different journeys, struggling at times and at others rejoicing, recognize that the one who trusts will never be disappointed.



**MONDAY**

**Acts 2:36** (NRSV – New Revised Standard Version)

36 Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah...

My Lord and Savior - As Christians, we refer to Jesus as our Lord and Savior but how often do we stop to consider what this means? We understand the savior part; Jesus came to save us. There are clear benefits from our relationship with Christ but aren't there also clear responsibilities? We tend to gloss over the part about Jesus being our Lord. The incredible gift of salvation comes with a responsibility that we submit to Christ's lordship over our lives. The Bible makes it clear that God is our sovereign.

**Deuteronomy 10:12-13** (NLT – New Living Translation)

12 And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? He requires only that you fear the Lord your God, and live in a way that pleases him, and love him and serve him with all your heart and soul. 13 And you must always obey the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good.

If Jesus is truly to be our Lord and Savior then we must submit ourselves to his will and obey his commands. What is it about our culture that makes the idea of submission so unappealing? Is it possible for a true transformation to occur in our lives without surrender and obedience?

**TUESDAY**

The Struggle to Obey - As we saw in yesterday's study, to be a follower of Christ we must obey him. But this is not always easy. Sometimes it's inconvenient. Sometimes it's scary. Sometimes we're just afraid that we'll fail. These feelings can prevent us from stepping outside our comfort zone and trusting God. The struggle to obey can be discouraging and can even make us feel inadequate to serve God at all. But we are not the only ones to feel this way. Consider Moses:

**Exodus 3:7, 10-12** (NIV – New International Version)

7 The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.  
10 So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"  
12 And God said, "I will be with you.

Even the great patriarch Moses struggled to obey God. And he's not alone. The Bible is full of stories of people who initially resisted God's call. But when they obeyed faithfully, God did such amazing things that thousands of years later we're still telling the stories. When have you struggled to obey? Read Exodus 3 in its entirety to see the many excuses Moses made to avoid serving and how God had an answer for every one of them.

**WEDNESDAY**

Jesus in the Garden - Like us, Jesus himself experienced fear when faced with the awesome responsibility of obeying God.

**Mark 14:32-36** (NLT – New Living Translation)

32 They went to the olive grove called Gethsemane, and Jesus said, "Sit here while I go and pray." 33 He took Peter, James, and John with him, and he became deeply troubled and distressed. 34 He told them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." 35 He went on a little farther and fell to the ground. He prayed that, if it were possible, the awful hour awaiting him might pass him by. 36 "Abba, Father," he cried out, "everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."

Perhaps nowhere in the Gospels does Jesus appear more human than as he faces his coming suffering. Here we see a man charged with serving God in a way that scares him. And he says yes!!! He chooses to obey! We may never suffer as greatly as Jesus did but his example shows us that it is possible to put our fear aside and trust God. Here's how the Apostle Paul put it:

**Hebrews 5:8** (MSG - The Message paraphrase)

8 Though he was God's Son, he learned trusting-obedience by what he suffered, just as we do.

## THURSDAY

With the Heart of a Servant - Have you noticed that at CITY ON A HILL we don't talk about volunteering? Volunteers give of their time to do God's work. But God needs more than a sacrifice of our time when it fits into our schedule. He asks that we give our very selves to his work and that we obey with the heart of a servant. Consider these words from the Apostle Paul:

**Romans 12:1-2\*** (NLT – New Living Translation)

1 And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. 2 Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. \*

Being a follower of Christ requires a transformation from the mindset of a part-time volunteer to that of a servant, dedicated full-time to doing God's will. To become the "living and holy sacrifice" Paul talks about means recognizing that our time doesn't truly belong to us anyway. Living a life of obedience means worshipping God through our faithful service to him.

## FRIDAY

The Blessings of Obedience - Obeying God can be difficult and maybe even scary. God never guarantees that doing his work will be safe. But our God is a loving master who rewards his faithful servants. He promises to meet our needs (though not necessarily our desires).

**Matthew 6:31-33\*** (NLT – New Living Translation)

31 "So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' 32 These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. 33 Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need."

But beyond our physical needs, the blessings of obedience mean living a life filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (the Fruits of the Spirit – See Galatians 5:22-23). In our love relationship with Christ our reward for submission and sacrifice is an abundant life.



**MONDAY**

**Acts 20:28-35** (TNIV – Today's New International Version)

28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number some will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. 32 "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. 33 I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. 34 You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. 35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

Today we read part of the Apostle Paul's farewell to his beloved brothers and sisters in Ephesus. He warns them that soon wolves will come among them and try to disperse and entice their flock – the church. Isn't it interesting that his most important advice, his last words to them, are to remember these particular words of Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive". How might taking this teaching to heart help fight the inevitable "distortion of the truth" of the Gospel that would come? Do you think Jesus was only referring to giving money? What else might we give in order to be a blessing?

**TUESDAY**

**Genesis 12:1-3** (NLT – New Living Translation)

1 The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. 3 I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."

**Luke 6:38** (NLT – New Living Translation)

38 Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back."

We are blessed to be a blessing to others and in God's economy, when we bless others we too are blessed. Giving is missional (about others), yet at the same time when we let go of our possessions (whether money or time, talents or "stuff") we are open to receive all that God would give us. Has there been a time when you have given your all to help another? Did you find that you were the one that seemed to receive the blessing? How do you spend your money? Is it becoming part of God's economy and blessing others?

**WEDNESDAY**

**Luke 19:1-10\*** (ESV – English Standard Version)

1 He entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3 And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature. 4 So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. 5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." 6 So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. 7 And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." 8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." 9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

**Luke 21:1-4** (MSG - The Message paraphrase)

1-4 Just then he looked up and saw the rich people dropping offerings in the collection plate. Then he saw a poor widow put in two pennies. He said, "The plain truth is that this widow has given by far the largest offering today. All these others made offerings that they'll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn't afford—she gave her all!"

Jesus noticed! God notices when we give – and it's not the dollar value He notices. He notices the spirit with which a gift is given and the cost to the giver. Both the widow and Zacchaeus gave extravagantly and Jesus noticed and approved of their generous heart. Giving is not about what we are supposed to do, but about what we want to do!

**THURSDAY**

**Malachi 3:8-10\*** (NLT – New Living Translation)

8 "Should people cheat God? Yet you have cheated me! "But you ask, 'What do you mean? When did we ever cheat you?' "You have cheated me of the tithes and offerings due to me. 9 You are under a curse, for your whole nation has been cheating me. 10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!"

Last year during Lent, this passage was also included in the study guide and the following really made me stop and think long and hard about my own giving: "So many Christians ignore this passage of scripture as if it doesn't exist (along with other passages that discuss giving back to God the tithe, the first 10% of our income). Or they don't take it seriously, as if God really meant John 3:16 for example, but wasn't truly serious about Malachi 3:10. Why does God want his people to bring the tithe – to provide ample provisions for God's house (the church) and His work through it." The tithe is all about mission and God wants us to be a part of it. Have you been taking this passage and this invitation seriously?

**FRIDAY**

**Luke 12:22-34** (NIV – New International Version)

22 Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. 23 Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. 24 Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! 25 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? 26 Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?"

27 "Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 28 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! 29 And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. 30 For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. 32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. 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. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

So often the reason we don't give is because we are worried that we will not have enough "left over" for ourselves. Worry is rooted in the fear that one must take care of them self rather than trust God to do so. Jesus speaks a lot about money and giving, and he makes it clear that giving is about trusting God. Giving offers a way to express our faith and confidence that God – the Ultimate Provider - will care for us just as God cares for the birds or the air and the flowers of the fields. What treasure are you storing up? When you have given generously (of your wealth, your time, your gifts) to someone in need, have you been left without enough? Take some time in prayer; in other words, talk to God about the tithe, about how you have given and would like to give, and ask your Creator and Provider to help you to trust rather than doubt, to have faith rather than fear.

**MONDAY**

**Romans 8:22-25** (MSG - The Message paraphrase)

22-25 All around us we observe a pregnant creation. The difficult times of pain throughout the world are simply birth pangs. But it's not only around us; it's within us. The Spirit of God is arousing us within. We're also feeling the birth pangs. These sterile and barren bodies of ours are yearning for full deliverance. That is why waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting. We, of course, don't see what is enlarging us. But the longer we wait, the larger we become, and the more joyful our expectancy.

The idea of hope can be hard to grasp firmly like smoke. When we say "I hope so," we usually mean "I doubt it will happen." Hope in the Bible though is firm and solid. Hope means to expect you will obtain something and to expect it with desire. What are some things you were hoping for that have come to pass? How did they come to pass?

**TUESDAY**

**Romans 5:1-5** (MSG - The Message paraphrase)

1-2 By entering through faith into what God has always wanted to do for us—set us right with him, make us fit for him—we have it all together with God because of our Master Jesus. And that's not all: We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has already thrown open his door to us. We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand—out in the wide open spaces of God's grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise.

3-5 There's more to come: We continue to shout our praise even when we're hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, we're never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary—we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!

Hope without an object hoped for is meaningless. The Bible tells us our hope for salvation is sure because of who made the promise to us. Hope in God brings strength and confidence. Even when we don't feel like hoping or see any reason to hope, the object of our hope is secure and steady.

**WEDNESDAY**

**2 Corinthians 1:8-9** (NLT – New Living Translation)

8 We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. 9 In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead.

**1 Thessalonians 5:8-10** (NLT – New Living Translation)

8 But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation.

9 For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us. 10 Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever.

2 Corinthians shows us a time when Paul was in a difficult and deadly situation. Paul learned from this situation that he could be confident in God, despite feeling "completely overwhelmed". God's promise (our hope) never changes regardless of the circumstances we are in – whether good or bad.

## THURSDAY

### **Colossians 1:19-23** (NLT – New Living Translation)

19 For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, 20 and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross. 21 This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. 22 Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. 23 But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News.

The Good News (or gospel) is that while we were God's enemies, God loved us so much that He sent and sacrificed His son, Jesus Christ, to make peace between God and ourselves. As Easter approaches, re-read Colossians 1:19-23 and think about what these verses say about what God did for us through Jesus' death and resurrection.

## GOOD FRIDAY

### **1 Peter 1:3-5** (MSG - The Message paraphrase)

3-5 What a God we have! And how fortunate we are to have him, this Father of our Master Jesus! Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we've been given a brand-new life and have everything to live for, including a future in heaven—and the future starts now! God is keeping careful watch over us and the future. The Day is coming when you'll have it all—life healed and whole.

Praise God today and this weekend for the fact that your hope in His salvation is secure and you are "guarded by the power of God".



**MONDAY**

A Path to Belief - When we encounter a crisis of faith it seems so hard to overcome. Believing and not believing seem to be at opposite ends of a deep cavern with no obvious bridge across. How is it possible to flip the switch and believe in something that we don't? Is there a way to faith from a place of unbelief?

**1 John 3:21-24** (NLT - New Living Translation)

21 Dear friends, if we don't feel guilty, we can come to God with bold confidence. 22 And we will receive from him whatever we ask because we obey him and do the things that please him. 23 And this is his commandment: We must believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us. 24 Those who obey God's commandments remain in fellowship with him, and he with them. And we know he lives in us because the Spirit he gave us lives in us.

Often times the best way to work through a time of doubt is to take action. God promises us that if we do the things that please him in obedience he will remain in fellowship with us. Our continued acts of love toward others can be a path back to our own faith. By deciding to do his work, even though we doubt, not only will our loving acts bear fruit, but soon God will reveal himself to us again and we will know that he does indeed live in us.

**TUESDAY**

That You May Believe - God created us with intelligent minds and the ability to reason. He therefore knew that at times belief would be a struggle. But he was prepared for this and equipped us to overcome our doubt. In fact, much of what is written in the Bible was specifically done so to help us believe. Take Old Testament prophecies for an example:

**Isaiah 48:3-5** (NIV – New International Version)

3 I foretold the former things long ago, my mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass. 4 For I knew how stubborn you were; the sinews of your neck were iron, your forehead was bronze. 5 Therefore I told you these things long ago; before they happened I announced them to you so that you could not say, 'My idols did them; my wooden image and metal god ordained them.'

In this passage God reveals to us why he used prophecy. He knew that when he worked in the world we would try to explain away his miracles

and that we might doubt that God was behind them at all. But by telling us what was coming before hand, we would be forced to consider that God was indeed at work. In this way many people were able to recognize that Jesus was the messiah because he fulfilled prophecy. They were able to overcome their doubt and believe. Similarly, the writer of the Gospel of John tells us that his motivation for recording the life of Jesus was so "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31 – NIV). Through the Bible, God provides us with sound reasons to believe in him, reasons that our God-given minds can recognize and accept.

**WEDNESDAY**

**John 20:24-29** (NLT - New Living Translation)

24 One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came. 25 They told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side."

26 Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. "Peace be with you," he said. 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!" 28 "My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed. 29 Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."

Thomas the Blessed - Thomas gets a bad rap. "Doubting Thomas" we call him. But is that really fair? Let's look at the situation from his point of view. His leader, teacher, and friend was just brutally killed. Thomas was likely in fear that that the same thing would happen to him. So here he is scared and grieving and his friends start with all this crazy talk. Does his reaction really seem that unreasonable? But when Jesus reveals himself, the experience renews Thomas' faith. Having received such a gift, maybe Thomas deserves a different name. In a time of darkness have you ever had an experience that revealed Jesus to you in a way that strengthened your faith?

## THURSDAY

The Faith Muscle - In the spiritual lives of mature, thinking Christians, there are times when we experience doubt. This can be discouraging because we feel that our faith isn't strong enough. What we often don't realize is that doubt can lead to a stronger faith in the end. It may help to think of your faith as a muscle, in need of exercising like every other muscle in your body. In order for a muscle to become stronger, it must be put to the test and even broken down a little before it can grow. It's the same way with faith. Consider this story from Mark:

**Mark 9:17-18, 21-24** (NIV – New International Version)

17 A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech.

18 Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."

21 Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. 22 "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." 23 "'If you can?'" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes."

24 Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

Instead of seeing our doubt as moving us away from God, we can recognize it as a time when we are actively seeking God. Doubts can breathe new life into faith because it forces us to examine closely the things we believe. Doubt allows us to make a decision for faith. In times of doubt we can look to God and know that if we can just keep our eyes on him, we will come out of it a stronger Christian. We can then say, "I have decided to believe. Help me to continue to believe so that my faith muscle may grow ever stronger."

## FRIDAY

God Has Faith in You - Even the greatest among us struggles with doubt. Consider this episode in the life of John the Baptist:

**Matthew 11:2-5, 7-11** (NIV – New International Version)

2 When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples

3 to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" 4 Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor."

7 As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? 8 If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. 9 Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you. 11 I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

John had set aside his life to prepare people for the coming of the Messiah. He was one of the first to recognize Jesus as the one he'd been waiting for and openly proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah. But as he sat alone and scared in prison, even he had his doubts. But Jesus didn't condemn him. He simply reminded him of the good that was being done by the power of God. Jesus didn't tell the crowd to have more faith than John. He told them that John was truly loved by God and that despite his doubt, God had used John to do important and amazing work. John may have had his doubts, as we all do, but Jesus never doubted John.

## 40 Passages Every Christian Should Know

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1. Genesis 1:27 (TNIV)
2. Deuteronomy 8:3 (NKJV)
3. Deuteronomy 30:19 (NIV)
4. 1st Chronicles 16:34 (NIV)
5. Psalm 23 (KJV)
6. Psalm 34:1 (ESV)
7. Psalm 51:10-12 (ESV)
8. Psalm 103:8 (ESV)
9. Psalm 119:105 (KJV)
10. Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)
11. Proverbs 19:17 (TNIV)
12. Jeremiah 29:13 (NRSV)
13. Micah 6:8 (ESV)
14. Malachi 3:10 (ESV)
15. Matthew 5:14, 16 (NIV)
16. Matthew 6:33 (ESV)
17. Matthew 7:1-2 (NKJV)
18. Matthew 28:19-20 (TNIV)
19. Mark 1:15 (NLT)
20. Luke 19:10 (NLT)
21. John 3:16-17 (NKJV)
22. Acts 1:8 (TNIV)
23. Romans 8:1 (NIV)
24. Romans 12:2 (TNIV)
25. Romans 16:20 (ESV)
26. 1st Corinthians 13:4-8 (NRSV)
27. 2nd Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)
28. Galatians 5:22-23 (TNIV)
29. Galatians 6:2 (NRSV)
30. Ephesians 2:8-10 (NRSV)
31. Ephesians 4:32 (NIV)
32. Philippians 4:6-7 (TNIV)
33. Philippians 4:19 (NKJV)
34. Colossians 3:17 (NIV)
35. 1st Thessalonians 5:16-18 (ESV)
36. 1st Timothy 2:3-6 (TNIV)
37. Titus 3:5 (NIV)
38. James 2:26 (KJV)
39. 1st John 4:19 (TNIV)
40. Revelation 21:4 (NKJV)

Scripture referenced in the daily devotionals followed by an asterisk (\*) indicates one of COAH's 40 Passages Every Christian Should Know.

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## 40 Day Bible Reading Plan

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Day 1	Genesis 1-2	The Creation
Day 2	Genesis 3	The Beginning of Sin
Day 3	Genesis 15; 17:15-27	God's Covenant with Abraham
Day 4	Genesis 21:1-7; 22	God's Faithfulness and Abraham's Faith
Day 5	Exodus 3-4	God Calls Moses to Deliver His People
Day 6	Exodus 20	The Ten Commandments
Day 7	Joshua 1	Conquering the Promised Land
Day 8	1 Samuel 16-17	David and Goliath
Day 9	1 Kings 3; 8:1-9:9	King Solomon's Wisdom and the Temple
Day 10	1 Kings 18	The Prophet Elijah and the Prophets of Baal
Day 11	2 Kings 25	The Siege of Jerusalem and Exile of Judah
Day 12	Daniel 2-3	Daniel in Babylon: The Fiery Furnace
Day 13	Ezra 3	Rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem
Day 14	Isaiah 9; 53, 61	Isaiah's Prophecy of the Coming Messiah
Day 15	Luke 1-2	The Birth of Jesus
Day 16	John 1:1-18	Who Jesus Is
Day 17	Luke 4:14-44	Jesus Begins His Ministry
Day 18	Matthew 5,6,7	The Core of Jesus' Teaching I

## 40 Day Bible Reading Plan (Cont'd.)

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Day 19	Luke 10:25-37;15	The Core of Jesus' Teaching II
Day 20	John 3	God's Love for the World
Day 21	John 5	Jesus' Miracles and Authority
Day 22	John 11	Jesus' Power Over Death
Day 23	John 14,15	The Christian Life Defined
Day 24	Matthew 26-27	The Arrest and Crucifixion of Jesus
Day 25	John 20	The Resurrection of Jesus
Day 26	Luke 24	The Ascension of Jesus
Day 27	Acts 2	The Coming of the Holy Spirit
Day 28	Acts 9	The Conversion of Saul
Day 29	Acts 16	The Gospel Spread to Europe
Day 30	Acts 26	Paul's Defense of the Christian Faith
Day 31	Romans 3	Justification by Faith Alone
Day 32	Romans 7-8	The Battle With Sin: Life in the Spirit
Day 33	1 Corinthians 13	The Way of Love
Day 34	1 Corinthians 15	The Power of the Resurrection
Day 35	Galatians 5	Freedom in Christ
Day 36	Ephesians 6	The Whole Armor of God
Day 37	Philippians 1:18 - 2:18	Christ's Example
Day 38	Colossians 3:1-17	Putting on the New Self
Day 39	James 1	Pure Religion
Day 40	Revelation 21-22	The New Heaven and Earth