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TRUTH  
FOR LIFE



365 DAILY DEVOTIONS

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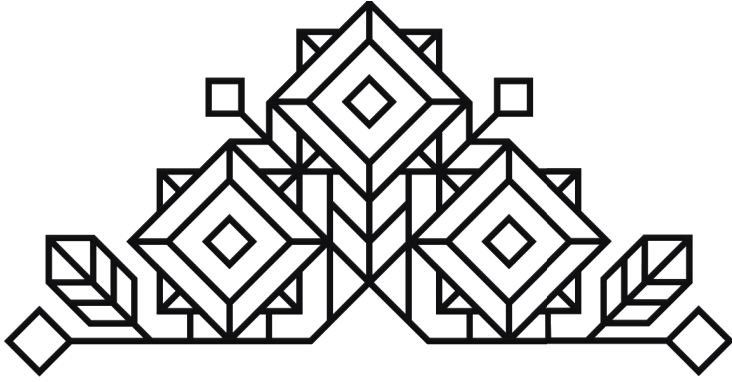
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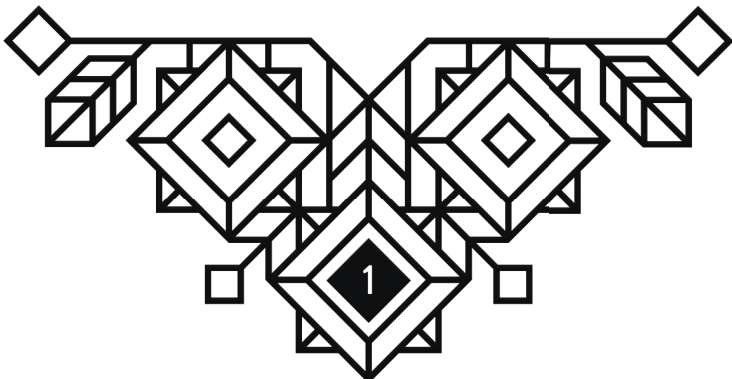
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TRUTH  
FOR  
LIFE

365 DAILY DEVOTIONS

ALISTAIR  
BEGG





# INTRODUCTION






God's word is a glorious gift. Our Father has given it to us in order that we might know His Son and that we might live in the power of His Spirit, in obedience to His truth.

It is worth pausing to consider this reality: when we read the Bible, we're dealing with the words of the Creator of the universe, spoken to His creation. It is impossible for us to understand ourselves, our world, or anything else without His word. As we read a newspaper, as we try to make sense of our society, and as we look to our history and to our future, it is the Bible we need if we are to get a handle on it all. God's word is the truth that you and I need to navigate every day of this life, and to point us to the one in whom we find the life that really is life.

So in this devotional, by far the most important words on each page are the ones at the top, just under the date and title. Those are the words of the living, reigning, eternal God. My aim in the comments below those divinely inspired words is simply to explain them, to encourage you from them, and to reflect on how they inspire and equip us to enjoy living for Christ in every area of our lives. God's word says of itself that it is able to "make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" and that these God-breathed words are "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

This is a *daily* devotional, because man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). That is, God's word sustains us each day and is as necessary to our spiritual health as food is to our physical health. On some days you may find reading God's word a delight, and on other days it may be done more out of duty, but every day it is essential. Think of it like exercise. If you're a runner, there are times when you're running around the track and it feels amazing; and there are others when it feels like an effort and you need to push on and push through. Most of us will not tumble out of our beds each morning thinking how fantastic our time in God's word is going to be. If we approach the Scriptures thinking that we need to be stirred as we read them, or that we ought to "get a blessing" whenever we open them, then we will either be intermittent or disappointed Bible readers. There will be times of delight and excitement and feeling something as you read and meditate on God's word—but do not worry if those times do not come every day, or even most days. Make a commitment to turn to the Bible every day (and if you realize you have fallen out of the habit of doing so, simply jump back in), for God's word is living and active, and it will be going to work in you in ways far deeper and more profound than your feelings can intuit.

And the Scriptures will—or they should—make a difference to our minds, to our hearts, and to our lives. Therefore, at the bottom of each devotion you will see

three icons:   . These are a prompt to say to yourself, *Now that I have read and considered these verses...*

- *how is God calling me to think differently?*
- *how is God reordering my heart's affections—what I love?*
- *what is God calling me to do as I go about my day today?*

It may be that God's word does not speak to all three of those areas each day; but learning to ask yourself these questions will ensure that you are open to what God's Spirit may be saying about your mind, heart, and life. And they will be helpful prompts to pray in response to what you have read, too.

Beside those icons you will see a passage that is linked in some way to what we have been considering; if you have time, turn up that passage and enjoy going deeper into God's word. I have also found it very profitable to read through the whole of the Scriptures from start to finish in a year, and so, at the very foot of each page, you'll see a Bible-reading plan that enables you to do just that.

God's words are the words that we need. And so I am praying for you: that, in taking you to those words each day, this book would be life-changing for you, God's beloved child, as His Spirit works through His word to show you His Son. Why not make that your prayer too? You could begin each day by using the words of my friends Keith Getty and Stuart Townend and praying:

*Holy Spirit, living breath of God,  
Breathe new life into my willing soul.  
Let the presence of the risen Lord,  
Come renew my heart and make me whole.  
Cause Your word to come alive in me;  
Give me faith for what I cannot see,  
Give me passion for Your purity;  
Holy Spirit, breathe new life in me.<sup>1</sup>*

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1 Keith Getty and Stuart Townend, "Holy Spirit, living breath of God" (2005).



JANUARY 1



## KING OF CREATION

*“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”* GENESIS 1:1

**T**here was never a time when God did not exist. Before there was time, before there was anything, there was God. And since His nature is unchanging, so He has also always existed in the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

When reading the Bible, we discover that each member of the Trinity was involved in creation: God the Father took the initiative, God the Spirit is described as “hovering over” the proceedings, and God the Son was the agent of creation in all that was made (Genesis 1:2-3; John 1:3).

“All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small”<sup>2</sup> should leave us in awe; they were all fashioned by God’s command. And He is not only the Creator of all; He is also the Lord of all that He has created. All of nature is in His hands, under His control. As we see waves crashing against the shoreline, it’s wonderfully encouraging to know that each one is there as a result of God’s sovereign rule. He hasn’t stepped away from His creation, nor will He ever.

It’s important to remember that God is also transcendent. He is on His throne, above, beyond, and distinct from all that He has made. This is what distinguishes Christianity from pantheism, the idea that the natural world is a manifestation of God and therefore everything is somehow a part of Him. With this belief, we dare not kill a fly or step on an ant because those insects are divine. Similarly, we should not chop down a tree or eat meat, because these too are “parts of God.” Teachings like these are mistaken and misguided and tend to lead to idolatry. Scripture makes it clear that time and time again that people will choose to worship “the creature rather than the Creator” (Romans 1:25). When we see a great painting, we rightly admire and enjoy the painting, and then we praise the painter. All of creation is God’s canvas, and all of it speaks of “his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature” (v 20).

Only God is to be worshiped, for creation exists by His power and for His glory. His existence knows no beginning or end, and He will reign forever. He is the King. Today, exalt Him as He alone deserves. Go for a walk or look out of the window and praise Him as you see His beauty displayed in what He has made. Praise Him as He continues to rule over His creation, holding you in His sovereign hand.

 REVELATION 4

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2 Cecil F. Alexander, “All Things Bright and Beautiful” (1848).



## BEHOLD YOUR GOD!

*“Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God!’”* ISAIAH 40:9

**D**uring the prophet Isaiah’s lifetime, God’s people had been taken captive into a foreign territory. They were dejected, unable even to sing songs of praise to the Lord (see Psalm 137:1-4). Yet while they were in that state of exile, God came to His people with words of comfort (Isaiah 40:1)—comfort found only in the fulfillment of His promise: that the glory of the Lord would be revealed, not only to Israel but to all mankind.

These good tidings were nothing to be quiet about. God’s people were meant to give a triumphal shout, captivating each other with the glory of their hope. Once described as “people who walked in darkness,” they now saw “a great light” (Isaiah 9:2).

The distinction between the darkness of this fallen world and the light of heaven is a striking picture that runs all the way through Isaiah, and indeed through the whole Bible. Darkness is a result of disinterest in God, rebellion against Him, and unwillingness to do what He says. There is but one message that shines light into such darkness, refreshing hearts and minds: “Behold your God!”

This message is just as relevant to God’s people today as it was in Isaiah’s time. The darkness often feels very heavy and the light sometimes looks very dim. Yet often the message of hope also dawns during uncertain times. God promised, “The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken” (Isaiah 40:5). Ultimately, God fulfilled this promise when He took on flesh and established His presence among us.

When John wrote his Gospel, he looked back on the same scene to which Isaiah had been looking forward, saying, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Here was—*He* was—the Light of the world, and “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (v 5). Isaiah was describing the one who would come—but we, like John, are able to reflect upon the completed work: the promised glory that has now been revealed.

God has come to us, breaking through our darkness and bringing salvation. You can behold your God in a manger, on a cross, walking out of a tomb, and now reigning on high. It is not hard to see the darkness—but we must nevertheless look to the light, for there we find hope that casts out fear and good news that is worth heralding. Today, behold your God!

 ISAIAH 40:1-31

JANUARY 3



## EVERY PROMISE FULFILLED

*“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”*

MATTHEW 1:1

The beginning of the New Testament may not immediately strike us as inspiring. In fact, if someone were reading through the Bible for the very first time and reached the end of Malachi, which points forward with anticipation, their excitement might falter when the next book begins with... a genealogy. They (and we!) might even be tempted to skip Matthew and begin with another Gospel altogether.

Keep in mind, though, that the promises God made to His people in the Old Testament all looked forward to their fulfillment. As we read through the New Testament, we realize that in fact it couldn't open in a more fitting manner, since the genealogy in Matthew draws the line from Abraham to David and at last to Jesus as the one who fulfills all these promises.

Similarly Mark, throughout his Gospel, reaches one hand back to the prophets who pointed forward to the one who was yet to come. Mark uses the Old Testament to set the stage for this striking reality, his second sentence beginning “As it is written in Isaiah the prophet...” (Mark 1:2). And the first words he records Jesus as saying are, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (v 15). Jesus' disciples had the privilege of witnessing what prophets and kings had longed to see (see Luke 10:24)—a privilege that even now continues through the illuminating work of God's word.

The New Testament shows us that the means by which God's promises are fulfilled can be summed up in two words: *Jesus Christ*. God made His promises to Israel using terminology and categories that they understood—words like *nation* and *temple*. Christ's coming redefined Old Testament concepts in light of the gospel: Old Testament prophecies, we discover, are all fulfilled christologically—by and in the person of the Christ. Therefore, instead of looking for a new temple in the state of Israel, we meet with God through His Son, the Lord Jesus; enjoy His presence in each of us by His Spirit; and look to the reality of Christ's reign to transform our lives both now and forevermore.

The coming of the Son of God breaks the boundaries of Old Testament categories. This is not meant to be unsettling for God's people; it is meant to be thrilling! Christ is the perfect fulfillment of all God's promises. He is the reality of all God's great assurances.

Wait no more, then, to see how God will fulfill His every promise. We know now that each one was, is, and ever will be satisfied through Christ. He has promised to be with you, to work for you and through you, and to bring you to an eternal kingdom of perfection. There are times when it is hard to hold on to those promises. When those times come, we look back to a man born of Abraham and David's line, conceived of the Spirit, who was able to announce, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” and who hung on a cross and rose from the grave so that all God's promises would become “yes” in Him.

 MATTHEW 1:1-18

JANUARY 4



## CONTENTED IN CHRIST

*“I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound.” PHILIPPIANS 4:11-12*

**W**e live in a society permeated by discontent. Commercials condition us to be envious. The real issue, though, is not so much the society we live in but the state of our own hearts and minds. We’re drawn away from contentment by so much which clamors for our attention: titles, possessions, influence, or fame. Yet all of these and more seek to rob us of any sense of joy in what God has given us, persuading us that it will never be enough. The chase is never-ending.

Paul, though, could say not only that he was content but that he could be content “in whatever situation I am.” This is what everyone is searching for! What was the secret, then? It was to ground his sense of self and his outlook on life in the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul didn’t champion a stiff upper lip in the face of hardship or offer a false gospel of self-sufficiency. No, his contentment was the result of bowing his heart and mind to God’s will, no matter what conditions he faced.

Not everyone has lived on both sides of the street. Not everyone knows how the other half lives. But Paul did. He knew what it was to be warm and fed, and he knew what it was to be cold and naked. If he had derived contentment from his circumstances, his life would have been a constant roller-coaster ride, leaving him intoxicated by wonderful luxuries one minute and overwhelmed by their absence the next. Such a fickle spirit would have neutralized Paul, making him unable to serve Christ.

Paul was a normal man with normal needs. In a letter to Timothy from a dungeon in Rome, Paul wrote, “Do your best to come to me soon ... Bring the cloak ... the books, and above all the parchments” (2 Timothy 4:9, 13). He had been deserted by others and lacked certain possessions. Yes, Paul wanted things like clothing, books, and company—but he knew he would be fine without them, for his peace rested in something greater.

Like Paul, your contentment can and should ultimately be grounded in your union with Jesus. Refuse any ambition other than belonging to Him and remaining entirely at His disposal. When you know Christ and how wonderful He is—that He is your all in all, more precious than silver, more costly than gold, more beautiful than diamonds, and that nothing you have compares to Him<sup>3</sup>—the way you view your circumstances and the measure of your contentment will be completely transformed.

 PSALM 73

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3 Lynn DeShazo, “More Precious Than Silver” (1982).

JANUARY 5



## OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

*“Every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins ... No one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you’; as he says also in another place, ‘You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.’”* HEBREWS 5:1, 4-6

**T**he concept of priesthood and the sacrificial system is far removed from our contemporary Western world, but understanding it is fundamental to Christian living. The practice of animal sacrifice in Old Testament Israel was not a man-made system created as a futile attempt to reach God and make humans acceptable to Him. Rather, it was meant to help God’s covenant people understand His character, His expectations, and the wonder of His plan of redemption (and it can still help us in this way today). In all of its nuances, God was pointing His people toward the finished and perfect work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who would come both as His people’s Great High Priest and as the one perfect sacrifice offered on their behalf.

Historically, Israel’s high priest would have come from the line of Aaron, Moses’ brother, and would have been considered “chief among his brothers” (Leviticus 21:10). This individual would have experienced the same societal conditions, pressures, and trials as the men and women he was representing, which would have helped him to be a more compassionate advocate on their behalf.

Long before the arrival of Jesus, however, the historical pattern of high-priestly appointments had been corrupted by Herod the Great and other rulers, who chose the high priest for themselves. They didn’t understand that the high priest’s role was not an honor to be bestowed by man but ultimately a call from God, as it had been for Aaron. High priests were not to represent the political establishment; they were to represent God’s people to God Himself.

That is one of the factors that makes Jesus the very best high priest: He did not take upon Himself the glory of becoming a high priest; rather, He was appointed by the Father. He acknowledged, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God’” (John 8:54). He perfectly endured the same hardships we face. He has gone before Almighty God for our sins even though He was sinless. With a spirit of gentleness, Jesus spurs us toward righteousness. Because He offered the perfect sacrifice—indeed, because He was the perfect sacrifice—you and I can enjoy God’s presence both now and forevermore. No sin or suffering, no disappointment or despair, makes this glorious reality any less true: that you have a priest, forever, and therefore you have a place with Him, forever.

 HEBREWS 4:14 – 5:10



## CHERISHING GOD'S WORD

*“My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you; keep my commandments and live; keep my teaching as the apple of your eye; bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.”* PROVERBS 7:1-3

I find it a dangerous thing to go grocery shopping when I’m hungry. I find myself tempted to buy food that under normal circumstances would not appeal to me at all. I am not alone, according to King Solomon: “One who is full loathes honey, but to one who is hungry everything bitter is sweet” (Proverbs 27:7).

This same principle can be applied to our pursuit of purity. There is a real danger in going through our days spiritually hungry because we have not fed well upon the word of God.

If we are going to make any meaningful attempt at maintaining our purity, it is imperative that we not only read God’s word; we must also *cherish* it. Solomon—the king of Israel to whom God gave wisdom that surpassed anyone else’s (1 Kings 3:3-14)—uses language that gets at the notion of cherishing God’s word when he tells his son to “keep” his words, to “treasure” them, to keep them “as the apple of [his] eye,” to “bind” them, and to “write” them on his heart.

To relate to God’s word this way requires us to get beyond using the Bible merely as a textbook to study, a book of proof texts for arguments, or a promise book to which we occasionally turn. Cherishing God’s word requires us to seek the perspective of the psalmist who, distancing himself from the proud and the scoffers of his day, says of the man who is walking with God, “His delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:2).

There is a direct correlation between delighting in God’s word—allowing it to control and guide our lives—and maintaining a zeal for purity. If we fail to cherish Scripture, the question is not *if* we will stumble in the matter of purity but *when*.

Every one of us can keep our way pure by hiding God’s word in our hearts (Psalm 119:9). Do you have a plan for memorizing Scripture? Let me challenge you to make a commitment to memorize a verse of the Bible, whether it’s every other day, every day, every week, or whatever it might be. Make a plan, and stick with it.

Feast on God’s word and be satisfied. Cherish the Scriptures and be pure.

   PSALM 119:1-16

JANUARY 7



## THE GOSPEL DISPLAYED

*“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.”* PHILIPPIANS 1:27

**T**he way we dress, the way we smile or scowl, the way we carry ourselves, the tone and content of our speech... Every day, we are always making statements to those around us about what really matters and what life truly consists of.

For Christians, such statements should be in harmony with the gospel.

So Paul called the Philippians to close the gap between their beliefs and their behavior—between the creed they professed and the conduct they displayed. Christ’s call to us today is no different. Even so, however mature we are in our faith and however much we close the gap, there always remains more to do.

Paul’s phrase “let your manner of life” comes from the Greek verb *politeuesthe*, which the NIV translates as “conduct yourselves.” The root of this word comes from *polis*, which means “city,” and gives us other words like *police* and *politics*. In a very real sense, Paul is concerned with Christian citizenship and conduct. As we understand ourselves to be members of the city of God, we learn what it means to live as strangers and ambassadors in that other city, the city of man. When we close the gap between belief and behavior, others will get a foretaste of heaven through their interactions with us.

So what kind of statement should our actions make? Simply this: the gospel of Christ is a gospel of love. We see this in the words of John: “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:10-11). In other words, just as God loves us, so we should love those around us—even those whom we, or others, tend to see as unlovely or unlovable—and we should do it with hope and joy! This message of love is the challenge that Paul gives us.

*Not merely in the words you say,  
Not only in the deeds confessed,  
But in the most unconscious way  
Is Christ expressed.<sup>4</sup>*

So pause to think about how you will dress today, when you will smile and when you will scowl today, how you will carry yourself today, and the tone and content of your speech today. What kind of statements are you making to the world? Let them be ones that are worthy of the gospel of love.

 1 JOHN 4:7-21

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<sup>4</sup> Attributed to Beatrice Cleland, “Indwelt,” in, for instance, *Our Aim: A Monthly Record of the Aborigines Inland Mission of Australia* 68, no. 7 (17 March, 1955), p 1.

JANUARY 8



## BATTLING BITTERNESS

*“Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman’s wife. She said to her mistress, ‘Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.’” 2 KINGS 5:2-3*

**S**uffering in and of itself does not lead a person into a deeper relationship with God. As with those who hear the word of God yet do not respond to it with faith, suffering divorced from faith and hope will actually embitter us as our hearts grow harder rather than softer toward God. In other words, suffering will either make us run to God or away from Him. In the midst of trials, we must ask ourselves, “Is this trial making me bitter and callous, or is it making me loving and gentle?”

In the midst of the book of 2 Kings, among the stories of monarchs and prophets, we find an extraordinary picture of gentleness and humility in the face of great heartache through the example of a little Israelite girl. The Syrians had captured this young girl during a raid; they had carried her away from her family and from Israel and had forced her to work in the service of Naaman, a commander in the Syrian army. What an unfathomable tragedy for a young child and her family!

Yet in the midst of her great suffering, we catch a glimpse of her tender heart: upon learning that her master suffered from leprosy, this child told Naaman’s wife how he could be healed. If she had allowed herself to become embittered, then, when the word went around the house that her master was sick, she might have concluded, *Well, it’s nothing more than what he deserves.* But she didn’t. She wanted the best for her enemy, rather than hoping for the worst. This is remarkable. How could she do this? Because presumably, in the face of her emptiness and the sadness of being separated from her family, she had turned time and time again to her loving God and His promises.

As we journey through our own suffering, and as we seek to minister to those who are in deep affliction, we must not forget to cultivate a tender and open heart. Will it be easy? By no means! But God’s faithfulness is so vast, so comprehensive, that it is able to sustain us, even in our deepest pain. So turn to God in every circumstance and take comfort in His faithfulness and provision. When you do, then you “may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:4).

 2 CORINTHIANS 5:6-21



JANUARY 9



## THE INVITATION OF ALL INVITATIONS

*“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”*

MATTHEW 11:28

Whenever you receive invitations, you probably find yourself asking the same sorts of questions: Who is it from? Who is it for? Why does it matter? This verse presents one of the loveliest invitations in the whole of the New Testament—but to understand it best, we must ask those same questions.

First, this is a personal invitation. It is not an invitation to a program, nor is it an invitation to a religion or philosophy to be included alongside Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, New Age-ism, humanism, or any other “ism” that may be found among today’s worldviews. It is an invitation from Jesus Himself. He is bidding each of us, “Come to me.”

The significance of the invitation lies in who is issuing it. In the Gospels, Jesus declares who He is: the Messiah, the Savior of the world, the Son of God (see John 4:25-26; 1 John 4:14). By virtue of this identity, Jesus could command a response—but instead, He extends an invitation.

And who does He invite to come? “All who labor and are heavy laden.” This invitation is all-inclusive. It doesn’t single out a certain group among a larger group but describes all of humanity. Each of us needs to hear these words, because there’s not one person who isn’t figuratively pushing around a wheelbarrow filled with all the cares, responsibilities, fears, and failures that make up his or her life.

Why does all this matter? Jesus invites us to find “rest for your souls.” He’s speaking in eternal terms of a rest that never fails. He’s beckoning us towards a banquet, and He doesn’t even ask us to provide the clothes. We show up for the banquet just the way we are. God takes all the “Here are my good deeds” clothes that so many of us like to dress up in, calls them rags, and tosses them aside. He takes all the “I’m so bad and messed up that there’s no hope” clothes and tosses them aside too. In their place, He covers us over with “the robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10), which is provided by Jesus Christ Himself. We can rest from our striving to make something of ourselves or to earn heaven for ourselves when we come to Jesus and receive all we need, and could ever need, from Him.

This is the invitation of all invitations. Today, for the first or the thousandth time, bring your burdens to Him. Receive His rest.

*Just as I am, without one plea  
But that Thy blood was shed for me  
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee—  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.<sup>5</sup>*

 MATTHEW 11:25-30

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5 Charlotte Elliot, “Just As I Am, Without One Plea” (1835).

JANUARY 10



## MUCH IN COMMON

*“All who believed were together and had all things in common.” ACTS 2:44*

One of the greatest attractions of the early church in the eyes of the surrounding pagan world was its communal lifestyle. What was it that united such diverse people—Gentiles and Jews, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarians and Scythians, slaves and free men (Colossians 3:11)? Jesus Christ. There was no real explanation for the commonality of these Christians’ lives together apart from Him.

From those days until now, the church has always been united in a unique fellowship marked by several commonalities. First is its common *faith*. The early church did not gather on the basis of ethnicity, education, interests, or anything else; instead, they brought all of their diverse lives under a shared faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior. Today, Communion remains an eloquent expression of this same unity; there is one loaf and one cup for us to partake from as one body. Jesus is the Bread of life, who sustains and unites us.

Second, we have a common *family*. When we believe in Jesus as our Savior, we are welcomed into His family with other believers, having the same heavenly Father. This familial bond transcends that of even earthly families, because the family of faith is eternal. As such, we should look after the interests of our spiritual brothers and sisters. For us as believers not to love one another would be not only sad but contradictory: “Whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:21).

Third, by God’s grace, the true church also experiences common *feeling*. We see a lesser version of this at sporting events: each individual fan is different, but together they share a common feeling, conviction, and goal. Sometimes they are lifted up together and sometimes they are deflated together. Similarly, as members of one family, we share in each other’s joy, peace, pain, and sorrow. As Paul put it, “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (1 Corinthians 12:26). Paul’s metaphor in that chapter is of the church as a body: as believers we are different, and we have varying strengths and weaknesses, and so we make up a body that works better together than apart. My limitations and weaknesses are complemented by your strengths, and vice versa.

All families have their difficulties and struggles, and we are all sinners; so it is easy to forget the privilege of belonging to the people of God. When was the last time you thanked your Father for your church family? When was the last time you looked round on a Sunday at your brothers and sisters gathered together and allowed yourself to be buoyed by knowing that this is what you are, by grace, a part of?

Our world, just as in the days of the apostles, is full of division and loneliness. People are fragmented, fearful, and lost. But we, the united body of Christ, can offer to this world a deep fellowship and an eternal, hope-filled future. You have the opportunity to become the very hands and feet of your heavenly Father, reaching into people’s lives as you invite them into His family. Will you seize it?

 COLOSSIANS 3:5-17