



Sept/Oct 2025

# Today

refresh, refocus, renew

Basic Bible Truths

ALSO: AMONG ALL PEOPLE

Dear Friends:

Fall is a season of change, and it's the perfect time to reflect on where God is calling us and what anchors our faith.

In September, Kevin DeRaaf leads us through a devotional series that helps us focus on God's mission to the world. Through Scripture and ministry stories, Kevin reminds us that God's mission is for everyone and reaches into all parts of life. Each of us is called to participate in God's work of love, healing, and renewal.



At the same time, we are reminded to rest. Each week includes a Sabbath reflection, reminding us to pause and remember that God's mission moves forward not because of us but because of him.

In October, George Koopmans reflects with us on basic Bible truths that make up the core of Christian teaching. With a chaplain's heart, George leads us through themes like sin, salvation, faith, prayer, and God's justice. These devotions offer lasting comfort and assurance, reminding us what it means to belong to Jesus in both life and death.

Together, these series of devotions offer a rich invitation: to join in God's work in the world while staying grounded in his promises.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kurt Selles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kurt Selles

# Today

Sept/Oct 2025

**refresh, refocus, renew**



**"Among All People"**  
**Kevin DeRaaf**



**"Basic Bible Truths"**  
**George Koopmans**

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# october

## Basic Bible Truths

### George Koopmans

This month let's review the basic truths of the Bible as a way to remind ourselves (or maybe learn for the first time) how God designed us to live and flourish in this world. One of the main things to remember, as well, is how God provided us a way to new life through Jesus Christ even though we messed things up by trying to go our own way without him.

Many of the Bible's foundational truths are summarized and taught in a helpful teaching tool known as the Heidelberg Catechism. This set of devotions uses that catechism as a guide, and some readers will recognize key phrases and helpful guidelines from "the Heidelberg" as they reflect on these devotions.

We pray that this review of basic biblical teachings will help to inspire, comfort, and strengthen you with the good news of God's Word to us for everyday living.

*George Koopmans has served as an ecumenical chaplain at Medicine Hat College in Medicine Hat, Alberta, since November 2021. Prior to entering into chaplaincy, he served as a pastor to two congregations—one in Minnesota (Luverne), and the other in Medicine Hat. George and his wife, Emily, have four adult daughters and three grandchildren. Hiking, biking, and birdwatching are his favorite hobbies.*

## COMFORT FOR LIFE AND DEATH

Your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you . . . . You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

—1 Corinthians 6:19-20

We live in a world obsessed with comfort. The number of air conditioning units in the world is expected to triple by 2050. Tens of billions of dollars are spent on pain medication every year, and the market is forecast to increase 50 percent by 2032. Myriads of other products offer comforts we “can’t live without.” And yet nearly every day in my work as a college chaplain I meet and pray with people who are anxious and stressed out!

We all need comfort, and we all have important needs, especially for our physical, emotional, and spiritual health. But too often we look for comfort in the wrong places.

Being part of a community and having a sense of belonging is part of the answer to finding comfort for daily living, but the

best way to find comfort is in a right relationship with God, who provides the true and lasting comfort of full life forever.

The apostle Paul reminds us that we do not belong to ourselves but have been bought at a price—through the blood of Jesus, God’s Son—who came to offer us new life through the gift of his own life. Belonging to Jesus, we are connected to each other as well.

This world provides only limited, temporary comforts. But belonging to God through Jesus offers true and lasting comfort for both body and soul, during life and in the face of death.

God, thank you that we are not our own but belong, “in life and in death,” to you. Amen.

## DENIAL

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.  
—1 John 1:8-9

According to psychologists, we all live in denial at some point in our lives. Denial is a coping mechanism that can help us come to terms with difficult situations. It allows us time to adjust to new realities. But denial can also be deadly. Denying medical symptoms, for example, is not wise.

An even more serious form of denial is quite common in our world today. Many people deny that there is an almighty, all-knowing God who is holy and just and to whom we are all accountable. Countless people live their lives denying that God exists, that God sees and knows all things, and that they will meet God face to face after their earthly life is finished. Romans 1:18-21 tells us that God reveals himself clearly to us through creation. God's power and divinity are on

display for all to see, but people ignore and suppress these things and go their own way.

Nonetheless, God makes himself known to us even more clearly in the Bible. The Bible reveals God in great detail and teaches us about our broken relationship with him. It teaches that death—physical and eternal spiritual death—is the result of sin, but also that there is a remedy for sin: Jesus!

Lord God, thank you for making yourself known to us through the beauty of all that you have created. Thank you also that we may enjoy your beauty for all eternity through your Son, our Lord and Savior! Amen.

## THE WAGES OF SIN

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
—Romans 6:23

Sin is a topic that many people tend to avoid. Others make light of it. Las Vegas, for example, is sometimes called “Sin City,” and foods that are tasty but not healthy are often called sinfully delicious or decadent. Sadly, a world that chooses not to reflect seriously on sin does so at its own peril.

But what is sin? Sin can be described as having two sides, like a coin. One side of sin involves breaking the commands of God. God’s commands are in the Bible—for example, the Ten Commandments and various other passages. The other side of sin involves not living up to God’s good purpose for our lives. Jesus summarized our purpose when he said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (see Mark 12:30-31). Acting contrary to God’s com-

mands and failing to love God and others are the two sides of sin. Sometimes these are called sins of *commission* and sins of *omission*.

But is sin really that serious? After all, we are only human, some would say. But the Bible is clear. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), and “the wages of sin is death.”

But the Bible brings good news as well! While “the wages of sin is death,” “the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”!

Lord God, we confess that every day we sin against you in the things we do, and in the things we fail to do. Please forgive us, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

## GOD'S JUSTICE

You are not a God who is pleased with wickedness; with you, evil people are not welcome. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence.  
—Psalm 5:4-5

Imagine that you have purchased a new car. Then one day you find deep gouges in the fender and scratches in the paint. You are upset, but fortunately your doorbell camera has caught it all. The perpetrator is a neighbor. He appears before the judge, who also happens to be a neighbor. The judge says to him, "It is clear that you are guilty, but I remember that last winter you shoveled the snow from my sidewalk, so on the whole I think you are a pretty good person. Case dismissed."

You return home, and you see the judge and the other neighbor having a good laugh. What are you thinking? Most of us would say, "This is not right; this judge is corrupt!"

Today there are many people who think, "If God was truly kind and loving, he would just

forgive everyone." But if we think that through for a moment, a God who dismissed lying, stealing, rape, murder, genocide, and other sins as nothing serious would be horrible! A God who brushed evil away would not be good; he would be like a devil.

Sin must be punished. And God is a God of justice. Knowing that sin is serious and that it is impossible for any of us to live sinless lives, we know deep down that our sin has to be punished. And thankfully God has also taken care of that for us—through Jesus.

Lord, we confess that we are sinful, and we thank you for not tolerating evil. Thank you for the cross of Christ, where justice and mercy meet. Amen.



## SALVATION

Those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness [will] reign in life through . . . Jesus Christ!  
—Romans 5:17

Sin will be punished. God is a God of justice. Does this mean there is no hope for all of us who sin? No. Two thousand years ago, God the Son took on human flesh and was born to Mary. He lived in perfect obedience and then gave up his own perfect life for us to pay for the sin of all who would repent and believe in him. God is just, and sin is punished. Salvation is freely available for all!

It is fashionable today to say that Jesus is the way of salvation for Christians while other religions offer other ways to God. It is also common to hear that Christianity is a white, European religion. Both assertions are false. Christianity did not originate in Europe, and Christian communities were established throughout the Middle East, India, and Africa before the faith spread to

Europe. Believers from many tribes and nations are present on the college campus where I serve.

In 1 Timothy 2:5 we read that there is one mediator between God and humankind—and that is Christ Jesus. And “there is no other name under heaven” by which we may be saved (Acts 4:12).

God is just, and sin has been punished and paid for by Jesus, who was fully human, God in the flesh! Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Jesus, thank you for becoming human, for living and dying in the flesh in order to pay for our sin. Thank you for becoming the way to eternal joy for all who trust in you! Amen.

## FAITH

By grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. . . . —Ephesians 2:8

The Bible teaches that when Adam and Eve—the parents of all humankind—sinned against God, their human nature became corrupt. And this corruption has been passed along to every generation. This means that we all have a sinful nature and that we all sin.

But Jesus Christ, God's Son, became human and provided us the remedy for sin, and the Bible states clearly that the remedy must be received through faith. As Paul says, "It is by grace [we] have been saved, through faith"!

Believing that we are sinners and that only Jesus can save us is the faith that brings salvation. And we are responsible to live wholeheartedly for the Lord, doing the good that he has prepared for us to do. In fact, we are eager to do that out of gratitude for all that God has done for us in Christ. We can be

tempted, however, to get lazy in our life of faith, so we do well to test whether our faith remains true.

One way to do that is to examine our relationship with God. Throughout the Bible God uses a picture of marriage, in which he is the husband and his people are the bride. When the people's affections shift from God to other things, God compares that to adultery. So, to test if our faith is genuine, we can ask ourselves if we are faithful in our relationship with God, if God is our deepest joy, and if our deepest love is for the Lord rather than for anyone or anything else.

God, grant us the wisdom and the will to test our faith regularly. May we truly love and be faithful to you in all that we think, say, and do. Amen.

## WHO IS GOD?

God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky . . . and over all the creatures that move along the ground."  
—Genesis 1:26-27

Around the world there are many different religions and many different views about who or what God is. Some people believe there is one God, some believe there are many gods, and some believe there is no god at all. Some people say that God is whoever or whatever you want him or it to be, so it doesn't matter what you believe.

While it may be fashionable to view God in a way like that, neither the Bible nor logic will allow it. The Bible teaches that there is one God who created the heavens and the earth. The one God has revealed himself to us as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And while the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, there are not three Gods but one God. This teaching is sometimes

described with the word *Trinity*, and we can think of this in terms of "tri-unity."

Some people argue that this is a human-made teaching. But in Genesis God says, "Let us make mankind in our image," referring to a plurality in the Godhead. And Jesus commanded his followers to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). The truth of God in three persons is found throughout the Bible. And the one, true God is completely wise, just, and good!

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thank you for your love and grace. Help us to truly know you, love you, and honor you. Amen.

## GOD IS OUR FATHER

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!  
—1 John 3:1

It is a stunning truth: God the Father is not only the Father of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, but he is also the Father of each one who trusts in the sacrifice of Jesus for their salvation.

Ponder this glorious truth for a moment. The God who, out of nothing, created the heavens and the earth and everything in them and who upholds and rules them is not simply my God, but he is also my Father! God the Spirit testifies to our spirits that he is our “*Abba*, Father.” *Abba* is an Aramaic word that children would use to call on their father; in English the equivalent for this could be “Daddy” or “Papa.” Marveling at the fact that the Almighty God is our “*Abba*, Father” is good for our faith.

If you are able to travel out into the countryside at night,

leaving the glare of city lights behind, look up at the star-filled sky. When I can do that, I often marvel and think, “My Father made all of this.” God has a name for every star, and he knows if any go missing! Though he is so powerful and mighty, God also loves me so much that he gave his Son to die for me.

Our almighty Father loves us so much that we can trust him to provide whatever we need for body and soul. And he will turn to our good whatever troubles may come our way in this world (see Romans 8:28).

Lord and God, we stand in awe that you are our Father and that you love us more than any earthly parent could. Help us to grow in our love for you and our trust in you. Amen.

## GOD IS IN CONTROL

We know 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

Life can be hard, even brutal. Wars rage; diseases kill; disasters strike; accidents maim and take lives; loved ones betray. The list goes on, and questions arise. Where is God? Does he know? Does he care?

Sufferings and struggles are often described in terms of what we call the problem of evil. “And if God is all powerful and all loving,” people ask, “why do suffering and evil exist? An all-powerful and all-loving God should be able to prevent suffering and evil, right?”

Well, we need to recognize that sin, evil, and suffering entered the human experience through human disobedience. And suffering and evil are often connected to the choices people make. But God, who is all powerful and loving, has provided a way for us through Jesus to have eternal life with

him—where suffering, sorrow, and evil will be no more. In the meantime, though, there is still trouble in the world, and that can make life hard.

Why does God allow this? Because he is patient with us, “not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). All good things in life come to us from God (James 1:17). And, thankfully, God limits the extent to which evil can harm us. If he didn’t, things would be far worse. In addition, God can use suffering and evil—for which he is not to blame—to bring about good. And this can lead people to find comfort and salvation in his loving arms.

Father God, in this broken, suffering world, we thank you for your love and mercy. Amen.

## WHO IS JESUS?

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth. . . . —Colossians 1:15-16

Who is Jesus? Many different answers are given to this question. The truth is that Jesus is the eternal Son of God. From all eternity God has existed in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Every human being, except one, did not exist before being conceived and born. By coming into existence, people become sons and daughters, and their parents become fathers and mothers. But there was never an event in which God the Son came into existence. God the Father and God the Son have an eternal relationship of Father and Son that has always existed. (“Firstborn” in Colossians 1 does not mean “born first”; it means “most exalted”—see Psalm 89:27.)

At a point in time, God the Son took on humanity in the womb of Mary, a virgin (Mat-

thew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38). He was born in Bethlehem and received the name *Jesus*. Jesus is fully God and fully human. He is one person with two natures—human and divine. Each of us is also one person, but with only one nature—human.

Jesus lived a perfect life. He was without sin—though he was tempted and can sympathize with our struggles (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:14-15). And he laid down his perfect, sinless life as payment for the sin of all who would repent and trust in him for salvation. What a Savior!

Jesus, you are our God, our Savior, our Brother, and our Lord. By your Spirit, guide us to honor and praise you each day! May we never cease to love you! Amen.

## JESUS' INCARNATION

His mother Mary . . . was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.  
—Matthew 1:18

There are lots of misunderstandings about what may happen to us after we die. Many people think that babies who die become angels, for example, and it's common to see artwork about souls playing harps in the clouds.

Reflecting on Jesus' incarnation can help us think more biblically and clearly, however. The eternal Son of God took on human flesh about 2,000 years ago in the womb of Mary. While remaining fully God, he became fully human as well.

He lived a perfect life, without sin. Then, giving up his life to pay for the sin of all who would look to him for salvation, he died. His human body was laid in a tomb. And on the third day his body rose to life again and walked out of the tomb. Several weeks later his human body ascended to heaven, where he is seated at

God's right hand. And one day he will return in the flesh to welcome all of God's children to full life with him in the new creation.

Matthew 28 tells us that some of Jesus' followers met the risen Lord on the morning of his resurrection. Two of the women kneeled on the ground, grasped his feet, and worshiped him! One day, in our own resurrected bodies, we too will meet Jesus in the flesh to worship him.

Body and soul are created to be together, and so it will be in eternity!

Lord and God, our hearts stir within us as we long for the day when we too can meet you in the flesh and worship you! By your Spirit, move us to love and obey you today and every day! Amen.

## JESUS IS LORD

If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.  
—Romans 10:9

When one of our daughters was young and we told her to do something, her response was sometimes swift: “You’re not the boss of me!”

The idea of having an owner or master, even if it is Jesus, does not come naturally to us. In fact, the notion of being independent from God is what led humanity into sin.

But is having a divine Master or Owner really so bad? My bicycle “lives” in my garage. It is not rusty from sitting in the rain, and the rubber grips are not degraded from extended exposure to the sun. Though I have owned it for years, it still looks new. Every summer I see “ownerless” bikes. Some lay at the bottoms of creeks and rivers. They are coated with mud and rust.

Which bicycle has a better life? The bike lying in a creek never

has to work! But no one rides it, either. My bike gets a good workout in nice weather—and it doesn’t mind! It was created to be ridden.

The outcome is similar for horses and dogs and other domesticated animals that live longer and healthier lives under the care of a good master than they can in the wild.

The simple truth is that we will never truly be independent. We are created to live for God, and we will either be servants of Jesus or servants to sin. Being a servant to sin leads to death. But Jesus is the perfect Lord, who loves us—and living for him brings perfect joy!

Jesus, you are Lord. You love us and care for us. Help us to find our true joy and purpose in living for you. Amen.



## LORD, LORD

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” —Matthew 7:21

It takes me just a second to say “Jesus is Lord.” *Lord* means “owner” or “master.” I also believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. Does this mean I am saved? The answer is “Yes . . . *if*”: “Yes, I am saved, *if* I truly mean and believe what I say.”

If you declare or confess that Jesus is Lord, that he is your owner and master, and that God raised him from the dead because he died to pay the price for your sin, to bear your guilt and shame, and to take your punishment—then, yes, you will be saved.

Well, almost.

There is only one way to know if we truly mean it when we say, “Jesus is my Lord!” Jesus teaches us, “If you love me, keep my commands” (John 14:15). And in 1 John 2:4 we read, “Whoever says, ‘I know

him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person.”

As Lord, Jesus has the right to instruct us how to live our lives, and all who are saved are happy to live out his instructions.

Jesus, our sinful nature died and was buried with you when you paid for our sin. And we have risen with you to a new life. You bought us with your blood. You are our Lord, and we love you. By your Spirit, guide us each day to follow you and honor you. Amen.

## THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.

—Matthew 28:9

Can an event that took place two thousand years ago benefit humanity today? When Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried, his body lay in a stone-sealed tomb. And then . . . he took a breath; his body stirred; God raised him from the dead. And before some of his followers came to visit the tomb, an angel rolled away the stone so that they could see Jesus had risen.

What difference does that make for us today? Well, whatever I am doing today, I know that my Lord and Father will see me as his child clothed in the righteousness of the risen Christ. The Bible teaches us that, as God’s children, we have been crucified and have died with Christ, and we have been buried with him and have risen to new life with him. And we experience this new life in amazing ways as we

grow in faith, serve the Lord, and meet with others in Jesus’ name—in our churches, neighborhoods, college campuses, workplaces, and more.

We are also assured that when Jesus returns, the bodies of all who have died believing in him will be raised to live with him. Just as Jesus left the tomb in his resurrected body, I will rise from the grave with mine!

Yes, an event that took place two thousand years ago offers us a world of comfort and joy!

Lord, even as we begin to enjoy new life in you today, we look forward to our own resurrection, when we can live, body and soul, with you! Amen.

## THE ASCENSION OF JESUS

Jesus Christ . . . has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.  
—1 Peter 3:21-22

Years ago, I attended an air show. A military jet flew low over the runway and then turned its nose skyward and flew straight up until the clouds hid it from sight! The sound of its engines faded when we could no longer see the jet. But we all knew it would come back! And it did.

The disciples were gathered with Jesus when suddenly he rose up from the ground, and “a cloud hid him from their sight.” While the disciples were staring up intently, two angels assured them—and us—that this same Jesus would one day return in the same way.

Where is Jesus now? He is seated at God's right hand, reigning over all creation.

Before he left, Jesus promised his followers that he would send his Holy Spirit to be with them. In the power of the

Spirit they would bring the good news of Jesus to the nations and teach people what it means to live as followers of the Lord. And one day he will return, and we will live with the Lord forever in a renewed creation!

Right now, Jesus, in his resurrected human body, is in heaven, and in his divinity he fills the entire universe. As the King of kings and Lord of lords, he is building his kingdom, preparing for the day when he will return.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the joy, peace, and comfort we have in knowing that your Son, our Lord, is reigning over all creation. Help us to carry out the work you give us as loyal followers of Jesus. Amen.

## GOD THE SPIRIT LIVES IN US

"If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth."

—John 14:15-17

One Friday each month, the college where I serve as campus minister celebrates "Spirit Day." On Spirit Day students, staff, and faculty are encouraged to wear black and gold, the college colors, and to attend the college sports games.

In our culture we often emphasize having a strong school, work, and team spirit. Many of us develop a strong national spirit as well. As a result, we can tend to view the Holy Spirit more as a power than as a person. But there is much to gain when we realize that the Holy Spirit is God himself living in us (2 Timothy 1:14), along with God's power being present in our lives.

Jesus calls the Holy Spirit "the Advocate," or "Counselor" (John 14:26), and he tells us that the Spirit will convict us of

sin and guide us into all truth (16:7-15). The Spirit will make known to us what belongs to the Father and the Son. There is comfort and joy in knowing that God himself lives within us to lead and guide us.

Paul tells us that our bodies are "temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in [us]" (1 Corinthians 6:19). What an amazing blessing it is to have God living in us! When we ask God to lead and guide us, and when we actively follow him, a whole new life of comfort and joy opens up for us. The Holy Spirit living in us changes our lives and the lives of the people around us.

Spirit of God, we are honored to have you living in us. Lead us into the truth each day! In Jesus, Amen.

## THE BODY OF CHRIST

God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body. . . .  
—Ephesians 1:22-23

Maybe you have heard someone say, “I don’t need to go to church to be a Christian.” This is true. Many Christians have been jailed for their faith and have been prevented from going to or attending church worship services.

But the church is not a place where we “go.” The church is the body of Christ. Wherever God’s people meet for worship and fellowship, the church is present. The church is found not only in buildings that we call churches but also in prisons, on college campuses, on remote mission fields, in homes within countries that have outlawed Christianity, and more.

The Bible likens the church to a human body and says that we are each a part of the body (1 Corinthians 12). Being a Christian and being part of the

church are synonymous. Every part of the body is important, and every part contributes to the overall well-being of the entire body.

While it may be true that we don’t need to “go to church” to be a Christian, the parts of the body can die if they are disconnected from the whole. A foot, finger, eye, or kidney, for example, cannot live if it is not connected to the body. Only when we minister to others, and are ministered to, can we grow in our faith and flourish!

Lord, thank you for the church, your body, in its many different shapes and forms throughout the world. Thank you for joining me to the church. Help me to serve and to be served as a part of it! Amen.

## HEAVEN, THE NEW CREATION

“For you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves.”  
—Malachi 4:2

On the dairy farm where I grew up, it was always fun to watch young calves when they were first released into the pasture. For a few seconds the freedom seemed to paralyze them. Taking in the bright sun and the unfamiliar sights and smells, they stood motionless. Then suddenly they would leap into the air and race around! Soon exhausted, they would stop to rest—and then do it all over again and again.

About four centuries before Jesus came, Malachi prophesied about God’s people living joyfully, even frolicking “like well-fed calves.” Today the kingdom grows under the watchful eye of the reigning King Jesus, and when he returns, it will be established permanently and perfectly. With “no more death or mourning or crying or pain,” we will have life to the full, and we may even frolic like young

calves! With paradise regained, we will reign with Jesus in resurrected bodies for eternity.

But life is often hard for us now. And growing old, as people say, is not for the faint of heart! But one day we will be released from the struggles of this life and freed to live with the Lord forever. In Christ, death has become like a doorway to eternal life with God and the promise of the new creation. Whether we are dead or alive when Jesus returns, the new creation awaits us!

Father, we long for the day when we are released from our present struggles to enjoy life with you and in the new creation forever. Strengthen our faith as we begin to experience eternal joy even now, in Jesus. Amen.

## BAPTISM

In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.  
—Galatians 3:26-27

In the church we have two sacraments given to us by Christ: baptism and the Lord's Supper (holy communion).

Baptism symbolizes the dying of our old sinful nature and its being buried with Christ, as well as our rising to new life in Christ. Just as we use water to wash our bodies, the waters of baptism represent the washing away of our sin by the blood of Jesus. And just as water is necessary for life, the water of baptism represents the new life we have in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

In addition to these beautiful pictures, baptism stands as a sign and seal of God's faithfulness to his promises that salvation comes to all who repent and believe in Jesus. Though people are prone to break promises, God is not. Baptism assures us that we belong to

the faithful God, who has adopted us in Christ to be his children forever.

Does baptism save us or guarantee our salvation? No, baptism does not nullify the need for faith. But God guarantees us that if we trust in him, we will never be put to shame. And baptism is a glorious reminder and guarantor of that promise.

In baptism God declares that we belong to him and are part of his church and kingdom. His command is clear and simple: trust me and live with me forever!

Lord, thank you for the gift of baptism. Thank you for using baptism to signify that you claim us as your own. Help us to live with you in joy and faithfulness. Amen.

## THE LORD'S SUPPER

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?

—1 Corinthians 10:16

It has been said that the Lord's Supper, or holy communion, is a "visible sermon." It is hard to imagine a better one!

The bread that is broken reminds us of the body of Christ, which was broken for us—not only on the cross but also in the hours leading up to Jesus' crucifixion. The wine (or juice) reminds us of the blood of Christ, shed for the payment and forgiveness of our sins. Holding the broken bread, holding the cup, and hearing Jesus say, "This is my body. . . . This is my blood. . . ." has the power to evoke deep, godly sorrow and to awaken a love and sense of gratitude that goes beyond words.

And there is more. As surely as we eat the bread and drink the cup, and as surely as we are nourished by those calories

and vitamins, we receive the crucified Christ in the depths of our souls—to nourish us spiritually for this life and the life to come. While the sacraments do not save us, God works his grace through them to grant us joy and peace as we grow in faith.

The sacraments bring us into deeper communion with God and with the body of Christ. We celebrate the sacraments as a community destined for eternal life in God's glorious kingdom.

Lord, thank you for the Lord's Supper. May it always strengthen our faith in you, testifying of your sacrifice for us. Amen.



## GOD'S DISCIPLINE

“Do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves. . . .”  
—Hebrews 12:5-6

Jesus teaches that there is a broad road that leads to destruction and a narrow road that leads to life (Matthew 7:13-14). And because God wants us to experience full life rather than destruction, he disciplines his children who are taking the wrong road.

How does God discipline the ones he loves? Sometimes God causes a godly fear to fall on his people. For example, this could be a fear that reminds us, “If I do not mend my ways, I will separate myself from God.” Sometimes God uses our fellow believers to call us back to the right road. Sometimes God uses the church to call us back to faithful living. Sometimes God uses challenging situations in life to discipline his people.

Discipline never seems pleasant at the time, and it can be

painful. However, God designs discipline to produce a harvest of righteousness (Hebrews 12:11).

When it comes to Christian discipline, we do well to pray that God will give us the grace to receive his discipline—and that he will give us wisdom, humility, and compassion when we are called to speak a word of correction to others.

Loving God, we thank you that you discipline the ones you love rather than simply letting us stray down pathways that lead to destruction. Grant us grace and mercy in the face of discipline so that we may grow to love you more and more. Amen.

## LIVING A LIFE OF GRATITUDE

Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?  
—Romans 6:1-2

We have been saved by grace and not by works. But does that mean we do not have to do good? The answer is clear and decisive. Grace and good works are not competitors. They go hand in hand in the lives of God's children (see Ephesians 2:8-10).

When we come to faith in Christ, our old sinful nature dies. The old nature is crucified and buried with Christ, and we rise to new life in Christ. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Being raised with Christ means living a life in which good works (or "good fruit" in the words of Jesus—John 15) become natural to us. Bearing good fruit is a sign that our faith and conversion are true

and genuine. Good works are a natural expression of thankfulness.

While doing good becomes "second" nature to all who have new life in Christ, we still need to work at it. Though the old nature has been crucified, it still rises up from time to time to try to reassert itself. It is no longer the driving force in our life, but it remains a force to fight against. Wanting to produce good fruit assures us that we are indeed saved, and that is a powerful witness to people who do not yet know Jesus.

Jesus, thank you for dying for us to purchase our salvation. We commit our lives to thanking you by striving to live for your honor and glory. Amen.

## IS MY FAITH REAL?

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.  
—Galatians 5:25

On our first visit to the Grand Canyon we made our way to the guardrail and peered down to the Colorado River some 5,000 feet below us. Considered to be one of the natural wonders of the world, the Grand Canyon is stunning. It can also be dangerous. People who do not follow safety guidelines risk their lives. Over the years many have fallen to their death. Years later we returned to the canyon and safely hiked pathways down to the river and back up again.

God created a world that was good. But there is a right way and a wrong way to use the things of this world. Because of sin, our tendency is to use and experience the things of this world in wrong ways.

God gave us his law to teach us the right way to relate to him and the things of this world. And when the Holy

Spirit opens our hearts and minds to understand right from wrong, and we are given the grace to repent of our sin, and the faith to follow Christ, we experience what is called conversion.

For all who are in Christ, God's law functions like a guardrail and a path. It keeps us from thinking and acting in wrong and sinful ways. When we come to love God's law rather than resenting it, we know our conversion is genuine and our faith is real.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your law and your grace. Help us to embrace your ways as we seek to honor you in every part of our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## FIRST TABLE OF GOD'S LAW

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.”  
—Matthew 22:37-38

My wife and I recently attended a symphony. Seventy-five musicians on the stage gave their best. The star of the show was a young violinist playing a 1699 Stradivarius violin. At the end of the performance, with the crowd on their feet applauding, the young man left the stage. The applause continued, and he reappeared and bowed. The applause increased, and he returned a second time.

Was this violinist an egotistical young man? No. Giving the audience the opportunity to express their gratitude and amazement for a beautiful performance added to the listeners' joy. If the violinist had simply walked off and not returned, the audience would have felt shortchanged. Expressing appreciation is an important part of enjoying a great performance.

The first table of God's law to his people (commandments 1-4) calls them to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, and mind. God wants us to honor and glorify him in all we think, say, and do. The first table of the law is designed to enable us to truly appreciate God's beauty and glory.

Calling for our love and respect in this way is not egotistical. Rather, it is a sign that the utterly amazing and loving God wants us deeply to enjoy the best life, blessings, and hope possible.

Lord God, thank you for your law, which teaches us to see and enjoy your amazing, beautiful love for us all. Help us to think and act and live in your ways always. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## SECOND TABLE OF GOD'S LAW

"And the second [greatest commandment] is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."—Matthew 22:39-40

Maybe you've heard that one of the first steps a person takes toward becoming a murderer is to dehumanize their victim. By viewing others as less than human, killers tend to free their consciences to take other people's lives.

The second table of God's law (commandments 5-10) guards us from viewing and treating others as less than human. All of us are created in the image of God. Loving our neighbors prevents us from simply viewing and using others as stepping-stones toward advancing our own sinful causes. In addition, loving others is the best way to experience the deepest purposes and joys of life.

Loving others begins when we are young. We learn to honor our parents, our teachers, and all who are in authority over us, including our governments.

We also learn to love our siblings and other family members, our friends, our neighbors, and more. Jesus calls us to love even our enemies and to pray for people who mistreat us (Matthew 5:43-48). He also teaches that the place for sex, including thoughts about it, is within marriage. He teaches us to be givers rather than takers, and he calls us to build one another up and to celebrate others' victories instead of tearing people down.

Living on the path of love, we honor God, bless others, and find joy and satisfaction in life. How do we do all this? By treating others as we would like to be treated (Matthew 7:12).

Jesus, help us to be like you, loving and treating others with care, dignity, and respect. Amen.

## PRAYER

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

—1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

In my work as a college chaplain there is rarely a day when I am not asked to pray. Most students also express gratitude when I pray with them and for them. I often find they are crying when we finish praying.

But what is prayer? And does it do anything more than make us feel better?

A hymn writer, James Montgomery (1771-1854), wrote:

Prayer is the soul's sincere  
desire,  
uttered or unexpressed,  
the motion of a hidden fire  
that trembles in the breast.  
Prayer is the burden of a sigh,  
the falling of a tear,  
the upward glancing of an eye  
when none but God is near.

Why pray? It is the most important part of our gratitude to God for creating, redeeming, and sustaining us. It's at the top of our "good works" we offer to God.

God is not looking for fancy prayers from his children. He is not looking for key words and phrases that follow formulas. God simply wants us to pray from the heart, acknowledging that he is the one true God who will not share his glory with another. God wants us to come to him with humility, expressing our reliance on him for life and breath and every good thing.

When we come to God in this way, he promises to hear our prayers and to answer them in ways that are often better than we could imagine.

Father, we come to you with praise and adoration. Thank you for your amazing love and care for us. May our lives be a never-ending prayer of gratitude to you. Amen.

## HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME

“Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

—Matthew 5:16

God is perfectly holy. When Jesus teaches us to pray, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,” he is teaching us to pray that we, and all who are around us, will see God’s glory and holiness.

Nearly every day, 50 or more students enter the Interfaith Centre at Medicine Hat College, where I work as a chaplain. They come from dozens of countries and from many religious backgrounds, or none at all. They come for free coffee, tea, hot chocolate, and snacks. They come for a quiet place to sit, rest, or study. They come for friendship and fellowship. Sometimes they even come to see me!

My prayer for our campus ministry is simply this: “Father in heaven, hallowed be your name! In every visit to the Interfaith Centre and in every

interaction with the campus minister, may your name be hallowed. May your glory be seen as clearly as Isaiah saw it so many years ago!”

The apostle Paul wrote, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). These words apply to every one of us who follows Jesus. So we need to ask, “Who and what do people see and experience when they come into my presence or our presence?” And by God’s grace, may people see the glory of the King living in us.

Lord God, hallowed be your name. As the people around us get to know us, may they see your glory shine through us in all we think, say, and do. In our lives, Lord, be glorified today! For Jesus’ sake, Amen.

## THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM

The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

—Romans 14:17

On Mondays I bring lunch for students at the college, and we have discussions about life. I once asked, "If you could change three things in our world, what would they be?" The most common answers went like this: I would change . . . the way money is used and abused . . . the way people treat other people . . . the lack of true religion in our world. In other words, they were hoping for a greater presence of God's kingdom here on earth.

When Jesus taught his followers to pray, "Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10), he was teaching them to ask for the kingdom of God to be present in their lives and in the world around them.

When we pray, "Your kingdom come," we are asking God to help us submit our lives to him. We are praying that we will

faithfully submit our finances and our relationships to him. We are praying that he will help us live in such a way that he is glorified.

This is a prayer that in our personal lives we will be faithful followers of the heavenly King, and that in our life as the church we may together be a visible presence of God's kingdom in the world. This is also a prayer that the work of the devil and his kingdom of darkness, which seek only to ruin all good things, will be destroyed.

Lord and King, help me to submit every part of my life to you. Help me to live faithfully for you, and may your kingdom of love and grace advance throughout this world. In Jesus' name, Amen.



## YOUR WILL BE DONE

What kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.  
—2 Peter 3:11-12

Elisha and his servant were in big trouble. They were surrounded by a hostile army that had come to capture them. But Elisha was not afraid. God had provided a vast and powerful army of angels to protect them. This passage is just one example in the Bible where we see angels carrying out the will and command of God.

When Jesus teaches us to pray, “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10), he is calling us to be as faithful and willing to serve God as are the angels in heaven.

What is this service that God wants us to do? Peter reminds us to “live holy and godly lives.” James 1:27 teaches us to “look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep . . . from being polluted by the world.” The writer of Hebrews urges us to “spur one

another on toward love and good deeds,” “show hospitality to strangers,” and “remember those in prison” (10:24; 13:1-3). (See also Matthew 25:31-40.)

God calls us to serve people both inside and outside the church. We are also called to share our faith with those who do not yet know him. God does not want anyone to perish; he wants all to come to faith in Christ!

God’s will is that our lives will be sacrifices of praise as we honor him with our lips and work to advance his kingdom. This is not easy! Thus we pray, “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”!

Spirit of God, fill me with your power to serve you all day, every day. May I live a life of praise and loving service. Amen.

## OUR DAILY BREAD

“Give us today our daily bread.”

—Matthew 6:11

The college where I serve as chaplain includes many students who are squeezed financially. Some of them have to choose between buying food, paying rent, or paying their tuition and fees. So when they pray, “Give us today our daily bread,” they mean it literally. And God often answers that prayer through a local bakery that donates thousands of loaves of bread and buns and other baked goods to our campus ministry each year. In addition, local farms donate thousands of pounds of greenhouse vegetables, onions, and potatoes. Still other donors bring us boxes and boxes of groceries. And somehow the bills get paid.

Recently a young student asked if we could pray for her as she was looking to buy her first car. She was not looking for a fancy, expensive car—just a used, economical, and

reliable vehicle that would serve her well for several years without major expenses. That request also connected with asking for “daily bread” because it had to do with providing for physical needs.

In the request for “daily bread,” our Lord is teaching us not to worry about all our needs (Matthew 6:25) and that all our striving is in vain without God’s blessing (Psalm 127:1). Praying as Jesus teaches us will help us to grow in our trust and love for God in a world that seeks constantly to draw us away from him.

Heavenly Father, we depend on you to meet all our needs. Most of all, we need your blessing, Lord, to live faithfully for you. Help us to trust in you alone. Amen.

## LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. 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 endure it.  
—1 Corinthians 10:13

A student recently told me about her philosophy class. The students in the class were asking about some of the hard questions of life: How did we get here? And what is the purpose and meaning of life?

These questions have been asked and discussed throughout the ages, and the Bible gives a clear, definitive answer. We are here because we have been created by the almighty God, and we exist to glorify the Lord and enjoy him forever.

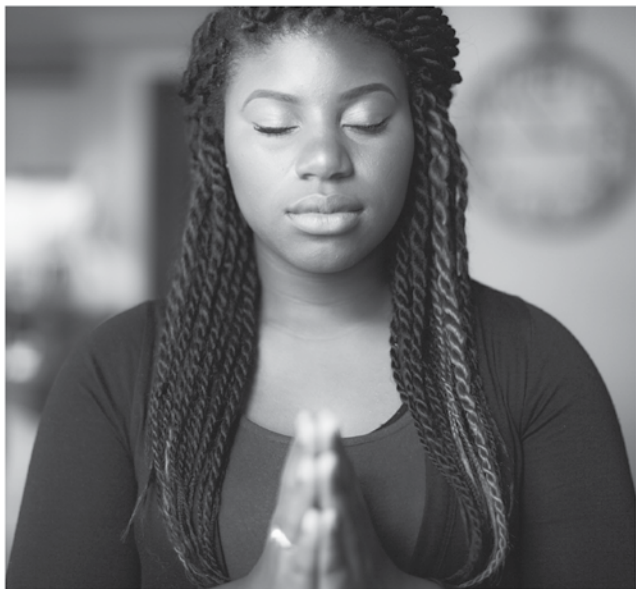
There is, however, another powerful being who has no desire to see God glorified. And he does not want us to enjoy God at all. The devil has come to rob, kill, and destroy. He does that by trying to convince us that God's way is not the

best way. As Jesus worked with his disciples, he saw that each one would be tempted to walk the path that leads to destruction. He taught his followers to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:13).

In this world the devil and our sinful human nature are constantly at work—even attacking us—to distract us from living as God calls us to live. But, as the Bible assures us, when we are tempted, God will "provide a way out so that [we] can endure it." Comfort and joy come in walking God's way!

Lord God, "uphold us and make us strong" by your Holy Spirit so that we can resist our enemies. In Jesus, Amen.

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