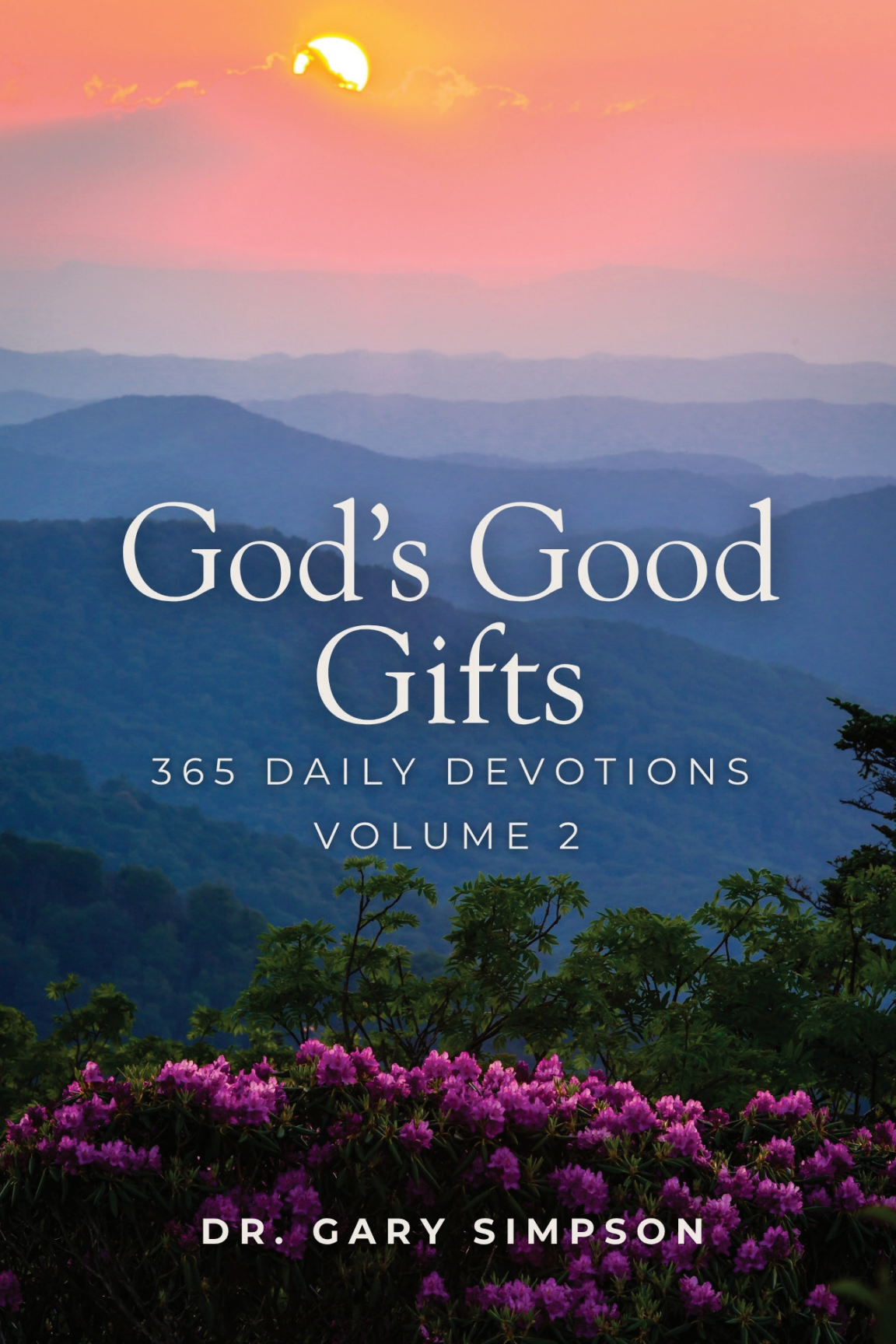

God's Good Gifts
365 DAILY DEVOTIONS
VOLUME 2
DR. GARY SIMPSON

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365 DAILY DEVOTIONALS – VOLUME 2

DR. GARY SIMPSON

SUNSET
INSTITUTE PRESS

God's Good Gifts: 365 Daily Devotionals - Volume 2

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ISBN 978-0-9600193-3-5 (Print edition)

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Cover design by Kristin Hagins. Book design and layout by Richard Cravy.

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Dedication

To my amazing kids and their spouses:

Charlyn, Joseph, Sarron, Nikki, Chantelle, Donggu

So proud to be your Dad!

Foreword

Dear Reader,

In my former book, I expressed my gratitude to the readers for their purchase of the devotional volume and their investment in their spiritual health. Once again, I thank you for choosing to spend time reading this little volume and making this investment in your spiritual well-being. I pray that by reading and meditating on these daily thoughts, you will be encouraged in your walk with our Lord.

We lived in Cape Town during my early and elementary school years. One vivid memory I have returns me to 17 Proot Street, Bellville, Cape Town. The house is still there but the address has changed. Our home had beautiful views in several directions that overlooked the valley below Table Mountain and Table Bay. It happened on a Saturday morning while I was on the front porch playing with my toy cars. Dad walked out onto the front porch and asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. Without much thought, I answered, "A preacher." I couldn't have been but 5 or 6 years old at the time, but that event marks my earliest memory solidifying my resolve to preach the gospel. Of course, as a young boy, I also wanted to be a soldier, a pilot, an astronaut, a policeman, a fireman, along with all the other fleeting

ambitions to which young boys may aspire. But along with those ambitions I always tried to figure a way to be a soldier and a preacher, or a pilot and a preacher. Preaching was the constant.

As I reminisce on the motivations for taking on a preaching career, those motives changed as I matured. Initially I remember thinking that preachers work only one day a week. Wow! What a deal! Suffice it to say, several other immature and less-than-noble motives evolved. By the time I reached high-school, my motives assumed a far more altruistic and Christian character. Graduating high-school, three life-goals crystalized: (1) Ensure I get to heaven (Matt. 16:26; I Cor. 9:27), (2) Do my utmost to ensure my family gets to heaven, and (3) Help as many others get to spend eternity in heaven too! And to this day, those are fundamentally the goals towards which I aim and work. Those goals are the reasons I preach. And those goals are the reasons for the writing of this devotional book.

As I write these words, I pray that our Lord will allow these meditations to bless you with encouragement, hope, and the fortitude to keep on keeping on. I love the words of the Apostle Paul as he anticipated his passing from this life: "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (II Tim. 4:6-8).

Gloria Dei

Gary

August 2026

January

JANUARY 1

Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. – Galatians 6:15

The new year has begun – happy new year! If you made new year's resolutions – great! But don't feel bad if you did not, or if you have already broken some of those. New Year's resolutions are somewhat beside the point for Christians. With all due respect to those who do make New Year's resolutions, for God's people, every day is a new day. Every hour, minute, second is a new one. We always have a chance to start afresh, to begin anew, to start over, and to try again.

The Apostle Paul made a wonderful statement in his epistle to the church in Corinth – "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (II Cor. 5:17). He didn't write that we became a new creation, but that we are – present tense! We are always new in Christ. We don't have to wait until tomorrow, next week, next month, or next year to make a fresh start. We are new! Always!

Let's live as though we are starting anew anytime, every time, all the time – because that is who we are in Christ!

JANUARY 2

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. – Hebrews 10:1

The writer to the Hebrews wrote of the Old Law as being but a shadow of the things that were to come – the New Covenant (Heb. 10:1). Christians thus live under a far superior law or covenant – the reality of which the Old Law was a mere shadow.

Similarly, this life on earth is but a shadow of the reality that we will experience in heaven. I have often misunderstood this physical life on earth as the reality of which heaven is but a shadow. The fact is, however, that it is this life here below that is but a shadow of the reality to come. Here our focus is most often on what is tangible and temporal.

In heaven, not only will the bad things of this life be nullified, but God will maximize infinitely all the good. Real purpose, real joy, real pleasure, real everything good – most of which we no doubt cannot even imagine right now.

Maybe that's why Paul wrote: "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:2-4).

Eagerly anticipating our Lord's return.

JANUARY 3

Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment. – John 7:24

Someone said: "Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it's thinking of yourself less."

The Apostle Paul introduced what many consider an early Christian hymn (Phil. 2:6-11), by stating, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3f). In other words, humility does not mean taking on an attitude of self-deprecation. Rather, humility means having an appropriate view of self and appreciating others. Paul also wrote to the church in Corinth, saying: "From now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view" (II Cor. 5:16). He viewed others the way God viewed them.

May we too, in humility, view both ourselves and others from a godly viewpoint.

JANUARY 4

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. – II Corinthians 10:4b-5

Genesis 3:1 states that "the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made." I wonder if this means that there are other animals who are less crafty, but crafty nevertheless. When we first moved to Dora, NM (rattlesnake country), I opened the garage door and there right in front of me lay a 2-foot long rattler. I'm embarrassed to say that I ran screaming like a Jr-Hi girl. You will be glad to know that I have since learned to respond a little more circum-

spectly. Just between you and me, if animals go to heaven, I don't think snakes are going to make it.

That word "crafty" is no doubt a euphemism for describing Satan's work. It is a rather nice way of describing what the writer to the Hebrews called the "deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13). That is one of Satan's most powerful tools – deception. It was through deception that he was able to get mankind to fall and sin. And the father of lies uses that tool effectively to this day (Jno. 8:44).

Paul noted that the "knowledge of God" stands in contrast to the pretensions and arguments of the evil one (II Cor. 10:1-6). The best way to combat lies is with the truth of God's word.

JANUARY 5

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. – I Corinthians 13:13

It was 19 degrees when I got up this morning. Due to modern technology, it was a comfortable 66 inside. But with natural gas prices already up more than 8% this year, it was time to fire up the wood-burning stove. Not wanting to burn down the house, we have to regulate the heat output. The way one regulates the heat on these stoves, as you may know, is by adjusting the airflow. Fires have to breathe and so the more air one allows into the firebox, the hotter the fire burns. We quench the fire by cutting off the airflow.

The fire in our hearts, however, is never in danger of burning too hot. The one thing we don't have to regulate is our love for one another. Our love may take many forms, but we may never love too much. God will never accuse us of being too kind, too caring, too compassionate. And there is never a situation where love is inappropriate. The writer to the Hebrews let us know that even disciplining those whom we love is a work of love (Heb. 12:5-11). Let's never believe that we have shown

enough love or that we have no need to continue to express our love in any particular situation.

Good news! No need to regulate our love! No need to turn it down. Rather, turn it to the max and let it burn hot!

Because Jesus loved us so!

JANUARY 6

So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. – Romans 7:4

I love the John 15 passage where Jesus told his disciples: "You did not choose me, but I chose you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last" (Jno. 15:16). Jesus addressed his disciples specifically on that occasion, but by extension, even you and me today. Isn't it an amazing experience, to have been chosen by God? He chose us before the creation of the world (Eph. 1:4). What an amazing God we serve!

A second significant statement in the John 15 passage is that Jesus chose his people for a purpose, i.e. "to go and bear fruit." One of the ways we bear fruit is by impacting our community with the love of Jesus. I am so excited to be part of a church family that is doing exactly that! This week, we delivered 23 meals to our local food bank. Those are meals that will feed underprivileged families in our community in the coming days. Robin, Chantelle, and I also delivered 30 boxes of supplies to the drop-off point (Mountainside Church of Christ) in Albuquerque yesterday. These boxes will be shipped around the world to serve underprivileged children. Thank you church for ministering to others, bearing fruit, and doing what we can to impact the world for Jesus.

What a privilege to be part of a church family that is putting their money where their mouth is, so to speak, a church whose collective faith is

accompanied by works. Isn't that a wonderful way to say "thanks" to a God who chose you and me before the worlds began! May God continue to bless us so that we may share his love with a world in dire need.

JANUARY 7

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. – Philippians 2:5-7

Paul made clear the importance of getting along with each other (Phil. 2:1ff). He let us know that we may do that by considering others better than ourselves and by looking to the interests of others rather than merely our own. And then, in that beautiful passage that many consider an early Christian hymn, he shared with us the example of Christ, who himself was God, but did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. Instead, Jesus emptied himself and came to earth to serve you and me.

I pray that we never take for granted the service Jesus rendered when he died in your place and mine. It is only through his death, burial, and resurrection that we have hope and life. It is also because of his humility that we're enabled humbly to serve one another and get along with each other. We are given unity in Christ. Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:2f). Unity is ours, not to attain, but to maintain.

Let's work at getting along with each other, doing everything we can to maintain our God-given unity.

Go with God today.

JANUARY 8

A time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance. – Ecclesiastes 3:4

My oldest daughter teaches Pre-K at the local elementary school and almost always comes home with a funny story or two. The other day she told of a little boy in her class, Domingo, who decided to hit multiple times, the little girl sitting next to him. Before my daughter could intervene, the little girl yelled out, "Owww! Stop it, Flamingo!" A case of mistaken identity, or maybe just a spelling (and pronunciation) error? The way it was told, we had a good laugh! Those little ones sure are cute!

I can't help but think that God has a wonderful sense of humor as well. He knows how to laugh. He enjoys his creation. He takes pleasure in sustaining the worlds and being involved in the lives of his people. He loves having a deep relationship with each of us. We have a sense of humor because God does and he provides everything good for our enjoyment (I Tim. 6:17). I believe being able to laugh and enjoy life is just one of the ways we are made in his image.

I pray you enjoy a God-blessed day!

JANUARY 9

"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." – John 4:34

Early last century, psychologists classified two personality types as introverted or extroverted. We've since assigned various meanings to these terms, but they basically describe the drive or motivation of various personalities. Some people are motivated primarily by externals or the outer world while others are motivated primarily by their internals or the inner world. Some people might be happier in a library

filled with reading materials while others would rather be at a party surrounded by people. I've often viewed myself as falling somewhere in between – as neither primarily either one. Well, maybe with a tendency toward introversion.

But what about Jesus? Was he an introvert or an extrovert? As I thought about this, I don't believe Jesus was either one. He did not derive his motivation from his inner world nor his outer world. He was not driven by a desire to hole up in a library nor by a desire to be a celebrity. Rather Jesus derived his motivation from a desire to do the will of the Father who sent him, and to accomplish his work (Jno. 4:34). There were times when Jesus went to be by himself (and his Father), and there were times when he interacted with large crowds of people. These events, however, were driven by his eternal desire to do his Father's will. He was motivated not from internals nor externals, but "from above." The Greek word for "from above" is "anothen." Instead of being introverts or extroverts, maybe we should be, like Jesus, "anoverts" – persons motivated from above.

May God bless us all as we seek to do his will today!

JANUARY 10

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. – I Corinthians 15:57

My daughter loves animals and so we often find ourselves at PetSmart or other pet stores, doting on those fluffy canines, felines and other lines of creatures. My priority when I get to a pet store, however, is to locate the reptile section, because that's the aisle I do *not* want to go down. I don't care even to see a snake! By now you may know that I am utterly repulsed by those creatures.

But the creature who should really concern me is from a different line. He's one who prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (I Pet. 5:8). The apostle wasn't talking about the lions on the

plains of Africa, nor the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. No, this is our arch-enemy, the devil. And if we would not allow a snake through our front door, why would we ever allow Satan a place under our roof or any space in our heart?

James' exhortation is that if we resist the devil, he will flee from us (Jas. 4:7). May God continue to enable us to resist Satan, and may the Lion of the Tribe of Judah give us victory over our real enemy daily!

JANUARY 11

I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. – I John 2:12

Paul wrote to the Church in Philippi: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4). But let's face it – sometimes it's difficult to be joyful. It is easy to allow all sorts of difficult situations, trials, struggles, and challenges to steal our joy. Here's a thought that may help us refocus and restore the joy that God wants for us.

Last Friday morning, I woke up with a song in my head – a song I hadn't heard or sung since I was five or six years old. I remember mom singing it with us in Sunday school. I don't remember all the words but the last three or four lines go like this:

My sins are all forgiven,

I'm on my way to heaven,

My heart is bubbling over with this

joy, joy, joy.

That is certainly reason to be joyful. When we think of what we have in Christ – the forgiveness of sins and being on our way to heaven, Wow! What more could we possibly want? Jesus is our greatest gift and he came to give us forgiveness and a home with him in heaven. When life

gets us down, let's refocus on these two indescribable blessings and we'll have reason to rejoice always.

JANUARY 12

Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. – II Timothy 4:2

Targum Onkelos – a Jewish Aramaic translation of the Torah – is traditionally attributed to Onkelos in the second century A.D. This scribe often took the liberty of substituting his own text/thoughts/ideas rather than producing a faithful translation, in an attempt to simplify the original language text. Two or three noteworthy observations:

1. In trying to simplify the text, he often complicated it. This is something many scribes and copyists did throughout the transmission of God's word through the centuries. Well-meaning translators do so even today.

2. This fact reminds me of the importance of taking very seriously my role as a spokesman for God. I always wish to share faithfully what God says rather than my own opinions and ideas.

3. It also underlines for each of God's people (you and me), how crucial it is to study his word daily and to test the spirits to see whether they are from God (I Jno. 4:1).

I pray that God always blesses our study and application of his word.

JANUARY 13

And who is equal to such a task? – II Corinthians 2:16b

Sometimes life can be challenging, stressful, and daunting. Satan loves to intimidate, manipulate, and incriminate God's people. He loves to

makes us feel inadequate, insufficient, incapable, and worthless. Ever felt as though you're not enough?

It is at times like those that I like to remember what Peter wrote: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (II Pet. 1:3). In other words, we lack nothing; we have everything to live our lives pleasing to God. We have what it takes to defeat the evil one and to be victorious.

We must realize, however, that it is only through God's provision that we have what it takes. On our own, we are worthless and incapable, but through Christ and in his strength we can and will be the people God wants us to be—more than overcomers through him who loves us.

May God continue to supply everything we need for life and godliness.

JANUARY 14

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. – Matthew 5:9

One of the Beatitudes has God's people functioning as peacemakers. When life is filled with conflict, what a privilege it is to be bring peace and to function as instruments of peace.

Peacemaking, however, is not about avoiding conflict. It is not about running from one's troubles or pretending they do not exist. It is not about ignoring or denying we have conflict. It is also not about appeasement or surrender. We do not necessarily have to give in or allow the other side to have it their way. Jesus never backed down from conflict. He never acted like a coward. Rather, he said and did what was in everyone's best interests. In his altercations with the Pharisees and other opponents, he taught them God's truth even though they inevitably rejected it.

We need to remember that peacemaking is quintessentially more about people than things. It's about the restoration of relationships. One of the best ways we may intervene in any conflict is to pray about it, about the person(s) involved, and that God's will may be done throughout.

May God continue to bless our efforts to imitate him who is our peace (Eph. 2:14).

JANUARY 15

Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. – Ephesians 6:7-8

Songs are a wonderful gift from the Lord because, among the many things they do, they help us remember the text of God's word. It is always amazing to me to see how many songs we may sing without the assistance of our songbooks. We know the words to hundreds or maybe thousands of songs because they are set to music. Who can recite the books of the Bible without breaking into song? Music is thus a wonderful mnemonic mechanism for the text of God's word.

By the same token, short, pithy statements are a wonderful mechanism for laying up God's word in our hearts. One such phrase that has become a favorite in our household is what Paul wrote to the church in Colossae: "as working for the Lord, not for men" (Col. 3:23). I've heard people say, "If it's worth doing once, it's worth doing well." Paul's statement, however, has a way of changing our entire disposition toward everything we do. The question then is how would I work differently if Jesus is my boss? With what attitude would I wash the dishes or the car if Jesus asked me to do it? What about Bible study, taking time to encourage a brother or sister in the Lord, or sharing Jesus with someone else?

I pray that these thoughts encourage you to do whatever you do as working for the Lord and not for men.

JANUARY 16

But my brothers who went up with me made the hearts of the people melt with fear. I, however, followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly. – Joshua 14:8

If you've ever seen the Star Wars movies, you readily recognize the many similarities and parallels between the movies' storylines and the reality of our struggle – "not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12). On one occasion in the Star Wars saga, Obi-Wan Kenobi (one of the good guys) made the comment to Darth Vader: "If you're not with me, you're on the dark side." It's difficult to miss the almost identical statement in the New Testament and I suspect that George Lucas had in mind the words of Jesus when he confronted the Pharisees: "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters" (Matt. 12:30).

What this statement tells me is that there is no fence-sitting in our fight. Serving in the Lord's army is an all-or-nothing venture. There is no middle ground nor room for half-hearted efforts. The Christians in Laodicea received a stinging rebuke from the Lord for their lukewarmness (Rev. 3:14ff). Jesus gave us his life; he deserves nothing less than our wholehearted efforts to serve him and his cause.

May God bless our wholehearted service in his kingdom!

JANUARY 17

In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. – Hebrews 9:22

The wind is howling through the trees this morning. The weather channel predicted gusts up to 60 mph today. We have 55 sixty-to-seventy-foot-tall pines on our lot and watching them sway in this wind

makes me pray they don't snap and break. But these trees have seen many windy days like this. Why are they able to withstand such gusts? The answer is simple – because they are flexible. If they were rigid, they would snap and break. The sap and moisture in the wood allows them to flex and bend. That moisture in a real sense is their lifeblood.

God has much to say about blood. The word "blood," excluding its cognates, is used well over 400 times in the Bible. The greatest thought about blood is undoubtedly that Jesus shed his lifeblood that we might live. As the hymn states:

On a hill, far away

stood an old rugged cross,

The emblem of suffering and shame;

And I love that old cross

where the dearest and best

For a world of lost sinners was slain.

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,

Till my trophies at last I lay down;

I will cling to the old rugged cross,

And exchange it someday for a crown.

May we always cherish that old rugged cross!

JANUARY 18

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." – John 20:21

Yesterday morning I mentioned the high winds with gusts up to 60 mph. This morning all is calm. There seems to be not a breath of wind. I

can hardly detect a pine needle moving. What a contrast to yesterday's weather! They talk about the calm before the storm – how about the calm after the storm?

But not even this calm or peace compares to the peace that Jesus brings. The peace that Jesus gives allows us to be calm in the midst of life's storms – not merely before or after. I love how Paul put it in his letter to the church in Ephesus: "For he himself is our peace, ... He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near" (Eph. 2:14-17). The peace Jesus gives is not like the peace this world offers – which is arguably not (Jno. 14:27). How blessed we are to experience his peace!

Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

JANUARY 19

I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. – John 17:4

I love living in the mountains. I love waking up in the mornings and seeing the yard occupied by a herd of deer or elk and sometimes both. This morning, a woodpecker was hammering away at one of our trees. My initial reaction was one of irritation, but then I realized that he was just doing what God meant for him to do. He was designed to destroy, I mean, peck away at our trees. He was fulfilling his purpose in life. And in so doing, he was actually glorifying our Creator!

And I wondered briefly what it is that God wants me to do today. It dawned on me that, maybe it is not so much what I do that is important. What really matters is that whatever I do glorifies God. And that can include what we may consider the most inconsequential and insignificant things we do. Even the small things in life can glorify God if they are done with the right attitude, purpose, and heart. As the song says: "To God be the glory; great things he has done!"

May God bless our activities today as we glorify him.

JANUARY 20

How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? – Hebrews 2:3a

Years ago, German Biblical scholars came up with the term "Heilsgeschichte" to describe the work of God throughout the text of the Bible. It is a term that means "salvation history." What an apt description for the word of God and the history of his interaction with his creation.

The words of the song say it well:

Living he loved me,

Dying he saved me,

Buried he carried my sins far away.

Rising he justified,

Freely forever,

One day he's coming,

Oh, glorious Day!

Thank God for the indescribable gift of his love!

JANUARY 21

"What is truth?" Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him." – John 18:38

A distinguishing feature of modern society is the proliferation of information. Today we have access to more information than has ever been available. Just ask SIRI or Google it! Interestingly, the retention of

knowledge seems to have taken a back seat. Former generations since the beginning of time seem to have placed far greater emphasis on memorization and being knowledgeable especially in comparison to the amount of information available to them.

What is truly disturbing, however, is modernity's distinct lack of regard for truth. The pursuit of truth is what seems to have suffered more than even the retention of knowledge. In our pluralistic society it seems anything goes – as long as you don't judge your neighbor. Few absolutes if any. Everything is considered relative.

Jesus said it well: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father except through me" (Jno. 14:6). If we know anything, we need to know the truth – Jesus! Truth and lies. What a contrast. Truth, who is Jesus; and lies – Satan's modus operandi.

The Apostle John wrote: "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth" (I Jno. 2:20f).

Thank you, God, for showing us the way, the truth, and the life.

JANUARY 22

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

In his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul noted that God's people are justified through faith (Rom. 5:1), even as was Abraham, whose faith was credited as righteousness (Rom. 4:9). As a result of this justification, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. In several important Greek texts, the verb "to be" takes the subjunctive form, reading, "we may have peace," as if our peace is prospective or not quite fulfilled. This textual variant is noted in our modern Greek editions and is highly disputed. The preferred reading is that which

treats the verb to be as a present indicative, meaning that peace is something we presently possess.

It seems quite obvious that Paul's point is that since we have been justified, peace with God is the result. Peace is a present possession! It is not prospective nor yet to be fulfilled. It is something which we now enjoy. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul made a similar assertion about peace when he wrote: "For he himself (Jesus) is our peace" (Eph. 2:14).

What a blessing to live in peace amidst a troubled world. Thank God for Jesus who is our peace!

JANUARY 23

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave. – Matthew 20:26-27

Our local members have often heard me mention the "five-minute rule." This rule states that during the five minutes following the worship service, we should visit with those who are visiting to make sure they feel warmly welcomed, cared for, and genuinely loved. Of course, we want them to be back if they are searching for a church home, but the bottom line is that this is what Jesus would do.

Jesus would seek out the person who is lonely, unfamiliar, the visitor who may feel intimidated or uncomfortable. Those are the people toward whom Jesus would gravitate. Jesus would search for a way to meet their needs. This is certainly the example he set for us throughout his life. And I'm convinced that he would want his people serving others even as he did.

Our corporate worship services present wonderful opportunities to minister to others, many of whom are searching – or they might not be there. What a prime opportunity to show them Jesus!

May God bless our efforts to be Jesus to our world.

JANUARY 24

For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.
II Corinthians 2:15

In a recent sermon that I preached, I noted how the early church, as recorded in Acts, made the teaching about God our Savior attractive. This was one of the reasons the church experienced explosive growth. I should have qualified what I meant by the phrase, "making the teaching about God our Savior attractive." That phrase is used by Paul in his letter to Titus (2:10).

To be sure, the teaching about God is not unattractive, as if we have to make it look pretty when it is not. God's teachings, principles, rules, regulations, ethics, morals, precepts, decrees, and statutes are perfect, beautiful, pure, lovely, right, and good. However, we can make being a Christian look good or bad. We can portray the Christian lifestyle as a drag or as the beautiful thing it is.

I pray that we always portray the teaching about God our Savior as the beautiful, attractive thing it is!

JANUARY 25

Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. – Colossians 4:6

Two practices that seem fraught with difficulty are offering constructive criticism and offering a genuine compliment. Many people have trouble with the former, fearing that their comments may degenerate into a judgmental critique. And, as in the case of the latter, they may deal with it by failing to offer any comments at all. Neither of these is helpful and usually merely builds walls between the parties involved. In both cases, whether one fails to offer a constructive critique or a

complimentary word, the failure is the responsibility of the giver rather than the receiver.

Both of these situations call for wisdom, maturity, and spiritual insight, especially when presuming to critique another's thoughts or actions. The Apostle Paul said it well in his epistle to the church in Ephesus: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Eph. 4:29). May God bless each of us with words borne of grace and maturity so that others may be built up in the faith rather than torn down (cf. Col. 4:6).

JANUARY 26

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. – Romans 8:29

Abraham's wife, Sarah, was ninety years old when she gave birth to Isaac (Gen. 21:2f). Her response to this truly supernatural event is recorded in verse seven – "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age." This rhetorical question solicits the answer, "No one." No rational human being would ever have thought or told Abraham that at age 100, his 90-year-old wife would bear a son.

The backstory, however, is telling. A year prior to Isaac's birth, the Lord appeared to Abraham and predicted Isaac's birth. You may remember how both Abraham and Sarah laughed at this prospect (cf. Gen. 17:17; 18:12). The fact is that only God would have made such a statement – that Sarah would nurse children. Only God could make that happen. Isn't it amazing how all of scripture points us to God?

I am reminded of Paul's statement in II Tim. 2:13, that even when "we are faithless, he will remain faithful."

May God bless our service in his kingdom today.

JANUARY 27

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. – I John 4:8

The prophet, Isaiah, cited the word of the Lord:

"'Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,' says the Lord, who has compassion on you" (Isa. 54:10).

The God who uttered those words some 800 years before Jesus walked this planet, is the same God who loves you and me with that same unfailing love today! What a blessing to know the only true and living God!

Be blessed in the knowledge that you are loved by a faithful God who loves us infinitely!

JANUARY 28

Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. – II Timothy 2:5

In the service yesterday, I mentioned my friend, an athletic director, who coached girls' basketball. I mentioned how he took his varsity girls team, who had won only three games in four years, to state in three years. On being hired, he laid down the rules. Among other things, he demanded 110% from the girls at every practice and every game. The girls were not allowed to date. He told their parents that they had to be in bed by a certain hour. They were not allowed to be late for classes and had to make the grade. The two rules that really stood out for me was that the coach did not have starters and he would play all the girls every game – a different kind of strategy for sure! I know this man to be a disciplinarian who does not tolerate nonsense, and that's what I believe ultimately led his team to victory.

I couldn't help but think that this is similar to the way God treats his family or "team." God doesn't have any starters and doesn't play any favorites. If we're on his team, we get to play! Of course, we have to play by his rules (they're in our best interests), and we have to give 110% ("as working for the Lord and not for men" – Col. 3:23). Ultimately, we're on the winning team, because God is our Father, Jesus is our brother, and the blessed Holy Spirit is our guide. . . .

May God bless us all as we play hard today!

JANUARY 29

If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! – Philippians 1:22

A few nights ago, my family and I watched the movie, "Paul, Apostle of Christ." The movie focused mainly on Paul's imprisonment in Rome and his interactions with Dr. Luke and the wardens. This was an interesting interpretation of the Biblical text/history and shed light on what life may well have been like for Paul and Luke.

One thing that really stood out for me was how these men took no credit for themselves, but gave God all the credit, honor, and glory. Instead of complaining about their situation and circumstances, they praised God for his provisions and for their hope of salvation. What incredible faith, fortitude, perseverance, and reliance on God for their sustenance! While their fellow Christians were being fed to the wild beasts in the arena, they never seemed to lose faith. And when facing their own executioners, they stood firm in Christ. What amazing examples of faith. As they died, may we live – for Christ!

JANUARY 30

Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart. – Psalm 119:34

Several years ago, I ran into some well-meaning folk, who thought that the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* – "Scripture Alone" – meant that they were not to consult commentaries, Bible dictionaries, etc. They were to read only the Bible. This is to misunderstand the intention of the principle.

This Reformation principle posits that the Bible is our sole, infallible, and authoritative source for doctrine and practice. *Sola Scriptura* was not intended to bar anyone from consulting other works designed to shed light on the Biblical text. Indeed, if that was the case, we would be out of line every time we heard a preacher or teacher speak, since they are giving verbally their interpretation/understanding of the Biblical text – their commentary on the inspired word. *Sola Scriptura* was intended to underline the truth and authority of the Biblical text as opposed to heresies originating from other sources.

Praise God for his God-breathed scripture that is "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (II Tim. 3:16f).

JANUARY 31

These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. – Hebrews 11:39-40

In the front of my Bible is a printed photo of my father, so that whenever I open the book, I am inevitably reminded of the amazing man of faith he was. Essentially, something as simple as that photo and its commensurate memories serve to spur me on to be the kind of Chris-

tian of whom he would be proud. I may not always succeed in achieving those aspirations, but the impetus is there.

Maybe that's why the writer to the Hebrews included chapter eleven – the chapter we commonly reference as the Hall of Faith, recalling all those great men and women of faith who preceded us. Is it not an amazing privilege to be part of so great a heritage of faith and family. What amazing examples of faith and devotion to our great God. Sure, these people had their faults and flaws, but they persisted and persevered and were ultimately commended for their faith (Heb. 11:39).

I'm convinced that my late parents have joined the ranks of the faithful in heaven and I am truly grateful to my eternal Father for giving me the parents I had. Even as these members of the Hall of Faith serve as examples to me, so do the examples of both my parents. I pray that you too have someone today, to whom you look for that example of faith that you may imitate.

DR. GARY SIMPSON



Gary was born to and raised by Christian parents in South Africa. He graduated from the Southern Africa Bible College in Benoni, South Africa, and the Sunset International Bible Institute in Lubbock, Texas. He has a B.A. in Bible and Missions and an M.A. in New Testament from Lubbock Christian University. He also holds a Doctor of Education degree from Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas.

He and his wife, Robin, tied the knot in 1993 and have three children, Charlyn (and husband, Joseph Bailey), Sarron (and wife, Nikki), and Chantelle (and husband, Donggu Hwang).

Gary worked as a youth minister in Carlsbad, NM for 9 years. The couple served as house-parents with the New Mexico Christian Children's Home before Gary embarked on his more than 20 year preaching career in New Mexico. He served on the Dora, NM school board for ten years and as the Dean of Ministry Training--Southern Africa for SIBI. Since 2019 he has preached as the founding minister for the Mountain View Church of Christ in Alto, NM.

Among his many interests and hobbies, Gary enjoys reading, writing, bicycling, both metal and woodwork, astrophotography, tractor restoration, 3D printing, and traveling.

ISBN 978-0-9600193-3-5
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9 780960 019335

SUNSET INSTITUTE PRESS
3710 34th Street • Lubbock, TX 79410 USA
800-687-2121 • www.extensionschool.com