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Godliness. Reverence. Obedience. Worship.

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growth in faith and service to God



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From the Editors...

Our apology for the tardiness of this January edition of GROW magazine. Some unforeseen challenges kept us from getting it out to you in the month of January. But, we're happy to get it to you now.

Happy belated New Year! We're excited for this year ahead and the opportunities it will afford to GROW in our knowledge, understanding, appreciation, and application of God's word. We are thankful for your ongoing interest in GROW magazine and hope the material presented is a blessing to you. If you find the content useful, please share it with others. Feel free to forward

the notification email, post links to our web site (GROWmagazine.site) or Facebook Page (Facebook.com/GROWmagazine.site) on social media, forward the full PDF version, or print out specific articles using the "Printer Friendly" button at the bottom of each page. There are plenty of ways to pass it along.

We're thankful for the work of our writers who diligently study and prepare articles for us and you.

Now, come GROW with us!

Cordially,
Sean P. Cavender, chief editor
William Stewart, editor & designer



In Spirit And In Truth

JEFF ASHER | NACHOGDOCHES, TEXAS

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In John four, Jesus converses with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. His objective is to prepare her intellectually and spiritually so that He may introduce Himself to her as the Messiah. He used the circumstances of their meeting and their mutual need for the well to initiate the conversation. Jesus asked her to favor Him by drawing water from the well for a drink.

The woman was somewhat taken aback by the request. She expressed her cultural shock with a straight response, *"How is it that you who are a Jew ask for water from a Samaritan woman like me?"* Jesus, with good manners, good taste, and good intentions, ignores her startled unbelief and answers the question without ever addressing it directly. Instead, Jesus initiates a conversation about water, well, not really. The Lord says, *"Well, if you knew who you were talking to you would have asked me for water."*

Living Water

Through that conversation, Jesus brings her to a place where she asks for water: *"Sir, give me this water that I thirst not neither come here to draw."* She's not ready yet, but she is close. Jesus has offered her living water. He has offered her water that only He can give. He has offered her water that will forever satisfy her inner thirst. However, she's still thinking in terms of the material.

Yet, Jesus deftly and gently turns her mind and gives her the living water with another request: *"Go and call your husband."* In an ordinary conversation, this may have been perceived as impertinent, even forward. But the woman knowing her own circumstance, being assured that Jesus is a total stranger and not a threat, readily replies, *"I have no husband."* Then Jesus, with a simple affirmation of fact, brings

her to a wonderful realization. He replies, *"You are candidly forthcoming, because you have had five husbands and the one you are with now is not your husband."* Jesus reveals that this woman had been married and divorced at least five times and was even now living in adultery. Jesus is either expressing that she was living with a man without the benefit of marriage, or if married to him, he was not lawfully her husband (cf. Mark 6:18). To our amazement, the woman is not insulted or embarrassed. Instead, her mind and heart are focused on spiritual realities; she says: *"Sir, I perceive you are a prophet."* Later, she will run to the city calling the citizens to come and see, *"A man which told me everything I ever did, is not this the Christ?"*

In this brief conversation, the woman has gone from seeing Jesus as just another prejudiced Jew to viewing Him as a prophet, a man of God. Her journey is not complete, but it is well underway.

A Question for a Prophet

Having confidence in Jesus as a teacher come from God, the woman asks what she perceives to be the most important spiritual question about which she should inquire. She asks: *"Our father's worshiped in this mountain, and you say being a Jew, that Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship, what is the correct view?"* Jesus replies to that question in an unexpected manner, a way designed to turn her toward the question she needs to ask.

Jesus says, *“Woman...”* He is not insulting her. It is a term of endearment used to express compassion and tenderness (John 2:4; 8:10; 19:26; 20:13, 15; cf. Matthew 15:28; 26:10). Jesus pleads with her, establishing trust. As noted, she perceived Jesus to be a prophet and asked, what was to her, the most important religious question of the day. It is not, but Jesus is not dismissive or harsh. This is important as a teaching technique. He implies from this one-word epithet: *“Believe me, trust me, if I am a prophet, I will tell you the truth. Listen to me think about what I’m saying.”* He then replies in an unusual way. Jesus says, *“The time will come when you will neither worship the Father in this mountain (Mount Gerizim), nor yet at Jerusalem.”* Then, Jesus challenges her intellect, saying: *“You do not know what you are worshipping. The Jews have it right, but it will not be long until none of that matters anymore.”*

What Really Matters?

The following words from the Lord’s mouth are the crux of His dialogue with this woman and His entire ministry. Jesus says, *“God is spirit, and they worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.”*

For many years, I thought I knew what Jesus was saying. However, further study has forced me to reconsider these profound words. With the help of Scripture, it became clear that my original perception, though not wrong, had little to do with what Jesus is talking about here.

Jesus sets the woman’s question in a context of relative importance. Many ask questions about things in the Bible because they are curious or do not really know what they should ask. Sometimes the things they inquire about strike their interest, but they are not very important to the situation that needs to be addressed, which is salvation. Rather than dismiss the question or chasten the woman, Jesus reframes her

question in a context of relative importance. He answered her question, saying Jerusalem is the correct place, and the Jews are worshipping in the right manner. Still, there is something more important than that to consider.

Jesus says, *“The hour is coming.”* How many times does John or Jesus refer to this “hour” of glorification (cf. 2:4; 7:8, 30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; 17:1)? In John chapter 13, Jesus declares His “hour” is come. This “hour” is His prophesied coming into the Messianic Kingdom, the appointed time in which He will be manifested as the Son of God ruling and reigning at the right hand of the Father in heaven. At that “hour,” all things are fulfilled, and repentance and remission of sins is preached (Luke 24:44–46). This is when the law of the Lord, the New Covenant goes forth (Isaiah 2:2–4; Micah 4:1–3; Jeremiah 31:31–34). Jesus is not talking about a specific hour on the clock, but instead a spiritual hour, a prophetic moment, a general time in which something is appointed to happen. In John 4, Jesus speaks of the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. This is what you must see in these verses.

The question was about Jerusalem and Samaria. Jesus says, *“Well, that’s a good question, but you need to realize there’s something more important.”* Jesus indicates something else is coming, something more important. It’s still about worshipping God, but it has nothing to do with the location. The time is coming when an entire change in system will occur and replace all that you know with that which is *“in spirit and in truth.”*

True Spiritual Worship

Jesus is pointing this woman to the New Covenant, the New Kingdom, and the New Worship, of which the prophets had all spoken. This woman perceives from Jesus’ words what we often do not. She understood that Jesus was indicating something new and different from

what she had known from the traditions of her fathers. She perceived Jesus spoke of something which even transcended what the Jews themselves were practicing. Why else at this juncture mention *“the Messiah”* who will come and tell us everything? Jesus necessarily implies that in the Kingdom, true worship and true worshippers would not be coming to the Temple in Jerusalem. These things are going to pass away (cf. Matthew 24). In the Kingdom, true worship would not be shrouded in types and shadows. The new worship of the Kingdom would convey spiritual realities to a spiritual people (cf. John 3:3–5).

In dealing with this phrase *“in spirit and in truth,”* I have said in the past the worship of the Kingdom must be from the heart and according to the truth. I have quoted Romans 1:9 to prove that worship requires the spirit or the heart. Similarly, I have quoted 2 John 4 or 1 Corinthians 11:23 to establish that there is a pattern for New Testament worship and truth to follow. But now let me ask you something, is that what Jesus is saying?

Consider Joshua 24:14, *“Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth....”* Joshua commands the nation that when they enter in land and come to the tabernacle, they must do so, worshipping Jehovah with the heart according to the truth Moses had revealed in the Law. Surely, Jesus does not mean the Jews worship without the heart and in error since He says, *“The Jews know what they worship.”* Likewise, in Deuteronomy 10:12, when Moses says to them, *“And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul.”* Jesus and the Jews understood that God required sincerity and truth as components of acceptable worship under the Law (Luke 10:25–28). While kingdom worship

requires a sincere heart acting according to truth, this is not what Jesus reveals to the Samaritan woman.

Jesus is talking about something different than what has been done up until the hour that now is. Jesus is saying that the worship of the Jews up to this time has not been *“in spirit and in truth.”* Suppose the Jews know what they worship (John 4:22), and we admit that God required sincerity and truth in that worship under the Law of Moses. In that case, it does not make sense to have Jesus mean kingdom worship requires something new and different, which is the same thing.

The Father Is Seeking Such

So, for what is the Father looking? He is looking for people who worship according to understanding. When we think about the Jewish religion, what is it? What words are used to describe Judaism in the New Testament? The words: type, shadow, example, figure, pattern, carnal, earthly, worldly, fault, imperfect, old, remembrance, no pleasure, etc. As the Hebrew writer expresses, Judaism was *“a figure for the time then present”* (Hebrews 9:9).

What did Jesus say, *“The hour is coming and now is.”* The Samaritan did not know what he was doing in his worship. The Jew had truth, but still, he only worshipped in shadows and figures, looking for a time when all things would be made clear until the Messiah would tell us all things.

Jesus contrasts worship *“in spirit and in truth”* with the carnal, fleshly, earthly worship of the Mosaic tabernacle. Carnal, not because they are sinful, but material (1 Peter 1:18–20). These things were types, shadows, rituals, washings, and food; all these things were part of the Jewish religion until the time of reformation should come (Hebrews 9:10).

When was the time of reformation? The *“hour that is coming and now is,”* the time of the New

Covenant and New Kingdom wherein is the New Worship. That began when Messiah ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father to rule and reign. Since then, men no longer worship in Jerusalem, but they worship in spirit and in truth.

Jesus is not saying the Father was dissatisfied with those Jews who, in faith, worshipped according to the Old Testament institutions and were looking for their Messiah. On the contrary, they were doing what God wanted them to do. They were doing what they were able to do because the time was not yet fulfilled. However, when the fullness of time came, “the hour” in which Christ died, fulfilled all the types and shadows of the law, and made the once-for-all-time offering for sin, those Jewish institutions ceased to serve any purpose.

Now with Full Understanding

We are no longer walking after the law; we are complete in Christ (Colossians 2:10). Why? Because the “body,” that is, the substance, the real, is of Christ (Colossians 2:17). The actual cutting away of sin and putting off the body of sins of the flesh is by the circumcision of Christ. Not physical circumcision, but the operation of God when we are buried with him in baptism, wherein we are raised with him through faith in the operation of God who has raised him from the dead (2:11–12). In Christ, we are made

alive having our sins blotted out, the sins which the law by animal sacrifice could not remit. Therefore, we are freed from the Law, that system of types and shadows consisting of carnal ordinances (2:13–16). We no longer worship the Father following these things, which are shadows (2:17–23). We worship the Father according to the Gospel, the word richly dwelling within us unto wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with grace in our hearts, doing whatever we do in the name of the Lord (Colossians 3:1–15). This is what it means to worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

When the woman finally understood that Jesus was the Messiah offering all the promises God had ever made to man through the prophets, she left her bucket and ran to the city to call others to Jesus (John 4:28). That seemingly insignificant act is so revealing. She had come to the well to draw; she was thirsty, as was her household. She had asked Jesus for living water, so she need never come to the well or draw again (4:15). Obviously, she received that for which she asked: Christ the Saviour of the world (4:42). She no longer was concerned about Mount Gerizim in Samaria or the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. She was concerned about Messiah, Jesus, being a true worshipper and the Gospel, which brings us to a complete understanding of Him, His Kingdom, the New Covenant, and the New Worship.

The Church at Thessalonica: Congregational Profile

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Background

The establishment of the Lord's church in the city of Thessalonica is found in Acts 17:1-10. During Paul's second missionary journey, which begins in Acts 16, Paul heard the "Macedonia call" to send out the light (God's Word). Specifically, he saw in a vision a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "*come over to Macedonia and help us*" (Acts 16:9). After seeing the vision, Paul and the men with him concluded that the Lord had called them to preach the gospel in that region. They traveled to Philippi (a Roman colony and the foremost city of that part of Macedonia). After they had preached and converted souls in Philippi, they moved to Thessalonica (another prominent city in Macedonia). They continued their preaching (Acts 17:1-10). Paul stayed a few weeks, preaching the Gospel in Thessalonica. He preached three Sabbaths consecutively in the synagogue and converted several people. However, the unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica became envious (Acts 17:5) and caused so much trouble that the brethren had to send Paul and Silas away to Berea by night lest they be seriously harmed (Acts 17:10). This is the beginning of the church at Thessalonica. Even after Paul left the city of Thessalonica, he was still concerned about the new Christians at Thessalonica. He sent Timothy back to Thessalonica, and Timothy brought the good news of their faith and love (1 Thessalonians 3:6).

This writing aims to identify some unique features of this congregation and see how we can learn from them today and apply them to our congregations and personal

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lives. Not long after establishing the church at Thessalonica, Paul wrote the first letter to the congregation. From this letter, we can tell the kind of church it was. What kind of church was the congregation at Thessalonica? Let us consider some of the attributes:

1. The church at Thessalonica was evangelistic: — In 1 Thessalonians 1:8, Paul said: "*For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.*" Evangelism is a major work of the church. Each congregation must carry out this duty to the best of their ability. We see how New Testament churches engaged in this work in several instances. For example, the church at Antioch sent out men (Acts 13:1-3), the Jerusalem church sent out men (8:14; 11:22), the Philippian church supported a gospel preacher (Philippians 1:5; 4:15-18), etc. Here, we see that the church at Thessalonica sounded forth the word of God even beyond their region. The Thessalonians become a great example. Sadly, many congregations are lagging in this very work. How much time do we invest in evangelism? If we want to be faithful to God, we must imitate this good example of the Thessalonians by preaching the gospel.
2. The church at Thessalonica was receptive: 1 Thessalonians 1:6: "*And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word*

in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.”

The brethren in Thessalonica received the word, even though they had to face “*much affliction*.” Here, Paul is saying that despite the opposition they faced and the affliction that came their way, it did not stop them from receiving the word of God. With many tribulations, we will enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). However, it takes faith, courage, and conviction to stand. The church in Thessalonica received the word, despite the great affliction that came their way. How many congregations would stand in the face of persecution today?

3. Another point to note was that they received the word of God with joy. Just as the 3,000 Jews on the day of Pentecost who “*gladly received His word*” (Acts 2:41) and were baptized, the brethren in Thessalonica did the same. Indeed, it is a happy day when a soul is added to the Lord’s church; hence we sing, “*O happy day that fixed my choice*.” Are you happy to be a Christian?
4. The church at Thessalonica was a working church: — 1 Thessalonians 1:3: “*remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father*,” Paul in this verse speaks of their works of faith, their labors of love and their patience of hope. These are great attributes of a church. Unfortunately, many churches are not known for their good works. What is your local church known for?
5. The church at Thessalonica was exemplary— Indeed, the excellent attributes, transformation, and new life seen in the church at Thessalonica is an example worth imitating. Paul said to the Thessalonian Christians, “*Ye were examples to all that believe in Macedonia*

and Achaia” (verse 7). Churches are supposed to be good examples to others. When a church does well and obeys God’s instructions, people will be encouraged to follow such an example. Without a doubt, the Thessalonian brethren were the good kind of example, leaving us “*a pattern of good works*” (Titus 2:7). Also, all believers should live in such a way that these same words can be spoken about the local church where they worship and serve.

6. The church at Thessalonica became followers of the Lord as well as Paul and his companions (1 Thessalonians 1:6): Paul often encourages brethren to be imitators (or followers) of him: “*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ*.” (1 Corinthians 11:1). The Thessalonian brethren believed and obeyed the same saving gospel Paul did, and in the process became servants of the Lord Jesus, just like Paul had. The Bible speaks of “*the way of truth*” (2 Peter 2:2), also known as “*the way of salvation*” (Acts 16:17). Paul submitted to that “*way*” in his life, and then later, the Thessalonians followed suit. There is no better choice than choosing to imitate the Son of God!

Conclusion

The church in Thessalonica is an excellent example for churches to follow today. Faithful churches striving to be pleasing to God should try and emulate the good examples of the church in Thessalonica. In doing this, we would successfully spread the word around, and the world would feel our impact. Jesus said, “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven*.” (Matthew 5:16). Christians should endeavor to shine as a light to the world that they would bring glory to God when our good works are seen.

The Mighty Works, Goodness, and Kingdom of God (Psalm 145)

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The Book of Psalms concludes with a series of psalms that praise the Lord. Some of our most popular hymns, such as “Hallelujah, Praise Jehovah”, based on Psalm 148, are directly from this section of scripture. Although there are commonalities between these psalms, each also have a unique focus on various attributes, actions, or characteristics of God that are worthy of praise. For example, in Psalm 145, David focuses on the mighty works of God, the goodness of God, and the kingdom of God.

David opens the psalm by inviting the reader to join him in praising the Lord every day. The greatness of the Lord, explored throughout the text, is described as “*unsearchable*” in verse 3. However, he is not “*unsearchable*” in the sense of being incomprehensible; instead, He is inexhaustible. This is true individually for the man that meditates on God’s splendor (v 5) and speaks of His awesome acts (v 6). Still, it is equally true for those that commit His deeds to memory (v 7) and faithfully transmit the knowledge of God by teaching the next generation (v 4).

David doesn’t specify which of God’s mighty works he is praising. This focuses the reader on the importance of the praise continuing from one generation to the next (v 4). This is emphasized more than once in the Law. For example, in Deuteronomy 6:20-22, God through Moses says, “*when your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘what is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the Lord our God has commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son: ‘we were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and*



the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; and the Lord showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household. Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which he swore to our fathers”. The Law contains the full account of these events, which are recounted in the historical psalms: 78, 105, 106, 135, and 136.

The psalm, therefore, encapsulates all the recorded miracles of God up to the time of writing. Though David wrote prophetically at times about the coming Messiah, he likely didn’t comprehend the magnitude of what he was writing. Only in the hindsight of fulfillment can one fully appreciate the “*manifold wisdom of God*” (Ephesians 3:10). The mighty works recorded in Psalm 145, as marvelous as they are, pale in comparison to the miracles of Christ, especially the resurrection. In the resurrection, all the claims of Christ are substantiated, and the sacrifice and love of the Savior to belief, confession, repentance, and obedience to the gospel in baptism move the hardened heart of the sinner. Yet we have “*this treasure in earthen vessels*” (2 Corinthians 4:7),

and the beautiful message must be shared from generation to generation as the psalmist admonished. The world, through its stranglehold on the media and its corruption of institutions, has poisoned the minds of an entire generation. This should not surprise us. The Spirit warned in Paul's day that *"evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse"* (2 Tim 3:13). The gospel has not lost its power to save, though the modern Christian often loses focus via mass distraction. We should focus on the charge Paul gave Timothy and prepare the next generation. Paul wrote, *"the things that you have heard and from me among many witnesses, [and] commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also"* (2 Tim 2:2). In this manner, we will perpetuate the gospel both to the world and also for the "equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph 4:12). The alternative is to continue to give ground to the world and to have churches filled with immature and uneducated Christians. Ignorance was the path of the Israelites, who were *"destroyed for lack of knowledge"* (Hosea 4:6). It is crucial that we meditate on and share the marvelous works of God with every and anyone!

The God of the Old Testament has an undeserved reputation amongst those that have not read the scriptures for being full of wrath and quick to exercise judgment. David counters with a declaration of God's love and mercy. He writes, *"The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy. The Lord is good to all, And His tender mercies are over all His works"* (v 8, 9), and statements like this are made by many other authors, including Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. Furthermore, he describes God as a provider (v 14-16, 19), gracious (v 17), attentive (v 18), and a preserver of the faithful (v 20). Indeed, the Old Testament records God's wrath. Still, two instances shall suffice to illustrate the principle

that God takes *"no pleasure in the death of the wicked"* (Ezekiel 33:11). God gave Pharaoh ten opportunities to release the Hebrews from captivity. Instead, he chose to reject all these opportunities and brought judgment upon himself and the people of Egypt. Had he obeyed, he likely would have been blessed for submitting to the will of God. Likewise, the people of Judah were carried into captivity by king Nebuchadnezzar, which the prophets had warned would happen if they did not repent. The full breadth of the longsuffering of God is detailed in 2 Chronicles 15:21, where the author records that God sent prophet after prophet to Judah for three centuries, and they refused to repent. Like Pharaoh, their stubbornness and pride provoked the judgment of God, who did everything in His power to prevent such an outcome.

We await the final judgment, not temporal judgments like those in the Old Testament, where the wheat and the chaff will be separated into heaven and hell, respectively. However, the Lord, who *"is the same yesterday, today, and forever"* (Hebrews 13:8), is still longsuffering. He *"is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9). Such a demonstration of the grace of God ought to motivate us to preach the gospel with a sense of urgency and join the apostle Paul in declaring, *"knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men"* (2 Corinthians 5:11).

In the psalm, David says that the saints *"shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom"* (v 11), which is *"an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations"* (v 13). During King David's reign, Israel was territorially its most expansive and faithful to God. After the death of David and his son, king Solomon, the people of Judah became progressively more wicked until they were carried away into captivity. Even during their return, the kingdom of Israel never achieved a semblance of its former glory.

The Romans ruled them by the time of Christ. While David is writing about Israel, these verses are also prophetic in nature and point to the kingdom of Christ spoken of by other prophets like Isaiah, Daniel, and Joel. Christ's kingdom, the church, is the fulfillment of these scriptures. While we work in the field of the world, His kingdom is *"not of the world"* (John 18:36), as Jesus said to Pilate. His kingdom was purchased with His blood (Acts 20:28), and this *"bride, the Lamb's wife"* (Revelation 21:9) is described in detail in Revelation 21 and 22. All this shows the tremendous importance that the Lord places on the church, yet too many Christians today treat church attendance and participation as secondary or, worse, optional. God's people have always prospered when they've worked together in faith. That was true in Israel's day, and it is true today. Within the church, individual talents effectively support others, and what the individual lacks in talents is supplied by others (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12). Use your abilities and God-given roles so that the church and the people within it are built up and effective (Ephesians 4:7-16) for the work. The result brings glory to God and edifies the individual members and congregations that influence the world. We must ensure that local churches remain faithful to God rather than being influenced by the world. Sadly, the

reverse is too often true now, with the result being that throughout the nations of the world, sins that decades ago would only have been whispered about are commonly spoken of and brazenly displayed. If Christians would display a fraction of the respect for the church that Christ does, this trend could be slowed, halted, or perhaps even reversed, though with tremendous effort.

It is fitting that the Book of Psalms concludes with a series that praise Him. The Psalms poetically illustrate God's character, His attributes, and His relationship with man. When studied in faith, the reader will be moved to praise the Lord for all that He is and all that He has done. Certainly, like how John says that he couldn't record all the works of Christ (John 21:25), the psalmists could not exhaust all the reasons that God is worthy of praise, and each of these psalms has varying emphases. David, in Psalm 145, reminds the reader of the goodness of God, the power of God in mighty works in the past, and points prophetically to greater works and to a greater kingdom. Most importantly, he reminds his reader of the importance of keeping these things in memory and perpetuating the knowledge of God from one generation to the next. We share that responsibility today and ought to carefully consider what we are doing to ensure we are effective learners and teach others, Christian and non-Christian alike.

Fruit of the Spirit: Shining Longsuffering, Kindness, and Goodness

T. SEAN SULLIVAN | PARAGOULD, ARKANSAS

Introduction

We all, as Christians, have the responsibility to “*shine as lights in the world*” (Philippians 2:15). Paul writes about being a shining example in Galatians 5:22-25, with the “fruit of the Spirit.” We are blessed to live in a divinely designed way and directed to help all others see, seek, and find it too.

Let’s consider the life of love, joy, and peace being complemented by “longsuffering, kindness, and goodness” so we can discover the value of these blessings and shine them brightly for all others to see.

Shining the Light of Longsuffering

“Longsuffering” is an old word; not commonly used today. It is better understood as “patience.” There is a great void of longsuffering in today’s world, making it all the more vital to live a life of patience and shine so others can see.

This life will test our patience, and too many in this world are failing the test. Let’s practice the patience of knowing all that waits for us beyond is far greater than any of the momentary issues of life. The Scriptures do not promise a life of ease. God’s faithful children still have difficulties and need the patience to endure them (1 Peter 1:6-9). Hope in God’s promised reward (Hebrews 6:9-12) motivates our practice of patience. In Hebrews 10:35-36 we see patience in the terms “confidence” and “endurance;” these words inform us of the proper attitude and actions required to gain our hope. We shine with this light of hope for all others around us to see. If we are determined to shine the light of patience, we will greatly



bless others around us.

Before we move on from this point, know that “others” does not only mean alien sinners trapped out there in the doom of darkness. Our light of longsuffering/patience needs to be seen by our children, family, and brethren. Every day, we need to rise and shine the light of longsuffering.

Shining the Light of Kindness

Much of what we have already considered in “the fruit of the Spirit” can be cataloged under the header of kindness. Kindness expresses our love, joy, peace, and patience. Kindness is like the ribbon on the gift, our example, offered to all others around us.

The term “kind” (relating to others) is only used twice in the New Testament. Once, it is said to be a characteristic of real love in 1 Corinthians 13:4, and then when we look out for the betterment of our brethren (Ephesians 4:32). Practically applied, this word means “to be useful to another.” The defining action of “kindness” is “benevolent care.” We fill an important need for others when we offer kindness to them.

A kind person is a doer of good. Doing good is the expectation of Galatians 6:9-10, as it says, “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have the opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” A kind person seeks to do good works— “All scripture is given...that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). A kind person sincerely cares for the well-being of others. Like Epaphroditus for the well-being of Paul, as recorded in Philippians 2:30, “...for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.”

Kindness is the right light to shine to show Christ through us. We fulfill the responsibility of Matthew 5:16, as it instructs us, “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works...” We must become more like Him every day—becoming the “measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13), increasing in holiness (1 Peter 1:15-16). If we are determined to shine the light of kindness, we will be a great blessing to others around us.

Before we move on from this point, please know that “others” does not only mean alien sinners trapped out there in the doom of darkness. Our light of kindness needs to be seen by our children, family, and brethren. Every day, we need to rise and shine the light of kindness.

Shining the Light of Goodness

In stark contrast to the way of the world, we are determined to be good people who do good things—for a good reason (Romans 2:7). Goodness is represented as much by the things we avoid as by those things we do. Goodness is “doing the right things” and doing them well (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Paul, in Colossians 1:9-12, teaches us that God expects us to be filled with the knowledge of His will; of course, this means that we will apply ourselves to the study of His word. As we study the word, we will grow in “wisdom and spiritual understanding,” which will lead us toward being “fruitful in every good work.”

The pursuit of goodness motivates us to seek opportunities to do more. Pray for, and look for, opportunities to do “good.” Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Titus 2:11-14 says, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.” If we are determined to shine the light of goodness, we will be a great blessing to others around us.

Before we end this point and this lesson, please know that “others” does not only mean alien sinners trapped out there in the doom of darkness. Our light of goodness needs to be seen by our children, family, and brethren. Every day, we need to rise and shine the light of goodness.

Conclusion:

As we continue to consider the influence of God’s way on our own lives and what it can do for others, we learn that this influence will only be

seen if we live it out in the open – living a life of love, joy, and peace. Maintaining that life through patience, kindness, and the continuous pursuit of goodness gives us the right light to shine for all others to see. Our hope and prayer must be that we will shine this light for all others to see, seek, and find. ~tss

25 Ways to Get Busy Doing the Work of Evangelism

SEAN CAVENDER | WICHITA, KANSAS & WILLIAM STEWART | KINGSTON, ONTARIO

Before ascending to heaven, our Lord instructed the apostles to be busy preaching the gospel. Mark's account of the great commission begins, *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"* (Mark 16:15). However, this mission was not exclusive to the apostles. In Matthew's record of the mandate, Jesus told the apostles to *"...make disciples of all the nations ... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you..."* (Matthew 28:19-20). In this, Jesus instituted a perpetual continuation of teaching the gospel to lost souls. We see the apostle Paul applying this in 2 Timothy 2:2, *"...the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these faithful men who will be able to teach others also."*

Several statements in the Scripture emphasize the importance of evangelistic work. There is no doubt God wants each of us to actively pursue opportunities to teach others. Mark 16 reveals what we are to teach – the gospel – the good news about Jesus Christ. People need to know who Jesus is, what He has done, and the need for us to obey Him. Mark 16 also identifies whom we are to teach – the world. That's exceptionally broad and intentionally so. The phrase "all the nations" is used in Matthew's parallel. Every person needs to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. Obviously, you and I won't have the opportunity to speak to every human on the planet. Still, we are responsible for reaching out with the message of God's grace and mercy to those in our corner of the world. As we have opportunity and ability, we should seek to increase the scope of our world.

There are several considerations to look at when it comes to teaching opportunities. Some of those considerations may be: what style or



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method of teaching is best for the particular situation? Where is the person in their current knowledge of spiritual matters? Do they believe in God? Do they believe the Bible is God's word? Do they believe Jesus is the Son of God? Are there any peculiar topics due to their religious history which should be focused upon, and how can we best address such? We could speak at length about these and other topics related to teaching the word of God. However, in this article, we want to step back a bit further and simply ask how we might find people to speak to – how can we engage with people and create opportunities to study the gospel together? We could be an expert in teaching methods and know the Scriptures exceptionally well, but if we are not meeting people and seeking open doors for the word, we'll not accomplish much.

Our aim is not to present a bunch of gimmicks or trickery – we want to consider legitimate ways to connect with people in the hope of affecting souls for the gospel's sake. We reached out on social media a couple of times, requesting input. Some of the things listed are from us, and some are from others. Some items will be more effective for some and in some places but

unproductive for others and in other areas. Our personality, abilities, regional demographics, and even local laws will influence how best we contact and interact with people.

All that said, let's consider 25 ways to make contacts. Note that some of these suggestions are specifically religious in nature, but many are not. The key is meeting people and interacting with them to create and earn opportunities to teach God's word to people:

1. Talk to people. There are people all around us. In line at the grocery store or bank; waiting at the bus stop; in the doctor's office; etc. Let's put down the phone and talk to people. In John 4, we see Jesus began a conversation with a woman over a drink of water, it turned into an opportunity to proclaim the gospel to a whole city. We must develop the skill of turning a secular conversation into a spiritual one.
2. Be agreeable. There will be areas of disagreement and contention when chatting with people, but that's not the place to start. Seek common ground and build a rapport; don't shut down a conversation before it's begun.
3. Be approachable. It will repel people if we are grumpy or abrasive in our manner. Have a kind spirit, enjoy life, and share your enjoyment of life with others.
4. Door-to-door. Take a tract, business card, flyer – whatever is available – pick an area of town, knock on doors, or drop the material in mailboxes (if it is legal to do so in your region). Be ready to chat about the Bible then and there, and seek to schedule a follow-up study time.
5. Sit at a coffee shop (or mall food court or elsewhere). Take your Bible with you, and have it open. Spend time reading, but don't forget to spend some time looking up and around. Perhaps an opportunity to chat with someone about the Bible will avail itself. You might even create a small "A-frame" cardboard sign to set on the table offering to chat.
6. Join a club. The desire is to meet people and create opportunities to talk. Join a club that fits your interests (book club, gym, walking group, etc.) and build relationships with fellow members. As you get to know people, they will get to know you, and opportunities to share your faith will be available.
7. Fostering or adoption. Many children need homes, some short-term, some permanent. What better place for these young souls to find a family than among Christians? Also, in opening your home to a child, there is a fostering/adoption community with which you will share time and build relationships.
8. Gospel meetings. As a congregation, host gospel meetings or lectureships. The speakers might be guests from elsewhere, or they might be speakers from the local congregation. Address topics of concern, questions about salvation, evidences, etc.
9. Engage in peaceful public debate. Debates could be in the form of formal debates arranged with propositions and such, or they could simply be a discussion in a private setting. Recall Jude 1:3 tells us to "...contend earnestly for the faith..."
10. Always have a business card. Be in the habit of carrying or having quick access to business cards, tracts, or flyers. You never know when you'll meet someone and want to give them further info. You cannot give them a card if you don't have one with you.
11. Look for places to leave material. That business card or tract or flyer you're carrying with you – how about pinning it up on a bulletin board or leaving it on the table at the doctor's office? Leave it behind, and someone may pick it up and contact you.

12. Use social media. As a follow-up to the previous one, try hosting a live Bible chat in addition to posting content. With the covid-19 pandemic, many of us got a crash course in video conferencing. Put it out there and see if some folks would like to participate.
13. Online video study. As a follow-up to the previous one, try hosting a live Bible chat in addition to posting content. With the covid-19 pandemic, many of us got a crash course in video conferencing. Put it out there and see if folks would like to participate.
14. Overseas preaching trip. Sometimes an opportunity comes along where you can go beyond your day-to-day world and affect people in other areas for good. If you can do so, go. If someone else is going to another region of the world, consider helping with their travel expenses.
15. Print t-shirts. Most people wear t-shirts with some kind of logo or text on them. Why not design a t-shirt with a simple Bible verse on it or a few words to kindle conversations?
16. Bumper stickers. Instead of the “if you can see this, you’re too close” bumper sticker, how about a custom-made sticker with a Bible reference or the local church website? Rather than a bumper sticker, you can place a magnet on the car door. You can create magnets at places like vistaprint.com. Warning – if you’re posting about your faith on your vehicle, you’d better live your faith out with courtesy and civility behind the wheel.
17. Community events and activities. It is important to be where people are. If there are special events going on in town, plan to go. Who knows who you will meet! Could you fill a volunteer position on a community board, kids’ sports team, or such? Consider doing so.
18. Go for a walk. Walking is good for you and an excellent way to meet people. The power walk is good for the heart, but a leisurely stroll in the park or at the mall might result in meeting and chatting with folks.
19. A friend of a friend. People you know can put you in touch with people you do not know. If you’ve got a study with someone, ask if they have any friends, family members, neighbours, or co-workers who might like to participate.
20. Do good. Always be on the look for opportunities to do good. Random acts of kindness are helpful to the recipient and may lead to an opportunity to share a word about the One who truly is Good, our Lord and Saviour.
21. Reconnect with people. We all fall out of contact with people as the years go by. Think back and consider reconnecting with old friends, former neighbours, or past co-workers. Check on them and see how they are doing. Even if they were not interested in spiritual things in the past, they might be now.
22. Newspaper ad. Yes, newspapers still do exist, and I suspect there are still people who read them. Placing a simple word ad in the classified section of a newspaper may yield opportunities to study the Bible with people. Related to this, maybe there are some other forms of print media (pennysavers, community journals, etc.) that you could use.
23. Chat with the parents. Our children have friends. Knowing their friends’ parents is an excellent opportunity to share our faith. Whether it be through school-related, social, or sports-related activities, take the opportunity to meet and visit with the other parents.
24. Host a BBQ. How well do you know your neighbours? Too often, people do not know others who live in their community. Break the ice by hosting a community BBQ. Invite folks, arrange some activities, and get to know people.

25. Be a good listener. We aim to find opportunities to speak to others about Jesus Christ. That said, there are people in our lives who are going through difficult things, and maybe the things they need right now is for someone to listen to provide support and comfort. If we let people know that we care, they will be more open to hearing what we have to say.

Indeed, there are more things that could be added to the list, but there re 25 things we can do to connect with people and create opportunities to teach God's word to others. And if we are committed to sharing our faith, the Lord will no doubt bless our efforts to reach people. So, let's go and do the work to the glory of God.

How to Be Strong for the Lord

SONIA RAINWATER (DECEASED) EDITED BY TOM RAINWATER | TAMPA BAY, FLORIDA

NOTE – below is a lesson that Sonia presented to a group of girls at the Northeast Florida College Camp in 2013. After this, her cancer afflicted her for five more years before she passed from this life. She faced that burden with strength and hope. Her example continues to encourage all who witnessed her faith. For that, I'm certain, she would give God all the glory. – *Tom Rainwater*]

Three years ago, I was diagnosed with colon cancer, which had spread to my liver. Since then, I've had major surgery on my colon and two surgeries on my liver. I've had lots of chemo treatments during that time. I've seen doctors constantly. I'm still fighting a battle against cancer. But thanks to our wonderful God, I'm here today and doing well, and so happy to be speaking to you. My message is: no matter what happens to you, you can still be strong for the Lord.

People ask how I've dealt with cancer and kept my spiritual focus over the past three years. Well, I want to share with you 6 points that will help you focus on God. Life will not always be pleasant. You will have to deal with unpleasant things and hard times. Here is how you can stay strong for God:

(1) Take one day at a time. Live in the day God has given you.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:34, *"Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."*

When I first learned I had cancer, the doctor informed me of all the treatments and things I would need to endure. It would take many months and maybe years to get rid of this



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cancer. It was not going to be easy. The thought of it all was overwhelming. But I needed to do what Jesus said. I couldn't worry about the next day, or the next treatment, or the next surgery. I had a job to do. And that was to live for Jesus today.

We make it harder on ourselves when we try to bring tomorrow's problems into today. Tomorrow may not even come. One thing is for sure: God has given us today, and we can rejoice in that. The Hebrew writer in Hebrews 3:13 commanded us to *"exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today.'"* That's because what we do today matters regardless of what's happening to us. If tomorrow looks gloomy, then forget it and focus on the now. Think: how can I make this day one that I can give God the glory? How can I live this day in service to Him? How can I use this day to encourage other people? You see, taking things one day at a time helps us focus on the things we actually have control over. None of us can control tomorrow. Tomorrow belongs only to the Lord.

(2) Stay strong by casting all your cares upon the Lord and trusting Him to do what's best.

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter 5:6-7. The apostle Peter said, *“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”*

Notice in this passage that: (a) God cares for you even when you are down and brought low. (b) You must cast all your care (concerns) upon Him. (c) The result is: He will exalt you. He will lift you up. Obeying 1Peter 5 means doing lots of praying. We can’t be strong if we don’t pray!

Consider Philippians 4:6-7. *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”*

So, what should we be anxious about? Nothing! What should we tell God about? Everything! What will God give us? Peace. He will guard our hearts and minds. Friends, it works!

One of the saddest verses about sickness is 2 Chronicles 16:12. It says: *“In the 39th year of his reign, Asa became diseased in his feet, and his sickness was very severe; yet in his disease, he did not seek the Lord, but the physicians.”*

Asa, who used to be courageous for God, was now too proud to pray. He did not trust God with this severe problem in his life. How foolish! Why would anyone not want to pray to the Creator? Why leave God out when you need Him the most? God is there for you. He is ready to help because He cares. Let’s trust Him with all the things that afflict us in life!

(3) Stay strong in God by allowing suffering to help you grow even stronger in faith.

Believe it or not, suffering is an excellent opportunity for us to grow spiritually. Consider the apostle Paul’s thorn in the flesh in 2 Corinthians 12:8-10. Even though Paul

continued to suffer in the flesh, God had a way to make him stronger in spirit. God can do the same for us. Through suffering, Paul learned humility, patience, and endurance. These are things he wouldn’t have learned otherwise. In suffering, we can also learn how to depend more on God.

Jesus suffered. And the Hebrew writer in 2:10 says that God made Him, the author of our salvation, perfect through sufferings. Suffering perfected Jesus. In 5:8, it says, *“though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.”* In the flesh, Jesus was required to obey and serve the Father. Suffering helped Him. It nudged Him to be obedient. For the faithful servant of God, suffering and the possibility of death can help you focus on the most important things in life. It prompts you to think about Heaven, being with God, and being free from suffering forever.

(4) Stay strong in God by looking for ways to help and encourage other people despite what’s happening to you.

According to Galatians 4:13-14, Paul preached the gospel despite his physical infirmity. Whatever it was, he didn’t let it stop him. Too often, people get so caught up in self-pity that they can only see their affliction. There’s so much more to see in life!

A difficult personal issue isn’t a free pass. It doesn’t excuse you from looking out for others. It didn’t excuse Jesus. While hanging on the cross, He was looking out for others! He arranged for the care of His mother, Mary, and prayed for the well-being of His enemies. *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”* (Luke 23:34). Jesus died for you and me. And He never allowed problems to keep Him from His work of saving souls! Looking out for others will help you stay strong for God.

(5) Stay strong in God by keeping a cheerful attitude and giving thanks for all the good things.

Despite the discomforts of life, there are always good and positive things to see and hold on to. Rainbows come from storms. We need to see the rainbows more than the storms. We need to see the good things of the Lord and be thankful for them. I'm thankful for all my family has done to care for me. It shows they love me. I'm grateful for all the brethren who pray for me. What a blessing to know people are praying for us! I'm thankful for our God, who listens to prayer. And I'm thankful for our Savior who made it all possible.

We can be strong by obeying Hebrews 13:15: *"Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name."* If the persecuted brethren in Hebrews were encouraged to give thanks, shouldn't we be doing that? There's no sense in being sad when there's so much for which to be happy!

(6) Be ready that no matter what happens, you're prepared to meet the Lord. Being faithful to the end is what it is all about.

At the end of my talk, let me read a few passages about endurance:

Mark 13:13. *"And You will be hated by all men for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved."*

James 5:10-11. *"My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord — that the Lord is compassionate and merciful."*

Hebrews 12:1-2. *"...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

And finally, 2 Timothy 4:6-8. *"I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."*

I hope what I've said will help you in life when it gets burdensome. God will always be there for us. He helps us daily and will never forsake us. Christ will always love us. He wants us to go home and be with Him. I can't wait to be there with you.

APRIL 2023 PREVIEW

EXPOSITORY ARTICLE

Joshua Welch brings us the first article in a new series looking at the hall of faith from Hebrews 11. He begins with the faith of Abel, Enoch, and Noah.

CHURCH ARTICLE

Sean Cavender begins a new series focusing on our Lord's relationship to the Church. The opening article views Jesus as the Head of the Body.

WORSHIP ARTICLE

William Stewart starts a new series on instrumental music in the Scriptures. The first article notes the use of instruments in the Old Testament.

APPLICATION ARTICLE

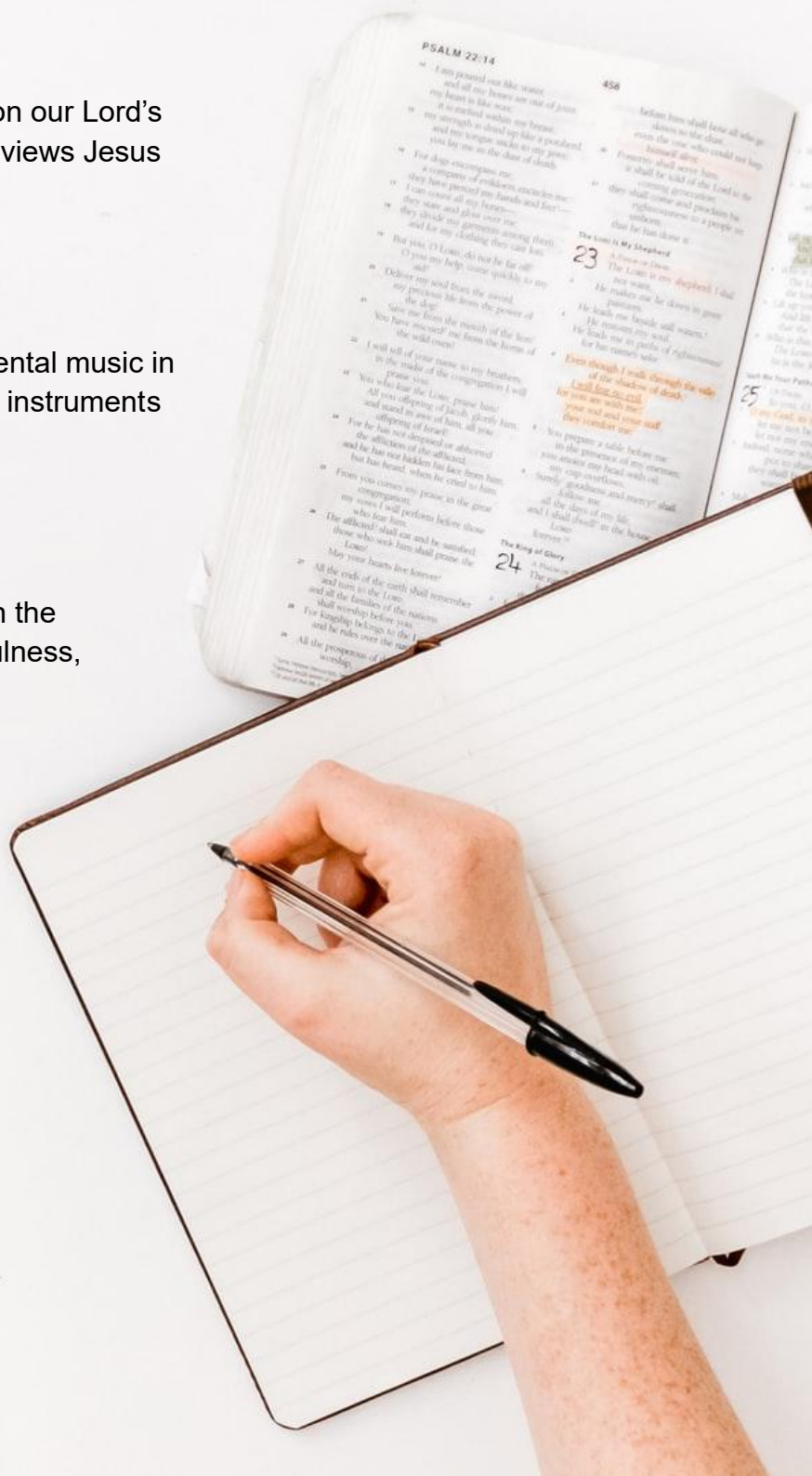
T. Sean Sullivan gives us part 3 in his series on the Fruit Of The Spirit. This article speaks of faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

EVANGELISM ARTICLE

Ken McDaniel gives us practical tips for conducting a Bible study.

BEYOND THE BASICS ARTICLE

Keith Sharp discusses what will happen when Jesus returns.



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