

NOVEMBER 2022

inspiration

M A G A Z I N E

EXTRA ORDINARY

**Dream Big and
Live Boldly**

**Tragedy to
Triumph!**

**Be Who God
Made You to Be**



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PAGE 12



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Extraordinary!

Could it be that the life your heart desires is the life God longs to give you? God never intended you to live a humdrum existence. In David's article, *Living the Extraordinary Life God Wants for You*, you'll meet average people who trusted God and changed the world! Turn to **page 5** to see how you too can live and leave a legacy like theirs!



EDITOR'S CORNER



When you put ordinary things into the hand of God, EXTRAORDINARY things can happen! Has your life lost its luster – are you struggling to find joy and thankfulness? The holidays often crush our hopes of perfect family gatherings, but God never disappoints.

Our November *INSPIRATION* helps you discover the incredible depth and breadth of God's desires for you. Our God's generosity and greatness are beyond our ability to imagine. In every situation, we must trust Him fully and allow His Word to do its work in our lives. I can't wait to hear the ways God blesses you extraordinarily this month!

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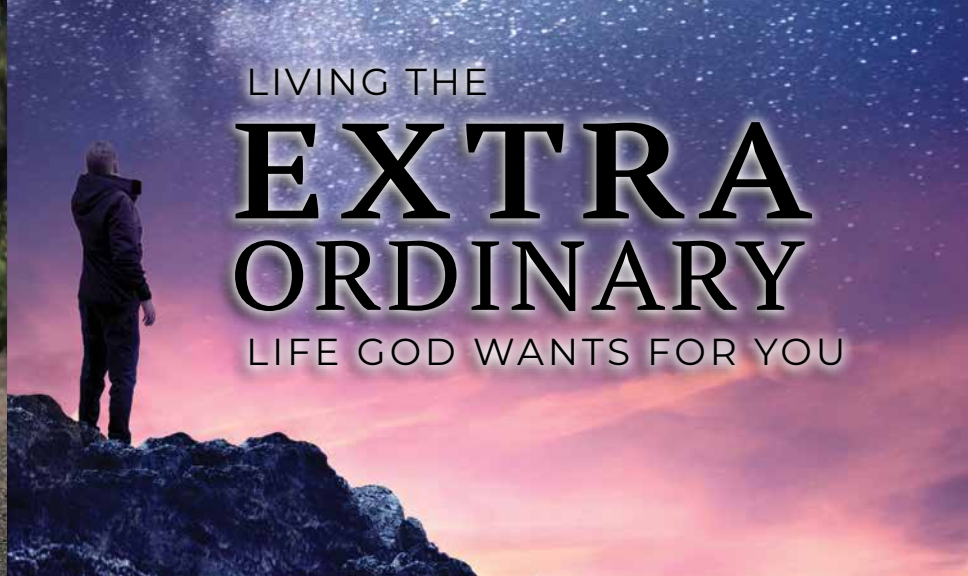
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ENJOY YOUR
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LIVING THE
**EXTRA
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LIFE GOD WANTS FOR YOU



November 1 – 11
God gives us wonderful blessings to enjoy, but sometimes those blessings take us captive. If God has dragged you into bondage, let Dr. Michael Brown help you break free.

November 14 – 25
Using a vintage Curtiss C-46 Commando airplane to illustrate the principles of God's faithfulness, David Cerullo unveils God's desire to guide you in every situation.



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STRENGTHEN
your walk
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What does it look like to believe in God's promises and expect amazing results? And is it possible to turn an ordinary, bland, unexciting life into a life full of blessings and miracles?

Perhaps you're familiar with the story in John 2:1-11 when Jesus turned water into wine during a wedding feast in Cana. At the wedding venue were some stone water pots used by the Jews for purification purposes. The water in these pots was plain...ordinary...bland...flavorless...and completely unexciting. But as the story unfolded, Jesus performed a miracle – turning this water into sparkling, tasty, thirst-quenching wine.

This account contains some wonderful principles for discovering an extraordinary life. We *all* have water of some kind that needs to be transformed into wine – and this story shows us how that can happen.

Water is an essential, elemental part of life. But in this story, it also stands for the plain, the ordinary, and the bland. Wine, in contrast, has zest and distinctive flavors. Jesus said this kind of wine must be put into “*new wineskins*” because it needs room to expand and grow (Mark 2:22).

A PERSONAL ASSESSMENT

Before embarking on this journey to get your excitement and zing back in life, it's important to do a personal assessment. Take a moment to ponder what boring, bland parts of your life may be due for a transformation like this. Your job? Your ministry? Your marriage? Your finances? Your relationship with the Lord?

The good news is that Jesus can turn *ordinary* things into something *extraordinary*. If you've lost joy in some area of your life, He can help you get it back. And if you've been stagnating instead of expanding and growing, your turnaround can be closer than you think.

But transformation comes with a price. Jesus' mother told the servants at the wedding feast, "Whatever He says to you, do it" (John 2:5). This is the key to every breakthrough. If you follow this profound advice and commit yourself to obeying Jesus' instructions, your water will surely be turned into wine.

This is a radical statement, isn't it? Are you willing to do WHATEVER He tells you to do? Think about it. That's the price of transforming your circumstances and your life.

YOUR BREAKTHROUGH IS AT HAND

Friend, I believe your breakthrough from God is at hand today – in fact, it's literally *in your hand!* Whatever turnaround you need from Him – whether in your finances, marriage, job, health, or children – the key is surrendering *all* of your resources into the hands of your Almighty Father and covenant partner.

That's how ordinary things and ordinary people become extraordinary and supernatural.

Remember...

- Samson slew hundreds of Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey.
- David defeated Goliath with a slingshot and five smooth stones.
- Jesus used a young boy's lunch – five loaves and two fish – to feed thousands of hungry people.

There was nothing extraordinary about the jawbone, the slingshot and stones, or the bread and fish. They only *became* extraordinary when they were devoted to the Lord's purposes.

God works the same way today as He did in Bible days. He is looking for obedient, submitted people, willing to entrust Him with everything they have and everything they are.

God is not looking at who you are or what you possess. He's looking at what He can do through you and what He can make of your life. You are simply an instrument and vessel of His supernatural power and ability.

The Lord is only dependent on Himself and His Word. He will never allow His purposes to be at the mercy of human ability, nor will He ever share His glory with anyone or anything.

So if you want the Lord's supernatural favor, the key is clear: "*The eyes of the LORD roam throughout the earth, so that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His*" (2 Chronicles 16:9 NASB).

Once you've fully submitted your life to God, you can confidently resist the devil, and he will have to flee from you (James 4:7). You can boldly speak the Lord's promises over your circumstances, knowing that He's a miracle-working God, forever faithful to His Word.

God is looking for obedient, submitted people who are willing to entrust Him with everything they have and everything they are.

Whatever turnaround you need from Him the key is surrendering all of your resources into His hands.

RUNNING OUT OF WINE

The wedding feast “*ran out of wine*” (John 2:3), and perhaps that’s how you’re feeling today as well. You *had* money...but it ran out. You *had* love...but now it seems to be gone. You *had* dreams...but somehow they evaporated or turned into nightmares.

At such times, it’s easy to feel frustrated or disillusioned. “I never thought life would be this way,” you complain. That’s exactly how the people at the wedding feast must have felt when they ran out of wine.

But the story isn’t over yet – and *your* story doesn’t have to be over either.

All you have to do is find out what Jesus is telling you to do. More often than not, He will tell you to give Him something you **HAVE** (like water) in order to get something you **NEED** (like wine). Sounds simple, doesn’t it?

So what do you *have* today, and what do you *need*? Like exchanging water for wine, whatever you give the Lord will be a wonderful exchange indeed. The entire new covenant Jesus enacted can be described as the great exchange: Your sins for Jesus’ righteousness... your sickness for His health... your poverty for His wealth... your weakness for His strength... your sadness for His joy... your weariness for His rest.

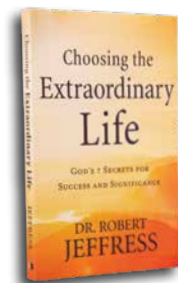
Everything changes when you step into a covenant life with God! However, those who taste the newly made wine in your life may well be like the master of the feast, who “*did not know where it came from*” (v. 9). They’ll wonder where you got such peace, joy, and zest for life even amid tough times. What a great chance to tell them about Jesus, the one who can also turn *their* water into wine.

If you’re older and have lived a lot of life, you may be tempted to feel that life has passed you by, and your best years are now behind you. But this story ends with some additional good news. Jesus didn’t just replace the old wine with something new; verse 10 of the story says He saved the **BEST** for **LAST!**

He can do the same for you when you do what He says and give Him what you have. That can be the first step in regaining your zest and rediscovering an extraordinary, joy-filled, Christian life.

David

P.S. Turn to page 28 to see the life-changing **THANK YOU GIFT** I will send you this month in appreciation for your faithful partnership.



Jesus in the War Zone

Thank you for sending a message of hope to the people of Ukraine!

God is working mightily through your seeds of faith! It has been our privilege to reach into the war-torn country of Ukraine with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Over 50,000 Ukrainian hearts received the gift of eternal life because of your faithfulness! Nearly 10,000 Russian-speaking Jews in Israel also responded to our **Love of God** video, saying “YES!” to Jesus. New believers are being connected with local fellowships where they continue to grow in their faith.

You are part of changing the world for good – for GOD! We are closing in our goal of **4.8 MILLION people saying “yes” to Jesus this year!** We can only do this with your support and prayers.

Contact us today to sow your seed of faith, so the message of hope can cover the world.



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Dream **BIG** and Live **BOLDLY**

Lives built on a faith foundation leave a lasting legacy.

Stressing his point that the only way to know God and enjoy his favor is by faith and faith alone, the writer of Hebrews then gives example after example of men and women who chose to follow God despite what human logic, common sense, and other people told them. He begins with Abel who is remembered for what he offered to God as an act of worship. Much like the three people tasked with investing their master's talents, Abel's story reminds us that we must always give our best.

By bringing up Abel, I can't help but think that the writer of Hebrews also wanted to remind us of how God redeemed a family situation that seemed beyond hope. You might recall that Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. God asked both men to present Him with an offering of their harvests. Abel was a shepherd and gave his very best, fattest lambs. A farmer who tilled the soil, Cain, however, gave an offering that did not please God. Angry and jealous of his brother, Cain then murdered Abel.

As if leaving the Garden of Eden wasn't enough, Adam and Eve lost both of their children. But their story wasn't over yet! God blessed them with another son, Seth, who went on to extend their lineage and redeem the loss of his brothers. So even when you feel like you've lost your spark of what was once an entrepreneurial fire within, it's never too late to birth a new child, a Seth, who can carry your legacy forward. If you have faith, then God will meet you there and nourish the seeds of new dreams He has placed within you and bring them to fruition. But you must not give up!

The writer of Hebrews goes on to list many other famous men and women of the Old Testament, most of whom you will remember from Sunday School. While all of these saints of the past are commendable for various reasons, we're told Noah was remembered in this Faith Hall of Fame for his work.

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the

world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith (Hebrews 11:7 NIV).

Noah, as you might remember, was asked to begin building an ark long before the rains came. He had to choose whether to trust God and take action to prepare for what was about to happen, or whether to trust his senses and the perspectives of the people around him. Stepping out in faith, Noah chose to pick up his hammer and start building something that probably made no sense to anyone else – maybe not even to himself! But Noah acted on the dream he had been given, and it saved his life. And not only his life, but also the lives of his family and ultimately the human race!

If you want God to bless your efforts and transform your innovation into an inheritance, then you must keep the faith and do the work. Building your legacy requires faith, and faith requires active participation. You must look ahead to your future and do what it takes now to secure the legacy you want to leave later. ❖



T.D. Jakes is a best-selling author, founder, and senior pastor of The Potter's House in Dallas, TX and CEO of TDJ Enterprises, LLP.

Excerpt from: *SOAR! Build Your Vision from the Ground Up* by T.D. Jakes, ©2017, FaithWords Publishing. Used by permission.



Tragedy to **TRIUMPH!**

A grieving mother displays God's love around the world.

Yvonne stared into the casket of her 14-year-old daughter Gloria and vowed to find her killer – never imagining the long road ahead. At first, Yvonne simply cried out to God for someone to protect and help innocent children like her daughter. She eventually realized God was helping her to become the answer to her own prayers.

In pursuit of justice for Gloria, Yvonne became a voice for other children silenced by murder. She fought tirelessly for safer communities. Pouring herself out for others gave meaning to Yvonne's life and earned the support of celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey and Queen Latifah, which kept Yvonne encouraged.

God used her efforts in

miraculous ways – across the world in Ghana, West Africa. There, a hungry and hopeless teen named Anthony trudged along a dusty road wondering *if* there was a God. A scrap of paper on the roadside caught his eye, so he picked it up and began reading. It was an old account of Gloria's story and Yvonne's fight for justice. Moved, Anthony took a leap of faith and wrote Yvonne asking her to be his champion and help him.

She recognized God's handiwork in the contact, saying, "God heard Anthony's cries, and said, 'Who will help him?' I like to think Gloria spoke up and said what she always told her teachers: 'My mom will do it.' God agreed and sent a page from an old magazine to Anthony to connect us."

Yvonne began sending gifts to Ghana and taught Anthony some basic safety lessons to share with children. God led Anthony to call the work the "Gloria Pointer Teen Movement." And shortly after that, he invited Yvonne to come see the work done in her daughter's name.

"I didn't know how I could do that, but I've learned that when something greater than us is going on...and we align with it, great things come to be." Yvonne stayed faithful to the work God gave her and received an award that provided the funds to go to Ghana.

The need in Ghana touched Yvonne deeply. "I asked God what He wanted me to do for these children, and I heard, 'Build a school.' I didn't know how to do that either... but God just asks you to be willing. Little is much when you put it in His hands. Step by step, God made a way." Today, Ghana has four new schools because of Yvonne's step of faith.

Despite such miracles in the three decades following her

murder, Gloria's case remained unsolved, and Yvonne often felt her efforts had little impact. One night the weariness overwhelmed her as she listened to yet another news report of missing teens. Discouraged, she flipped the TV channel and found Inspiration Ministries' Campmeeting. The message stirred her so much that she sowed a seed asking for justice for Gloria and safety for the missing girls.

A short time later, Yvonne received news she had longed for. Gloria's murderer was arrested, and the missing teens were reunited with their families.

Seeing justice administered was just another step in Yvonne's journey. She continues asking God what to do...determined to be part of the change she longs to see in the world. Whether writing books, speaking on behalf of the silenced, or just enjoying life, Yvonne confidently proclaims: "Healing is possible! It is doable, but it is a process." ❖

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ANGELS & GIANTS

THE WATCHERS & THE NEPHILIM

There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came into the daughters of men and they bore children to them (Genesis 6:4).

In this surprising **four-part docuseries**, we travel the world, unlocking archaeological, cultural, and even spiritual clues of “others” possibly existing among us.

Episode #1:

Origins

Who or what were the Watchers and Nephilim? Explore evidence from archeologists of their existence on earth – and learn why some think an unholy union of fallen angels with mortal women was meant to corrupt mankind genetically and prevent the birth of the coming Messiah.

Episode #2:

Out West

In Scripture and in historical records, there were reports of giants – even in the Americas. Then, in the 19th and 20th centuries, periodical records show giant bones being unearthed. Where are those giants now, and what does their disappearance mean for us?

Episode #3:

Epicenter of an Empire

Megalithic wonders and memorial stones baffle even the most respected academics and archaeologists. Were they unparalleled marvels of engineering? Or – as some say – supernatural fingerprints left from a time when watchers and giants roamed the earth?

Episode #4:

Predynastic Enigmas

We explore ancient Egypt! Was the Great Pyramid the pinnacle of human innovation or a silent testament to mysteries beyond time and dimension? What ancient secrets do they hold in our quest for angels and giants?



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Receive ALL God Set Aside For YOU!

Receiving your heavenly inheritance
requires powerful prayer.

You need to come to terms with the fact that there is a difference between God's *plan* and God's *personal will for your life*.

God's plan for the ages (as it pertains to worldwide events) will *always* come to pass because it does not need our cooperation, but God's personal will for your life (your family, your business, your church) does not always come to pass because it does need your cooperation. There are two ways to discover God's will:

- The *generic* will of God revealed to you from his Word.

- The specific will of God, kept in Heaven, to be revealed by the Holy Spirit and downloaded by prayer.

Neither God's generic will nor His specific will are automatic because we have an enemy that will, at all points, be hostile and put up a fight to stop the will of God.

The implementation of the will of God in the earth always results in Satan losing more ground. He does not care about the will of God; all he cares about is stopping the channel through which it will become a reality.

Prayer is the means by which the will of God becomes a reality on the earth.

The personal, specific will of God is a preplanned, custom-designed, fully loaded inheritance reserved in Heaven for you. This is so good that I want you to meditate upon it.

It is God's specific inheritance that He has for you, and it is acceptable, good, and perfect (Romans 12:2). However, it will not happen automatically because it has to be downloaded from Heaven to earth. Jesus showed this when He taught us to pray, and we see this in the life of Epaphras, who wanted the will of God to manifest in the Colossian church. Isaiah, Solomon, and Peter also expressed this truth (Isaiah 25:1; Proverbs 25:2; 1 Peter 1:4).

Aside from the generic will of God, which applies to every believer, God has a preplanned, custom-designed, and fully loaded will for you that is totally different from others. The same can be said about your church and other churches. Each is unique!

There is a plan conceived in the

If God's will is not implemented on the earth, then the will of Satan and the will of evil man will become your reality. ❖

mind of God as an inheritance for you. This inheritance will do you no good if it remains in Heaven. I don't want to die and go to Heaven to have God show me, "Here is what you could have had when you were on earth." This plan is concealed in Heaven, but it is up to you as a believer to search and draw out that plan (Proverbs 25:2). God's personal will for you in Heaven is full of every good thing,

Can you say that right now your life on earth is full of every good thing? If not, then stop wasting time in prayerlessness and start praying. You cannot forfeit your prayer responsibility.

God will not take your prayer responsibility. While Jesus is our *heavenly intercessor* (Romans 8:34) and the Holy Spirit is your *earthly intercessor* (Romans 8:26), this does not negate the fact that you have to respond to the call of prayer.

Our responsibility is clear: We must pray for the enactment of the will of God on the earth.



Glenn Arekion conveys the Word of truth in simple, yet dynamic and motivational ways. He is a gifted teacher and conference speaker.

Excerpt from *The Prayer Life of Jesus: Developing Yours by Looking at His* by Glenn Arekion, ©2018. Reprinted by permission of Faith House Publishing.

gen·er·ous



[jen-er-uhs]

1. unselfish; liberal, willing giver
2. extending a heart of grace

Synonyms: open handed, noble, unsparring

Antonyms: selfish, meager, barren

“One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.”
 – Proverbs 11:24-25 NIV

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Heaven on Earth

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: REVELATION 4

Have you ever thought about what Heaven is like? The Bible provides vivid images, but the words are often beyond our human vocabulary. How do we describe the indescribable?

One thing is sure: Heaven is filled with praise and worship. In the revelation given to John, he saw four living creatures surrounding God's throne. These creatures never stop giving Him "glory and honor and thanks" (v. 9). They *worship* Him for creating all things. They know that by His will *everything* exists. They cannot help but praise Him!

Here on earth, we can experience something of what Heaven is like. In the midst of our daily lives, we can pause to spend time in worship. Regardless of what we face, we can *focus* on the Lord, *thanking* Him for all He has done; we can praise Him for giving us life and an eternal home, sending Jesus to die for us, forgiving our sins, and taking away our burdens. We can thank Him for all His promises.

Praise changes our attitudes. We look at everything differently. Instead of thinking about *our* problems and weaknesses, we focus on God – *His* promises, *His* power, *His* plans, and *His* peace. We trust Him to provide for us and protect us.

Through worship, ask God to help you to be caught up in the kind of atmosphere that fills Heaven. Detail the reasons you are thankful. Praise Him with words and music.

Write out some specific things for which you want to praise God.

TUESDAY

November

1

“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!”... the twenty-four elders... worship Him...and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things.”

Revelation 4:8-11

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for all You have done for me. I worship You and give you all the honor and glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

As it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

1 Corinthians 2:9

What God has Prepared

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: 1 CORINTHIANS 2

Heaven is a word used by poets, songwriters, politicians, and pagans alike. In some contexts, Heaven simply means the sky above or a wonderful experience. It symbolizes ideas – even for atheists.

For others, Heaven is a code word for their vision of God or concepts like fate or the future. George Washington, for example, issued an order in September 1776, declaring the country could be saved only with "the blessing of Heaven." Benjamin Franklin told the American Constitutional Convention in June 1787 to implore "the assistance of Heaven."

Heaven is central to many civilizations. When he arrived in China in the 13th century, Marco Polo was impressed by "the City of Heaven," calling what is modern-day Hangzhou the greatest city in the world.

Heaven is not an idea but a *real* place. It is our eternal destination. Heaven is God's "holy dwelling place" (Deuteronomy 26:15). We will spend eternity there (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Jesus has prepared a place for us there (John 14:1). We should store our treasures in Heaven (Matthew 6:20). Our real citizenship is there (Philippians 3:20).

Some, like John, have seen glimpses of Heaven. But no matter what we have seen, the Bible makes clear that *nothing* can prepare us for its glories. It is *beyond our comprehension!*

Don't allow problems to dominate your mind and heart. Think about Heaven and all God has *prepared* for you! Praise Him!

What comes to your mind when you think about Heaven?

Our Hope

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: MICAH 7

Some have written many hymns. Others have written thousands. Bessie Doolittle seems to have written just one. The only known hymn she wrote was "How Cheering Is the Christian's Hope." Other than composing this hymn, little is known about her today.

In this hymn, she described how here on earth we may find ourselves toiling in a "wilderness of woe." In these moments, we should be reminded that God has prepared a "land of rest where saints with Christ will reign." There we will meet our loved ones "and never part again."

What glorious things we have to look forward to! Doolittle urged us to want these moments on earth to fly by. She advised us to pray that Jesus would "quickly come" and to realize how much we should long see Him on "that blissful shore."

This hymn was Bessie's contribution to believers, a cry that we would find hope in Jesus. We shouldn't be discouraged by trials but should rejoice in all God has promised for the future.

The Bible reminds us that Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us. He told us in His Father's house are many mansions, and He promises to come again and receive us to Himself (John 14:2-3). What a glorious hope!

What would be your message to future generations? What about *you*? Are you ready for *your* future – here and in eternity?

What message do you want to leave for future generations?

But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me.

Micah 7:7 NIV

PRAYER:

Father, thank You that in the midst of life, I can hope in You. Thank You for taking away my fears and burdens. In Jesus' name, amen.

He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

Micah 7:19

The Depths of the Sea

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: MICAH 7

Eliza Edmunds Hewitt was an invalid most of her life, the result of a serious spinal problem, but this did not weaken her faith or diminish her commitment to the Gospel. Partly because of struggles with her health, she could rejoice to realize that through faith in Jesus, she could be forgiven and set free physically, mentally, and spiritually.

In 1905, inspired by the words of the prophet Micah, she wrote a hymn that reflected this freedom, called "Into the Depths of the Sea." She invited all who trust in the Lord to realize that in His mercy, He offered us *total* freedom. This is a message to celebrate!

God's love is "an ocean, so boundless and free." He invites us to seek Him, knowing that in the "light of His face" shines the Gospel where "the shadows will flee." Momentarily, our burdens may seem heavy, but on the cross, Jesus became our ransom. Now "all is well." He broke the bonds of sin and set us free. As Hewitt realized, how wonderful it is to be forgiven. It is a message to celebrate and share with others.

The Bible tells us God offers complete forgiveness. As the Bible promises, "*As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us*" (Psalm 103:12). Don't carry your burdens any longer. Find freedom in Christ!

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these burdens to You: _____. Thank You for freeing me. Thank You for your forgiveness. In Jesus' name, amen.

What burdens do you need to release at the foot of the cross?

Indifference

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: ZEPHANIAH 1

God told the prophet Zephaniah that some people are "*complacent in their sins*." They are comfortable with their lifestyle and behavior. Even if they have heard His warnings, they don't want to change. They are indifferent to the Lord.

These people do whatever they want with no concern for the consequences. They feel God "*will do nothing to them*" to punish them.

The image is of people who are set in their ways and preoccupied with their *personal* desires and interests. In his commentary, Matthew Henry described how these people are "intoxicated with their pleasures." They are "secure and easy." They don't fear God.

These aren't just characteristics of nonbelievers. Some Christians have similar attitudes. They may go to church and say they believe, but deep down, they have their own ideas about God's Word and develop their own interpretations.

The Bible makes clear that God wants us to take His Word seriously and realize there are consequences to our actions. Obeying Him is the key to blessing, fulfillment, and wisdom.

Spend time in intimate fellowship with God. Remember David's prayer: "*Search me, O God, and know my heart...point out anything in me that offends you*" (Psalm 139:23-24). Read His Word. Pray. Be sensitive to the conviction of His Spirit. Don't allow indifference to creep into your life.

Compose a prayer asking God to search your life for sin and forgive you.

I will search with lanterns in Jerusalem's darkest corners to punish those who sit complacent in their sins. They think the LORD will do nothing to them, either good or bad.

Zephaniah 1:12 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, search my heart. Free me from anything displeasing to You. Deliver me from indifference. Ignite me with the fire of Your Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.

The great day of the LORD is near; it is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out.

Zephaniah 1:14

The Bells of Eternity

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: ZEPHANIAH 1

William Cushing spent most of his life in ministry. Born in 1823, he was forced to retire after his health declined and his wife died. Writing hymns became an outlet to express his faith and what he had learned from the Lord. He viewed these hymns as a central part of his worship.

In 1902 late in his life, he wrote a hymn called "The Bells of Eternity" that gave his perspective on life and the future. It revealed his expectations for himself and others. "The day is departing; its hours are past," he wrote. "The shadows are falling fast." And he pictured the reapers having "gathered the golden grain."

As eternity approached, it was time for each soul to be ready: "For the Lord is near; the sound of His coming is almost here." Symbolically, the bells of eternity were ringing. He certainly faced that reality in his own life.

Cushing pictured the imagery of shadows creeping over hills and valleys. It was clear that daylight was "fading away." He knew that his life soon would be over. "The day will be gone, and forevermore." But he also knew that life soon would be over for many others. His prayer was that they would be ready.

Jesus may return at any moment. He may come today or tomorrow or even years from now. Those bells ring at different times for each of us. Make sure you are ready.

PRAYER:

Father, help me be ready for Jesus's return. Forgive my sins. Thank You that I can celebrate with You throughout eternity. In Jesus' name, amen.

What do you need to do to be ready to meet Jesus face-to-face?

All the World

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: COLOSSIANS 3

Will Thompson described how the inspiration for songs came to him at "odd times." He could be at home or in a hotel, shopping or traveling. He realized God had given him a special gift, that many of these songs seemed inspired, yet he could find no publisher. He could have given up, but he instead decided to start his own publishing company to share these God-given insights.

In one of his most personal hymns, Thompson described what Jesus meant to him. He wrote, "Jesus Is All the World to Me." He is "my life, my joy, my all. He is my strength from day to day, without Him I would fall." He knew that Jesus was his friend and "made him glad when he was sad."

Born on this day in 1847, Thompson experienced many storms, but he knew that Jesus "sends the sunshine and the rain." When facing doubt, Thompson did not give up because Jesus was a friend who had been "so true." Thompson simply had to follow Jesus, knowing "He watches o'er me day and night."

Thompson could trust the Lord no matter what happened. He wrote, "I trust Him now, I'll trust Him when life's fleeting days shall end." It's a "beautiful life that has no end," and he looked forward to spending eternity with Jesus.

Ask yourself whether Jesus is all the world to you. Do not hold back. Dedicate yourself to Him.

Reflect on what all Jesus means to you today.

There is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, and free, but Christ is all, and in all.

Colossians 3:11 NASB

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, You are all the world to me. You are more important than anything else. I dedicate myself to serving You. In Your name, amen.

Seek the LORD, all you humble of the earth who have practiced His ordinances; seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will remain hidden on the day of the LORD's anger.

Zephaniah 2:3 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I humble myself before You. Help me to serve You. Use me to reach the lost with the Gospel. In Jesus' name, amen.

Do your character and faith shine for others to see clearly what you believe?

Seek the Lord

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: ZEPHANIAH 2

John Dickinson “lived one of the most extraordinary political lives of all America’s founding fathers.” Born in Maryland, he received a legal education in England. When he returned to America, he became an influential voice, writing essays distributed in America, England, and France.

However, he failed to receive the fame granted to many other founders because he opposed independence. Instead, he sought to reconcile the colonies with England and did not sign the Declaration of Independence. Yet he gained respect even among those who disagreed with him and went on to hold positions of importance in the new nation.

One reason for this respect was Dickinson’s character and his Christian faith. He urged others to base their lives on the Bible, which can “*make us wise for salvation, through faith which is in Jesus Christ*” (2 Timothy 3:15 NKJV).

He also stressed how important it was to realize that someday all of us will face God. He stated his conviction that there will be a Day of Judgment when each person will be evaluated.

Some day you will give an account of *your* life. You will be judged not according to your popularity or stand on political issues but on the condition of your heart and whether you are right with God.

Be sure you are ready. Seek the Lord. Humble yourself before Him. And serve Him with your whole heart.

Vindication

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: ZEPHANIAH 2

We can easily be influenced by the actions of others. Their words can intimidate or upset us, discourage us, and make us feel accepted or rejected. They can hurt our feelings and even impact our faith. They can challenge us and what we believe.

During the time of Zephaniah, many of God’s people had been taunted. Arrogant men and women had made fun of these believers. But God knew every insult and every word that had been said. He knew the pressures they applied on His people.

Promising to remember their words and deeds, God assured them He would “*be terrifying to them.*” He would watch out for His people. He would defend and protect them, and He would vindicate them as long as they did not compromise and stayed true to Him.

This same principle is true today. Faced with taunts and criticism, some Christians find themselves compromising their faith, or they even stop believing. No matter what others may say, the Bible encourages us not to be discouraged or afraid. Instead, we are to remain *faithful* and continue to trust in God. We must stand boldly on His Word.

God is with you in every situation. He knows what you go through. If others are arrogant, seek to stay humble. If others mock you for your faith, stay strong and bold. Never compromise. If you remain faithful, He will vindicate you, protect you, bless you, and reward you.

How can you keep your feet on the solid rock of Christ in challenging times?

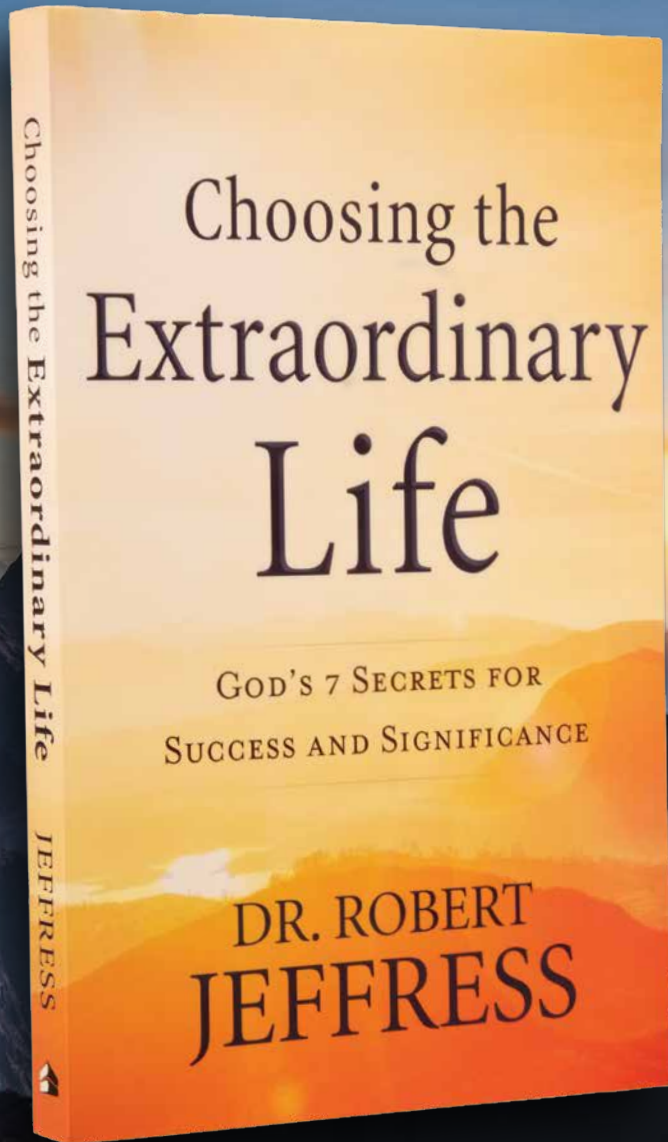
I have heard the taunting of Moab and the abusive speech [...] because they have taunted and boasted against the people of the LORD of armies. The LORD will be terrifying to them.

Zephaniah 2:8, 10-11 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, give me the boldness to stand firm. I commit my life to You. Use me to impact lives. Thank You for Your protection. In Jesus' name, amen.

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What sorrow awaits rebellious, polluted Jerusalem...It does not trust in the LORD...Its leaders are like roaring lions hunting for their victims. Its judges are like ravenous wolves... Its prophets are arrogant liars...Its priests defile the Temple.

Zephaniah 3:1-4 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, fill me anew with Your Spirit. Give me a greater sensitivity to Your Word. Help me to please You. In Jesus' name, amen.

In what ways have you rebelled against God – even subtly?

Rebellion

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: ZEPHANIAH 3

God described Jerusalem and its people as rebels who engaged in habits that corrupted their lives morally and spiritually to the prophet Zephaniah. They were determined to go their own way and were not interested in the things of God. They did not trust or seek Him.

Its leaders were particularly guilty. The political leaders were determined to take advantage of the people for their own benefit. They were like roaring lions hunting for victims. Its judges were like ravenous wolves. Its spiritual leaders were like *“arrogant liars seeking their own gain.”*

God continued to focus on moral behavior, fairness, honesty, righteousness, and a commitment to truth. Why? For He was *“still there in the city and He does no wrong...He hands down justice.”* God is consistent, for *“He does not fail”* (v. 5).

But these principles did not matter to some people. God tried to get their attention, but they refused to listen or change. God was concerned. He warned about the horrible consequences of rebellion and what happens when there is no commitment to purity and godliness but a willingness to embrace self-centered behavior.

The Bible makes it clear that there are destructive consequences for rebellion, rejecting God's Word, and going our own way. Ask God to show you if you are guilty of rebellion. Seek the clarity of His Word. Be sensitive to the leading of His Spirit. Submit your life to Him.

Open My Eyes

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: PSALM 119:9-24

It was a life-changing message for the boy Samuel. His mentor, Eli the priest, recognized that God had been trying to speak to Samuel. Eli's counsel? If Samuel sensed God speaking to him, he was to respond, *“Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening”* (1 Samuel 3:9).

This lesson became important to Clara Scott, the first woman to publish a volume of original hymns. She expressed the desires of her heart in her hymn *“Open My Eyes.”*

Through this hymn, we feel her desire to know more about God. She realized this didn't happen automatically but required *waiting* and *listening*. Her prayer was, *“Silently now I wait for Thee.”* She was ready, praying His Spirit would speak to her.

She prayed that, with newly opened eyes, she could *see* more of the truth God had prepared for her. She hoped He would reveal the key that would expose these truths and set her free. She prayed that God would open her ears and that she would *“hear voices of truth,”* confident that *“everything false will disappear.”*

She prayed that God would give her opportunities to be a witness, a vessel for the Gospel, sharing His love with others.

Apply these lessons. Spend time seeking God. Ask Him to open your eyes to deeper truths. Don't just talk to Him but *listen*. Read His Word with greater sensitivity. In stillness, seek His wisdom, direction, conviction, and deeper truths of His Word.

Write out a personalized prayer based on today's verse.

Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law.

Psalm 119:18 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, open my eyes that I might behold more of Your truths. Open my ears so that I might hear Your voice more clearly. In Jesus' name, amen.

Whenever the spirit from God was upon Saul, that David would take a harp and play it with his hand. Then Saul would become refreshed and well, and the distressing spirit would depart from him.

1 Samuel 16:23

PRAYER:

Father, direct my path. Help me to be sensitive to Your leading. Help me to apply my talents as You direct. In Jesus' name, amen.

With what diverse gifts has God blessed you for His service?

Unlimited Potential

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: 1 SAMUEL 16

Alexander Borodin became an influential doctor and chemist. Born on this day in 1833, he also founded a school of medicine for women and spent time as a military surgeon. He became better known as a composer, a key member of a group known as The Five. His wide-ranging output included symphonies, string quartets, a symphonic poem, and an opera.

Borodin reminds us it is possible to excel in many different fields. We should be open to developing whatever interests and skills God gives us.

We think, for example, of David. The Bible describes how, as a boy, he became a master at playing the harp. But that was only the beginning. He was also a poet and wrote most of the Psalms in the Bible. He was an expert shepherd and became Israel's leading general and its king. What a diverse life!

The examples of Borodin and David remind us that each of us is unique. God can bless us in many ways. For some, that may mean a single passion, one overriding interest. For others, this could mean many skills and talents or even multiple career paths.

Jesus taught that we must not hide the abilities and resources God gives us but develop those gifts (Matthew 5:14-16). Be open to His leading. Don't limit His work. Be ready to walk through whatever doors He opens for you. Let your light shine!

Only One Life

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: 1 CORINTHIANS 10

Nathan Hale became caught up with the independent spirit that stirred in the American colonies. When the War for Independence began, he joined the Continental Army. Then, in September 1776, he volunteered for a dangerous mission: spying behind British lines by posing as a teacher.

Hale secured vital information that helped the colonial cause, but he was captured on September 21. The next morning, he was hanged. His last words became famous: "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

Even though only 21 when executed, Hale knew the importance of giving his life for something that mattered. In contrast, many people go through life without being sure of their purpose.

Each of us should consider how we spend *our* lives. What do we do with the resources God gives us? Every day we have opportunities to determine our future here on earth and in the life to come through the choices we make.

Think about what you are doing with the things God has given you. Every choice results in consequences that impact your family, your future, your finances, your relationships, and your eternal destiny.

How are investing your life? When you stand before Jesus, what will you wish you had done? Are there things you will regret? Act. Make sure that everything you do right now is for the glory of God. Ask God to help you make the right choices.

How are you ensuring that you don't waste your life?

Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31 NIV

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for all You have given me. Use me for Your Kingdom. I offer myself and everything I have to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me?...My hand made all these things...I will look...at one who is humble and contrite in spirit, and who trembles at My word.

Isaiah 66:1-2 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I long to spend eternity with You. I humble myself before You. I treasure Your Word. Help me please and serve You. In Jesus' name, amen.

How can you honor and praise God specifically today?

Heaven and Our Hearts

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: ISAIAH 66

Picture Heaven in all its glory, color, and majesty. Imagine its splendor and grandeur. Hear the sounds that resonate with unimaginable beauty. It is a scene beyond our human comprehension. Yet, through His Word, God has given us glimpses of Heaven.

As John learned in the revelation he was given, it is a place filled with overwhelming praise and worship (Revelation 4:10). Heaven is also God's throne, the place from where He rules the universe. There, He sees the actions of people and nations.

As He surveys all of creation, what stands out? The Bible tells us He is not impressed with buildings or businesses or with our skills or accomplishments. No, He looks to those who are "humble and contrite of spirit," who tremble at His Word.

All believers can look forward to spending eternity with God, but if we want to please Him right now, we will humble ourselves. We will worship Him with our lives. We will seek first His Kingdom and *revere* His Word. We will long to be in His presence.

Make sure God is on the throne of your life. Be filled with His Spirit. Submit to Him your words and deeds, your mind and heart. Humble yourself before Him.

Make His Word the standard for your thoughts and actions. Let your heart be filled with thanks and worship. Be in awe of God and the glories of His creation. Trust Him.

The Kingdom of Heaven

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 3

The ministry of John began with a call to "repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Then, at the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus declared the *same* message (Matthew 4:17). Thus, this message was so important that both John and Jesus began their ministries with the same words.

It was an announcement that something amazing was happening. But to experience this Kingdom, people needed to *repent*. They needed to *change* and get ready.

This meant they needed to *examine* their lives. They had to *search* their hearts and minds and empty themselves of pride. They were required to confess their sins, humble themselves before God, and remove anything that separated them from Him, thereby making their lives pleasing to Him. God was offering them the possibility of entering a new *dimension*. He wasn't giving them a religion of rules and customs but a whole new Kingdom.

It was a life-changing message for everyone to repent so that they might experience this Kingdom. It was a Kingdom alive with the power of the Spirit and offering a new way to look at the world. Their eyes would be opened to a new dimension and their lives truly transformed.

The Kingdom of Heaven is near *you*. Repent of anything that prevents you from experiencing this Kingdom. Ask God to open your eyes, fill your heart and mind with His Word, and help you *live* in this new dimension.

Compose a prayer of repentance to prepare your heart for God's Kingdom.

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

Matthew 3:1-2 NIV

PRAYER:

Father, open my life to the reality of the Kingdom of Heaven. Help me experience the amazing things You have prepared for me. In Jesus' name, amen.

You have sown much, only to harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is not enough to become drunk...the one who earns...wages to put into a money bag full of holes.

Haggai 1:6 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, help me plug the holes in my life. I place You first and seek You in everything I do. Thank You for Your blessings. In Jesus' name, amen.

How are you practically seeking first God's Kingdom this week?

Wages That Last

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: HAGGAI 1

Imagine a person who works hard and earns a decent wage. Then, imagine this person storing these wages in a purse filled with holes. As a result, everything that had been earned would be lost. All the work was for naught.

Haggai provided this powerful picture in a passage that focused on putting God first. The example was building His house *before* building our own. This principle applies to every area. Focusing first on God is a key to receiving His blessing.

Jesus made this clear when He taught that if we seek first His Kingdom, "*All these things will be provided to you*" (Matthew 6:33). The Bible also consistently teaches the principle of tithing. This means giving God the *first* fruits of our labor (Exodus 23:19). If we give to God first, He promises to bless all our activities and to bless us.

Many people go through life with holes in their pockets. They work hard yet never seem to get ahead. They always seem to fall short. But when God has first place, He can plug the leaks and make our lives more efficient and effective. He can make our testimonies more fruitful.

The Bible teaches that God wants you to experience *abundance*. You unleash this abundance when you give Him *first* place, seek *first* His Kingdom, and sow into good soil the seeds He has given you.

With Us

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: HAGGAI 1

God had been critical of His people, particularly for having the wrong priorities. While His house was in ruins, they were dwelling in paneled houses. He urged them to realize the implications of their actions, consider their ways, and realize why they had not been experiencing His blessings. They needed to change and place Him first.

Through this exchange, they heard His voice. It must have been a *terrifying* experience for "*the people feared the LORD*" (v. 12). Many must have cowered in fear.

But the Lord sought to *assure* them of His love and compassion. They might have made mistakes, but He wanted them to know that He was still with them. He did not want them to be paralyzed with fear but to realize His goals were reconciliation, forgiveness, and blessing.

He did not want them immobile from mistakes of the past but secure in the knowledge that He was with them as they moved into the future. He wanted to correct their mistakes, so they could experience more of His blessings. He wanted them to have the right priorities.

The Bible reminds us of the prophecies that Jesus' name would be "*God with us*" (Matthew 1:23). Remember, He is with *you*. He may need to correct you when you fall short, reprimand you when you make mistakes, or teach you when you have wrong ideas. But, through every situation, He loves you, and He is with you.

Where are your priorities? Do you need to make some adjustments?

Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD's message, "I am with you, declares the LORD."

Haggai 1:13 ESV

PRAYER:

Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for being with me. Thank You for Your presence. Thank You for Your peace. Speak to me. In Your name, amen.

A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; he rages against all wise judgment.

Proverbs 18:1

Isolated

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: PROVERBS 18

The Bible warns against the dangers of being *isolated*. The Hebrew words here suggest *dividing ourselves* from others, becoming separated, or setting up barriers.

We take this kind of action for many reasons. We may be introverts who do not relish interaction with others. We may have felt wounded, hurt, betrayed, or offended by something others said or did.

These are normal responses, but the Bible reminds us that when we isolate ourselves, we actually *“rage against all wise judgment.”* The Bible uses a word that suggests being *obstinate*, foolish, or self-centered.

The Bible urges us to remember that we all are part of the body of Christ (Romans 12:5). We need each other. We each have a role to play, and we can learn much from interacting with others. When we remember the importance of humility, we realize why isolating ourselves can be poisonous and how it can be counter-productive to seek only our own desires.

We should realize that when we isolate ourselves, we may also be separating ourselves from God. We can become so focused on ourselves that we are not sensitive to His Spirit and are blind to the truths in His Word. Instead, we are to be filled with God's wisdom and to be good *listeners*.

Seek to fulfill your place in the body of Christ. Pray with others. Worship with others. As God opens the door, be ready to share your testimony.

How can you intentionally seek out others today?

Moving Forward

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: HAGGAI 2

As the Israelites returned to Jerusalem from exile, they saw the new temple. To many, this might have seemed impressive, but those who had seen Solomon's temple knew the new temple did not compare. It reminded them of all they had lost as well as their past sins and mistakes.

God wanted them to *“take courage”* and get beyond their disappointment. He wanted them to think less about their failures and more about Him and His plans for their future.

If they focused on the past, they could not move forward and fully embrace the future. While they were preoccupied with their failures, they could not focus on God. When they were negative, they could not be positive. He wanted them to be courageous and move forward boldly, with faith.

It is easy to be obsessed with our mistakes and lost opportunities or be dominated by questions. We ask ourselves, “What if?” We wonder, “If only...” While learning from the past and our mistakes, we need to have the courage and faith to move forward. As God said to His people through Haggai, He wants us to *“work,”* trusting that He will be with us.

Don't allow your past to keep hold of you. Be honest with God. If you have sinned, ask for His forgiveness. Then take courage. Boldly move forward in faith, confident that He has a great plan for you.

Write out a go-to script to recite when you're tempted to focus on the past.

Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory?...Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison? But now take courage... all you people of the land take courage... work; for I am with you.

Haggai 2:3-4 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I acknowledge my mistakes from the past. Forgive me. Help me serve You faithfully with the time and resources You have given me. I trust You. In Jesus' name, amen.

I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land...and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory.

Haggai 2:6-7 NASB

Abundance

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: HAGGAI 2

God had blessed His people abundantly. But, because of sin and disobedience, they had squandered those blessings. As they returned from exile, it would have been easy to dwell on past mistakes, remember that the riches He had given were *gone*, and worry about the nations around them.

God wanted them to understand that He *knew* their mistakes, but their waste had not diminished His resources. He reminded them, *“The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine”* (v. 8). He even would shake the nations who would provide their wealth.

As they confessed their sins and returned to Him, He was ready to bless them, so their latter glory would be *greater* than the former.

How easily we can focus on *our* mistakes and think about our limits. God continually reminds us that *He has no limits. All things* are possible with Him.

Like those ancient Israelites, we too can be forgiven when we have sinned if we return to God and ask for forgiveness. As we give our tithes and offerings, He is ready to bless us from His abundant storehouse (Malachi 3:10). If we have wasted opportunities and resources, we can be given second chances, like the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-24).

Make sure *your* heart is clean before Him. Seek to be a faithful steward of the resources He gives you. Don't limit Him, for He has no limits! Believe Him for abundant blessings! Have faith!

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for Your abundant blessings. Help me to be faithful with the resources You have given me. In Jesus' name, amen.

How are you being faithful with your God-given resources this week?

God's Wall of Fire

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: ZECHARIAH 2

The Israelites sought to build impregnable city walls for protection against thieves, invading armies, and other threats. At times, they also formed alliances with Egypt, Assyria, and other countries as insurance against attacks. They might have said they trusted God, but in reality, they often had more faith in their walls, alliances, or resources.

God wanted them to know that He was ready to protect them. They could only be secure when they trusted Him. Surrounded by His *“wall of fire,”* they were safe, regardless of what adversary they faced.

Many things can make us worried or afraid. We may experience difficulties in our jobs or our relationships. World conditions may change. Adversaries may threaten. But the Bible reminds us that we can have real peace and security as we *depend* on God.

If we are defensive and wait for problems to attack us, we can feel vulnerable and insecure. The Bible urges us to take the *offensive*, engage in spiritual warfare, stand on His Word, and confess His promises.

Trust God to surround you and your family with His wall of fire. Declare your faith in Him. Believe Him for victory, peace, protection, and provision. If you trust Him, He will *“meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:19).

Confess your faith in God. Stand on His Word! He will not fail you!

Write out your favorite scriptural promise for spiritual warfare.

Another angel...said to him...“Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of people and animals...And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,” declares the LORD, “and I will be its glory within.”

Zechariah 2:3-5 NIV

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these needs to You: _____. I praise You for victory in each situation. Thank You that I can trust in You! In Jesus' name, amen.

The LORD will be terrifying to them, for He will starve all the gods of the earth; and all the coastlands of the nations will bow down to Him, everyone from his own place.

Zephaniah 2:11 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I commit my time, talents, and treasures to You. Use me to help spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. In Jesus' name, amen.

How are you working to reach your corner of the world with the Gospel?

The Whole Earth

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: ZEPHANIAH 2

God knows every thought – even things done in secret. He hears words whispered behind closed doors, the private plans of kings and armies, the designs of every business and tycoon. Nothing escapes His attention. And He promises to respond appropriately in His time and in His way.

Those who know Him learn to trust Him and live according to His principles. Non-believers don't have this sensitivity and tend to be governed by their personal interests, not by God's Word but by their own subjective desires and private interpretations. Some are even hostile toward His people.

In his time, Zephaniah prophesied the actions of nations that surrounded Judah. God assured him that He knew those who taunted His people. He promised action *"in return for their arrogance"* (v. 10). Every person will bow down to Him.

Zephaniah spoke about the world he knew, but his prophecies also applied to the future, even to our time. Wherever there are people, they will eventually submit to the Lord. Everyone will know that He alone is God.

We witness the continuing fulfillment of this prophecy. We still see people who taunt believers and who defy God's Word.

The Bible assures us that the day is coming when *all* nations and people *"will bow down to Him."* We are called to serve Him, so everyone will know Him. Do your part to bring the Gospel to the whole world.

Unlikely Beginnings

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: ZECHARIAH 4

Niccolo Fontana Tartaglia faced incredible odds. Born into abject poverty, his father died when he was a child. When he was twelve, his hometown was attacked by foreign troops. A soldier slashed his face with a sword, leaving him deformed. Throughout his life, he stuttered, leading to constant embarrassment. He even came to be called "the stammerer."

What hope could there be for such a man? He could have looked at his obstacles and assumed nothing good could come of his life. Yet he became one of the most important mathematicians in history.

Largely self-taught, Tartaglia mastered highly complex concepts and developed insights into problems no one else could grasp.

As we face obstacles, it can be easy to feel hopeless. But the Bible gives many examples of miraculous ways God can open doors and change lives. He can use anyone dedicated to Him.

As Jesus told His disciples, operating with our human abilities, some things may not be possible. However, with God *"everything is possible"* (Mark 10:27). As the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples, these ordinary men were transformed into articulate speakers, amazing listeners, and mighty miracle workers (Acts 4).

You are special to God. He can use you in powerful ways. Commit your life to Him. Move forward with faith, confident that He is with you. Trust Him to accomplish great things through you.

How are you using your gifts and talents for God's glory currently?

Do not despise these small beginnings, for the LORD rejoices to see the work begin.

Zechariah 4:10 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, here are challenges I face: _____ . I commit them to You. Thank You for Your help. I trust in You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 NLT

Giving Thanks

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: 1 THESSALONIANS 5

The Christians in Thessalonica had many reasons to feel afraid and worried. Outnumbered, they faced a culture that could be hostile. They might have experienced persecution or been rejected by friends and family. From a human perspective, their future might have seemed bleak.

Yet Paul said that they were to be *thankful*, no matter what they faced. Paul wanted them to recognize the importance of being thankful in every situation, not just when they felt like it, when things were going well, or when they were happy and content.

This thankfulness was not an option. Paul made it clear that being thankful was God's will for their lives. He was evaluating their attitude and seeing if they trusted Him. This meant being thankful even in tricky situations.

This level of thankfulness can seem foreign to us. But the Bible tells us that God wants us to be thankful, no matter what we face.

If you want God's will for your life, start by being thankful in *everything* you do and every situation you face. This is not just wishful thinking. This is the essence of your faith.

Declare your gratefulness to God. Be thankful for all He has done for you. Be thankful for situations you face. Be thankful for the victory He will give you and the way He is working every situation for your good and His glory.

PRAYER:

Father, I am thankful for all You have done for me. Here are specific things for which I am thankful: _____ . I am so grateful. In Jesus' name, amen.

Write out your prayer of gratitude – even for life's difficulties.

Abundant Blessings

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: DEUTERONOMY 28

It became an iconic portrayal of the ideal Thanksgiving feast. Norman Rockwell's painting *Freedom from Want* pictured friends, family members, and neighbors sitting around a table, smiles on every face, enjoying fellowship as they prepared to share their Thanksgiving meal.

The idyllic scene was made in response to an address by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1941 in which he stressed four freedoms (including freedom from want).

Initially, the response to Rockwell's painting was not uniformly positive. Some, including Rockwell himself, were concerned that the imagery might not be realistic. Some complained that he stressed overabundance during wartime when many faced hardships. The objections were eventually answered.

With the support of a national magazine, the painting was exposed to the public. It struck a chord. Thousands of prints were reproduced and sold, and the public fell in love with Rockwell's portrayal.

The imagery reminds us of God's promise of abundance if His people obey Him and follow His commands (v. 1). But there is more to joy than abundant resources. This joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) that comes from fellowshiping with believers and from sharing with others.

God desires to bless us *abundantly*, but He also wants us to be *generous*, concerned with those in need, and share out of the abundance He provides.

How can you practically share out of your abundance with those in need?

The LORD will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none.

Deuteronomy 28:12 NIV

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for Your promise of blessing. Fill me with Your joy. And give me opportunities to share with others. In Jesus' name, amen.

Let us come before
His presence with
thanksgiving; let us
shout joyfully to Him
with psalms.

Psalms 95:2

Thankful Worship

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: PSALM 95

Jennie Augusta Brownscombe came from a family of immigrants. After settling in the United States, her father built a home in Pennsylvania where Jennie was born and raised. Her mother was a descendant of a passenger who came to America on the *Mayflower*.

Appreciating her heritage, Jennie became an active member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Mayflower Descendants, and other groups that celebrated American history. In particular, she was among a group of artists of the Colonial Revival Movement.

One of the iconic events in American history, particularly for immigrants like Jennie's family, was the first Thanksgiving. In 1914, she turned her attention to that celebration, painting *The First Thanksgiving*, depicting the event that united the colonists with the Indigenous people.

The painting had some historical inaccuracies, but Jennie was more interested in the symbolism and inspiration of that event. We see pilgrims and natives joined together in prayer. Around the table are men and women, young and old – hearts filled with thanksgiving.

The symbolism of that first Thanksgiving is a continual reminder of principles that are still meaningful, like the importance of prayer and showing appreciation to God. We need to realize we owe everything to Him. After all, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17). God calls us to share from the abundance He provides, help meet the needs of others, and have thankful hearts.

Write a prayer of thanks for the abundant blessings God's given you.

Prayerful and Thankful

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: COLOSSIANS 4

Many people admit they pray when facing a crisis or having needs. But Paul described a completely *different* attitude toward prayer. He spoke of a life *devoted* to *constant* prayer. He taught about being perpetually watchful, vigilant, alert, and prepared. He said we should pray with thankfulness.

Thankfulness opens our hearts to God. It changes our countenance and attitude. When we are thankful, we feel, think, and look differently. With a thankful heart, it is more difficult to be doubtful, discouraged, worried, or afraid.

Many people fill their prayers with lists of wishes. But thankfulness changes our relationship with God. It helps us take our minds off ourselves and focus on Him. We remember all He has done for us. We think about His Word and faithfulness.

Thankful prayer encourages a spirit of worship as we realize that God is our Creator. He loves and cares about us as *individuals!* Thankfulness encourages *faith*. We realize He answers prayer and hears us.

Thankfulness changes our vocabulary. If we concentrate on needs and problems, we can be worried, afraid, doubtful, or discouraged, but when we are thankful, we can be filled with expectation and confidence in God.

Think about all God has done for you. Don't take His blessings for granted. Worship Him. Seek to foster a more intimate relationship with Him. Devote yourself to a life of constant prayer, and always be thankful.

How does being grateful foster confidence in God's provision for the future?

Devote yourselves to
prayer, keeping alert in
it with an attitude of
thanksgiving.

Colossians 4:2 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I am grateful for all You have done for me. I offer my life as a living sacrifice. I worship You. In Jesus' name, amen.

I looked up again and saw a scroll flying through the air.

Zechariah 5:1 NLT

The Flying Scroll

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: ZECHARIAH 5

Zechariah saw a vision of a flying scroll that was “*about 30 feet long and 15 feet wide*” (v. 2). God revealed that this scroll symbolized His Word as it was being spread throughout the world.

Through this vision, God showed Zechariah how He deals with sin and how He purges those who sin. His Word never changes, and His standards always are true. He purifies His people and the world.

In Zechariah’s time, many ignored God’s Word. This vision is a vivid reminder that His Word is *true* in every generation – then and now. Each person has choices. We are blessed when we live according to the Word but suffer the *consequences* when we disobey or ignore it.

Remember the power of God’s Word for *you!* Every word of the Bible has the power to heal, convict of sin, change lives, impart God’s wisdom, and provide direction.

His Word is “*like fire,*” like “*a mighty hammer that smashes a rock to pieces*” (Jeremiah 23:29). It “*always produces fruit*” and always accomplishes God’s purposes (Isaiah 55:11).

Seek to live according to the principles in His Word. Read the Word. Study the Word. As you read, let the Holy Spirit remind you of truths in the Word and convict you of sin. As you face problems, *speak* the Word. Meditate on the Word. Allow its power to change you, inspire you, and direct you.

PRAYER:

Father, teach me through Your Word. Forgive my sins. Purify my heart and mind. Use me to impact others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

What has been the most impactful Scripture you've read this week?

God’s Chariots

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: ZECHARIAH 6

In Bible times, chariots were advanced military weapons, transporting armies and spreading fear. Chariots also enabled people to communicate quickly across long distances.

Chariots were central to the vision God gave to Zechariah. He saw God sending four chariots (“*four spirits of heaven*”) who stood in His presence. They were sensitive to His leading and always ready to obey His direction.

These chariots symbolized the ways God works in the world and the kinds of messengers He uses to accomplish His purposes. They were sent to “*patrol*” the earth, moving among nations, reviewing world conditions, examining how people lived, and listening to what they said.

This message cuts across time and cultures. People may think they can ignore God in their plans, but they *cannot hide* from Him. He knows their thoughts, words spoken in secret, and even their motives.

God is watching you and what you do. He has a plan for you and the world. He unfolds His plan step by step, day by day.

Ask God to help you be ready for the probing work of His Spirit. You can know that His “*chariots*” are being sent from His throne to deliver messages for *you* – messages of comfort and insight, conviction and reproof, direction and warning, protection, and guidance.

Seek to live according to His Word; always remember that you can trust Him. Nothing happens without His knowledge, and His plans are sure.

What message is the Holy Spirit impressing on you today?

Behold, four chariots were going out from between the two mountains. [...] The angel replied to me, these are the four spirits of heaven, going out after taking their stand before the LORD of all the earth. [...] They patrolled the earth.

Zechariah 6:1, 5, 7 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, help me be sensitive to Your messengers. I commit my life and resources to You. Use me to impact lives for Your Kingdom. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Your ancestors refused to listen to this message. They stubbornly turned away and put their fingers in their ears... They made their hearts as hard as stone... Since they refused to listen when I called to them, I would not listen when they called.

Zechariah 7:11-13 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, search my life. Show me if I am obeying you. Help me be sensitive to your Spirit and live according to Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.

Write a prayer asking God for another fresh start today.

Refusing to Listen

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: ZECHARIAH 7

God warned His people that they were making mistakes and would experience the consequences of their choices unless they changed. But they refused to listen. Their hearts became "as hard as stone."

Then, as God had warned, they experienced problems, the fruit of their choices. They had forgotten His warnings, though, and still expected Him to rescue them.

God wanted them to understand that when they rejected Him and refused to obey His Word, they had to experience the consequences of their choices.

This can happen to us as well. The Bible reminds us that we have choices every day. God loves us and wants to bless us and answer our prayers, but He also wants us to realize that we are *responsible* for our choices. We will reap what we sow. If we refuse to listen to Him, we will inevitably experience consequences.

This does not have to be the end of the matter. God gives us opportunities to repent, confess our mistakes, ask for forgiveness, change, and put His Word into practice. As He promised if we return to Him, He will return to us (Zechariah 1:3).

Surrender your life anew to God. Make Jesus your Lord. If you have made mistakes, be honest with God. Confess your sins. The Bible promises He will be faithful to forgive and cleanse you (1 John 1:9). He will give you a fresh start – over and over again if you ask Him to.



Jehovah Tsidkenu

The Lord Our Righteousness

Don't you just love getting a good deal or making a trade for something you need? Well, this month's name of God reveals the greatest exchange in all eternity. We give God our sin, and He gives us His righteousness! Isn't that amazing? It's also incredibly comforting when you come across verses like Leviticus 20:7, "Be holy, for I am the LORD your God."

One thing is for sure: No matter how hard we try, our efforts always fall short of His holiness. Isaiah 64:6 and Romans 3:23 confirm this eternal truth – we are not righteous on our own. We can't be. And that is all God wants us to recognize.

God's desire is both simple and profound. He asks us to consecrate (set aside) the days of our lives to Him, so He can wrap His **holiness** around us! You are precious to God, and it has always been His desire to be intimately involved in your life. Isaiah calls it a "robe

of righteousness" (Isaiah 61:10), and Paul lists it as part of the Christian's armor (Ephesians 6:14).

The gift of righteousness is the gift of GOD HIMSELF – it cost the very life of Jesus Christ. Knowing God as **Jehovah Tsidkenu** helps you understand just how much you mean to Him: He was willing to die to be with you!

Like any gift, it is not earned. It is only enjoyed. Will you welcome **Jehovah Tsidkenu** into your days so that:

- His glory can protect you
- His power can flow through you
- His wisdom can guide you
- His purposes can fulfill you

Let's rejoice over the precious gift of **Jehovah Tsidkenu** together.

I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of His righteousness (Isaiah 61:10 NIV). ❖

Be Who God Made You to Be



Trusting Him is the key to fulfilling His design.

by Ben Cerullo

Have you ever tried to make things happen in your own strength? Most everyone has made that mistake more than once – and it usually results in disaster. When I’m tempted to *make things happen*, I pause and spend some time with Jacob in the book of Genesis.

JACOB’S DESTINY

Jacob’s parents had begged God for a child, but Rebekah was confused by the painful discomfort of her pregnancy and asked God, “What is happening?” He answered: *‘Two nations are in your womb; and the separation*

of two nations has begun in your body...and the older shall serve the younger’ (Genesis 25:23 AMP).

From the time of her children’s births, Rebekah worked to fulfill the words of God – and so did Jacob. During the delivery, the second baby reached out and grabbed the heel of the first baby, who would be named Esau.

That action, coupled with God’s prophetic words, earned him the name Jacob, which means grabber or supplanter. He would spend most of the first 100 years of his life trying to fulfill God’s plans in his own strength.

JACOB’S SAVING GRACE

Not much went well for Jacob in those years. His best efforts created family tensions and heartaches. But through it all, Jacob had one special characteristic that kept him moving toward God’s destiny for him: Jacob cared deeply about the God of Isaac and Abraham.

Jacob just didn’t know God personally yet...but God knew him and never left his side. Every difficulty he encountered shaped him into the man he was meant to be and prepared him for his destiny as **Israel**, the father of God’s chosen people.

JACOB’S BLESSING

Bible scholars say Jacob was about 97 years old when he headed back to the Promised Land. Knowing he deserved his brother’s wrath, Jacob sent gifts ahead to soften Esau’s heart. After dispatching his wives and children to a safer location, Jacob found himself alone with God. It isn’t until we do business with God that our lives truly change. Scripture says Jacob wrestled with Him until daybreak – refusing to stop until he received a blessing.

It was then that God asked him, “What is your name?” In other words, *Will you own up to the way you’ve lived all these years?* And Jacob answered honestly...I am Jacob (a conniver, a grabber).

When ugly truths are exposed, the light of God immediately transforms them! God replied:

Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel [Prince of God]; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed (Genesis 32:28).

YOUR DESTINY

God knew you in your mother’s womb (Psalm 139:13; Jeremiah 1:5), and He made plans for you (Ephesians 2:10). But the plans of God require the hand of God. Will you take time to seek His face, so you can better understand His amazing plans for you? He wants to give you everything you need to fulfill your destiny. Power and provision are part of His plans – are you ready to receive them?

One final lesson from Jacob/Israel. Even after his transformational encounter, Israel, the prince of God, sometimes lived as Jacob, the grabber. That’s a danger for every one of us. Treasuring our identity in Christ is the way we protect our inheritance and live out our destiny.

Friend, always remember, you can’t walk with God and still live the way you’ve always lived. You are transformed. Do things God’s way, and get ready for His blessings! I promise you that His plans are better than your own. ❖

HATTIE'S Legacy



A little girl's 57¢ paved the way for a church, a university, and a hospital.

In the late 1800s, Dr. Russell Conwell came to pastor a tiny church in Philadelphia, PA. His inspiring words packed the church to overflowing every week. One Sunday on his way in to preach, a crying child on the street outside touched his heart. Her name was Hattie May, and she sobbed out, "I want to be in Sunday School, but there's no room for me."

The pastor carried her inside and promised that one day they would have enough money to build a church big enough for everyone. She listened attentively and took it to heart when Dr. Conwell told the congregation they would build a larger church soon.

Hattie May began saving her pennies for the church, but tragically, she soon became ill and died. Dr. Conwell was asked to preach at her funeral, and the parents brought in Hattie May's tattered red purse with its 57¢ and a crumpled note:

"This is to help build the little church bigger, so more children can go to Sunday School."

Dr. Conwell honored Hattie May's life by using her story to raise funds for what is now known as The Baptist Temple in Philadelphia, PA. This church eventually birthed Temple University and its affiliated hospital! ❖



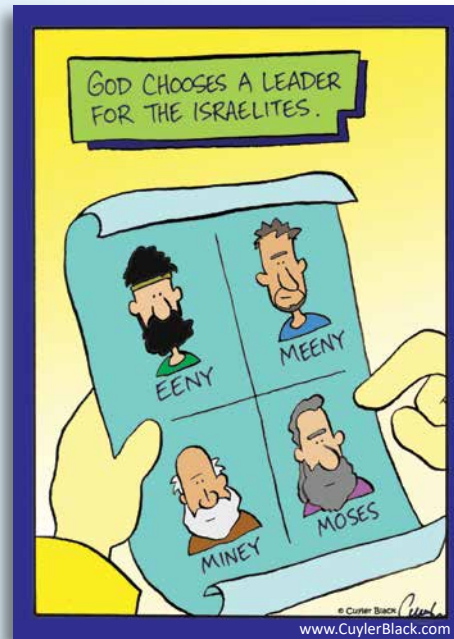
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does good, like medicine. – Proverbs 17:22



Got some clean, Christian humor you'd like to share?

Email it to: MerryHeart@inspiration.org



What flies through the jungle singing opera?

The parrots of Penzance.

"Did you hear about the dog who went to a flea circus?"

"No, what happened?"

"He stole the show."

A cannibal caught a missionary in the jungle. He said to him, "What's the best way to eat you? Boiled or roasted?"

The missionary said, "To tell you the truth, I'm a friar."

Give me a sentence with the word analyze in it.

My sister Anna lies in bed.



How did Quasimodo know the end was near?

He had a hunch.

My brother said, "I want a job as a human cannonball."

I said, "I bet you'll get fired."

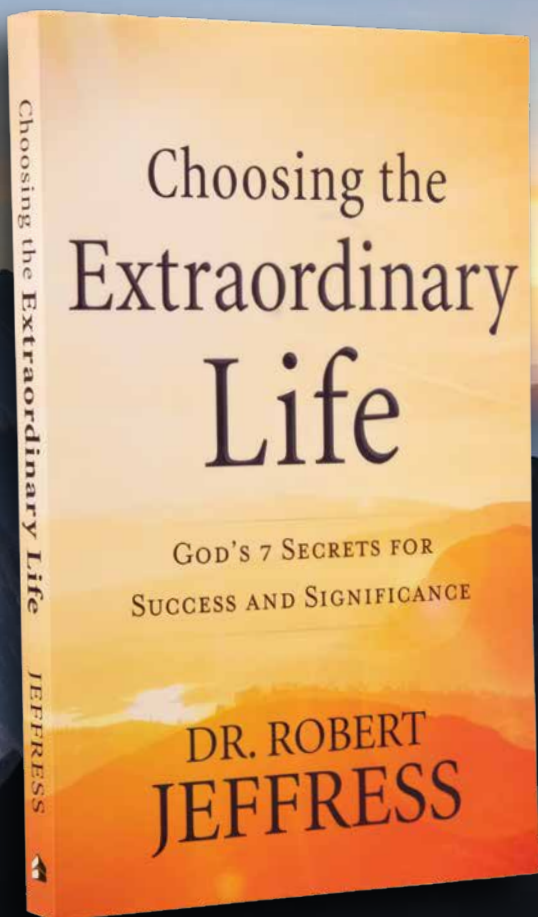
What did they call prehistoric sailing disasters?

Tyrannosaurus wrecks.

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See page 28 for details.