

Joy's Corner...

THERE'S POWER IN LONELINESS

School was a challenge for me because I was made to start school too soon. I was a late bloomer. Later, the trauma of high school, of trying and sometimes even failing, drove me into a loneliness that took years and years to recover from.

As an adult, I was in a lonely state of existing. I already was a piano teacher (and I thank God I had my students to love and that I was loved by them), but then I began to write. I became fascinated with words. In those days, I simply filled up pages of "feelings."

But I just didn't want anyone to know how I felt, so I burned up all my writing.

I put on a good front for others. Why should I bring down their emotions, just because mine were in the pits?

After a bit, I started writing seriously and saving what I wrote in my top drawer. In time, I needed a second drawer. Now I have six drawers of notes. Occasionally, I would look through them, laugh at some, toss some, and then realize—because of the SOLITUDE in my life—I was becoming a writer as well as a piano teacher.

It is my desire, dear reader, that YOU, too, can look beyond your present circumstances and write YOUR story. Think about "what went wrong," and how to change it. How to get beyond the deep gut hurt and reach for something beyond yourself, to make a different future for yourself...and also think about someone else for a change.

These texts have done wonders for me at difficult times:

Genesis 16:13 "...Thou God seest me..."

Deuteronomy 4:31 (NIV) "For the Lord your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you..."

Psalms 68:6 "God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains..."

Psalms 121:5 (NIV) "The Lord watches over you..."

Isaiah 49:16 "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands..."

Jeremiah 31:3 (NIV) "I have loved you with an everlasting love..."

God bless you, wherever you are—no matter your circumstances, God really is there for YOU.

When God Is Doing Something New, and We're Still Stuck in the Old

by Debbie McDaniel

"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." Is. 43:18-19

Sometimes...God is wanting to do something "new" and yet we're still stuck in the "old." It's hard at times. To let go. Of what's familiar, and what we know. It seems easier to stay "comfortable," to just keep going with the flow, not to mess anything up. But then "new" happens, and often sends us spiraling, on one big, long loop.

For those who like change - "new" is mostly exciting.

For those who don't like change - "new" is mostly stressful.

Your family, if you're like most, is probably a mix of those two traits.

But here's what I love about God. He thinks and works outside our own box of thinking. He doesn't always work in the ways that we would have chosen for our "new." If we had to have a "new."

He sees the big picture. He knows what He's doing. He works behind the scenes of life that unfold our every day, in the places where we can't always see or understand all the "why's."

So we can trust...that He has our best in mind. That He's got our back. He's with us right now. And He's secured our future too.

Sometimes our "new" comes out of great blessing, new opportunities. And sometimes it comes through great pain, huge loss.

People move, life happens, decisions are made, many change jobs, kids grow up, and there are times we might go through some really tough struggles. We may even start to feel cheated. Like life is unfair.

But it still breathes this truth: God is not finished with our lives yet. You're still here. And He has great purpose in all that you walk through, even in every life change and season.

Whether we recognize it or not, we're rubbing shoulders every day with people that we needed to meet in our "new," however hard that new thing may be.

We can rest in His care for us. He knows. He sees. He works in ways we don't always "get," but there's peace in knowing we don't have to try to control it all. We can let go - of the need to figure it all out, and the striving to make things happen.

We can trust Him.

Our future awaits, and there's still good around the bend. God has more in store.

Intersecting Faith & Life: If you find yourself in a new season right now, or you're struggling to find the good in changing times, be assured that God has the best in store. Choose to trust that He's working on your behalf today, even in ways you may not fully see or understand.

6 Major Differences between Christianity and the American Dream

by Felicia Alvarez

It smelled. Bad—really bad. In fact, I thought I was going to be sick. But the kids of this neighborhood in Mexico didn't seem to notice the stench surrounding them. They held our hands as we climbed up the dirt hill to their small "Bible clubhouse," made out of old garage doors. As I looked around at what these kids considered their play area and home, I saw trash. I smelled trash. It was a dirty, stinky, rotting dump. But the kids were smiling. They were... happy.

Our church group played games with them, told a Bible story, and fed them breakfast. Later, as we piled into our car to leave these precious children, we asked a little girl if she would like to take the leftover milk home. Since there was no running water or electricity in the dump, we asked her, "Do you have somewhere to keep this cool?"

"Yes," she replied excitedly. "My family would love the milk! We have a hole in the ground where we keep things cool. I can put it there." We handed her the half-full milk jug, and her face glowed as she carried it home.

I watched her walk away and then sank into the seat of our air-conditioned car, tears welling up in my eyes. Their refrigerator was a hole in the ground? How could these children be so happy in such circumstances? I replayed the day's events in my mind: their passion for learning about Christ and their genuine love of others, and I realized that their joy didn't come from possessions. Their joy came from knowing Christ. He was all they needed. The joy of the poor surprises and baffles American Christians. But why? Could it be because we believe happiness is only achieved by fulfilling the American Dream? Our culture promotes the American Dream of success and prosperity. Materialism drives our society. We think more is better, that wealth proves success. Little by little, I had begun to interpret through the lens of the American Dream. But then, as I dwelled on mission experiences, I wondered if the American Dream was biblical...

1. Jesus taught us to follow Him, not riches.

Matthew 19 tells of a rich young man who asked Jesus how to gain eternal life. Jesus said to keep the commandments, sell everything, and follow him. Saddened, the young man departed from Him. He had kept the commandments all his life, but couldn't bring himself to leave his stuff behind. Leaving it behind meant abandoning his achievements, status, and security.

His identity was in his riches. He had created an idol of his wealth.

The materialism fueled by the American Dream is consuming our society, just as it consumed the rich young ruler. It has created an idol of prosperity. Our culture praises it, adores it, and sacrifices to achieve it. However, the first commandment clearly warns that nothing should usurp God's place in our hearts. We should be able to abandon anything—everything—for Him.

2. Jesus taught us to store up treasure in heaven, not on earth.

The American Dream promotes piling up stuff up on earth—BMW's, three-car garages, and 401 (k)s. I ask myself, though, should mere accumulation of stuff be our focus? In Luke 12, Jesus shared with his disciples that the things of this earth are temporary. He encouraged them to focus on eternal matters—storing spiritual treasures rather than stockpiling stuff that would rot, rust, and mold.

Of course, living in such an affluent country, we will always have material possessions. And we should be responsible stewards of what the Lord entrusts to us, but we should not hoard things for ourselves. I doubt Jesus will say, "I wish you had purchased more vintage cars or had saved more money instead of giving it to the poor."

Our resources should go toward glorifying God and reaching people for Christ. We should not invest more

money in things stored in our garage than we do in God's work.

3. Jesus taught that poverty is not a curse.

The American Dream has taught us that poverty means failure. However, is that outlook biblical? Jesus never saw the poor as failures; He treasured them as much as He treasured the rich. Jesus saw poverty as a way to display God's work (John 9:3). The poor could never say, "Look what I bought for dinner." They could only say, "Look what the Lord miraculously provided."

Should poverty be such a frightful thing for Christians?

Do we prefer the American Dream of plenty to serving Christ with a more humble lifestyle?

4. Jesus taught us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

We stock our cupboards and forget that over 900 million of our neighbors don't have anything to eat. The American Dream teaches us to love others, but not sacrificially. Society says, "You deserve the nice stuff, the best quality that you can afford.

If you have money left over, you're free to give it out; just don't sacrifice your comfort or social status by giving away too much." Sadly, our culture teaches us that our own upward mobility and monetary dreams are more important than our neighbor's welfare.

5. Jesus calls us to a life full of persecution.

The American Dream encourages us to avoid anything uncomfortable. We deserve the best, most luxurious lifestyle that we can attain. So we sit smugly in our comfortable, even lavish, lives.

Is that I-deserve-the-best attitude biblical? Jesus didn't promise a cushy lifestyle.

In Matthew 24, He said we will suffer because of His name. Jesus applied this to all Christians, not just the ones in oppressive countries. So often, though, we rationalize His statements away, applying them to some generic group of Christians somewhere else—not us.

6. Jesus taught that the poor are blessed.

In the beatitudes (Matthew 5), Jesus shared that the poor are blessed because they often are richer in faith. Yet we rarely associate the word “blessing” with the word “poor.” In fact, the American Dream has taught us to compliment wealth more than character. You rarely hear, “He lost it all, but he’s blessed. He’s standing firm, and his family is standing with him.”

Instead, we say, “Wow. He’s so blessed. He just got a raise.” Or, “You are so blessed to have such a beautiful house.” Perhaps we, as Christians, should use the word “blessed” more thoughtfully.

Can we really reconcile the American Dream with Jesus’ messages? In Matthew 6:24, Jesus clearly states that we cannot serve both God and money. But the American Dream says we can do both—in fact, that we are entitled to both. From every street corner, computer screen, and radio station blares the same theme: You need this to be happy! You need this to succeed! YOU NEED MORE STUFF!

Our possessions hold us captive, and we soon find ourselves enslaved to the worldly desires of security, comfort, and success.

Jesus calls us to discard our idol of the American Dream, to prevent materialism from hindering our pursuit of God. Let’s not allow our stuff to obstruct God’s work.

The only way to navigate life’s twists and turns

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. Psalm 119:105

Just before the 1988 Winter Olympics, a television program aired that featured blind skiers being trained for slalom skiing. The blind skiers were paired with sighted skiers and were taught how to make right and left turns. Once they mastered that, they were taken to

the slalom slope, where their sighted partners skied beside them shouting, “Left!” and “Right!”

As they obeyed the commands, the blind skiers were able to navigate the course and cross the finish line depending solely on the skiers’ words. Throughout the course, they were left with the choice of either complete trust or catastrophe.

This is a great picture of the Christian life where this world blinds us to how we are to live. But when we, who are blinded by the world, begin to rely on God’s Word to guide our every step, we discover that whatever twist or turn life throws our way, we can trust the Bible for truth and direction.

If you want to successfully navigate the course of life, lean on God’s Word. Read it daily for guidance and truth, and let it illuminate your path. Because while we may be blinded by the world at times, God’s truth knows and sees every obstacle we’ll face!

Prayer Challenge

Pray and ask God to help you stay in His Word consistently and follow its guidance through the twists and turns of life.

Questions for Thought

If you were to make an honest assessment about how much you’re relying on God’s Word for daily living, what would you say?

AN AMAZING FACT.....

One of the earliest types of radio was called a crystal radio and did not require any power source. It got its name because it had a tiny piece of crystalline mineral, usually galena, in its electrical circuit. This enabled it to receive signals and “amplify” them in early earphones before modern diodes were invented. Today most radios amplify the incoming radio signal with a battery or other power source.

It is truly amazing to see how far and fast technology

has come in the last 90 years since radio was first introduced. We can mention not only radio and television, but sonar, radar, microwave, and cell phones. Medical technology has also made breathtaking breakthroughs in non-invasive imaging techniques such as CT and MRI (magnetic resonance imaging). But probably one of the most influential technological developments has been the personal computer.

At the heart of all of these electronic devices is again another mineral, this time not galena, but silicon. Silicon is a semi-conductor, which means it partially restricts the flow of electricity. When sandwiched into electronic “chips” in the right way, silicon can act as a variable “gate” to control the flow of electricity in response to small input voltages. This results in a very precise control of electricity that is needed in most electronic devices today, and it’s why integrated circuits (made of silicon) are essential in amplifiers of just about every kind of electronic device, including modern-day radios.

When Jesus was riding on the colt into the city, the crowd of disciples began singing and praising God. The watching Pharisees told Jesus to rebuke His disciples. But Jesus responded by saying, “I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out.” (Luke 19:40) Was this a prophecy? Today, the rocks are truly crying out. There are literally millions of tiny pieces of silicon faithfully crying out the gospel message through radio, TV, computer, and other devices.

As God’s people, let us be faithful to not only use the technology He has so miraculously provided for us near the close of Earth’s history, but to be personal, living, breathing witnesses to God’s faithfulness in our lives.

5 Signs God Is Closing a Door

Peyton Garland

While it's crucial to know when God is opening a door, allowing us to step into a new family role, church leadership position, or untapped adventure, it's

just as important to know when God is closing a door. I'm no therapist or pastor, but in my Christian walk, I have had many people ask me how to know when God is saying "no" to something. Often, I wondered the same thing. Just as I long to sprint through the doors He holds open on my behalf, I long to know which doors I'm yanking on, begging them to open, that God has closed for me.

He closes doors, just as He opens them, for our well-being. To keep us safe from evil. To prod us into a deeper walk with Him. To protect our healthy relationships and shield us from harmful ones. To thwart discontentment and set us on a path of peace. He closes doors for our good, but we still need to recognize when He has bolted the padlock on a particular season, opportunity, or choice.

This is gray territory, as there is not a single commandment or red block of New Testament scripture that spells out blatant signs God is closing a door. Yet, in my own life, as I've watched God close doors on dreams I swore would offer all I could ever want, I have discovered a few signs that He is pulling the door shut, locking it up, and throwing away the key on my behalf.

Let's check out five ways God might be shutting a door in your life:

1. Unbiblical Pursuits

Let's cut to the chase—if you are pursuing a relationship, business endeavor, or any other venture that defies God's ways, you best bet God will close that door.

I can attest to this from personal experience. In college, I met a marine who instantly stole my heart. He was everything I wanted, but, in short, he wasn't what I needed. And God knew that full well. He wasn't deceived by my boyfriend's smooth words and good looks. While I turned a willing blind eye to this man's lies and hypocritical lifestyle, God never chose rose-colored lenses to hide what He didn't want to see.

God's honest, protective nature wouldn't let me continue in a relationship where He wasn't the priority.

Of course, I spent three years yanking on that closed door, taking a jackhammer to the hinges, and doing everything I could to force it open, but the marine would never fully commit. I would get hurt over and over, discover lie after lie, until I realized this door was never worth my time, never worth my heart breaking over and over again. Finally, I dropped my tools and walked away, and a few months later, I met my now husband, who allows Jesus to lead our household.

Friend, if you are chasing anything that centers on misplaced priorities, lies, and deceptive character, God is likely slamming that door shut... for your own good.

2. Against Christian Counsel

Your pastor, Christian mentor, and other trusted, godly friends aren't all-knowing, of course. Yet, when they each offer the same wisdom and each explains that it's time to walk away from a certain pursuit, perhaps that's God's way of whispering to you, over and over again, "This one isn't for you. I have something better. Leave that door alone."

It's always fun to hear what we want to hear, but that's not why we adopt healthy, god-fearing friendships. We allow iron to sharpen iron (Proverbs 27:17), which means we enter relationships that challenge us and encourage our walk with God. We trust that these friends and mentors, while funny, adventurous, and caring, are there to offer wise counsel and point us to God, especially when we are so immersed in a particular relationship or opportunity that we have no outside perception.

Odds are, if all of your godly friends and counsel are shaking their heads no, God is using their discernment to let you know this door is shut. And there's a better one down the road.

3. Gnawing Feelings

Sometimes, there are good adventures in front of us. Stepping into them is as simple as saying yes to the engagement ring, signing on the contract's dotted line, or agreeing to pack up your bags and hop on the next Greyhound bus. They are good opportunities that offer everything you want. But you simply can't say yes; the word doesn't feel right rolling off your tongue. You want to sign on the dotted line and gain that extra promotion, but your hands are a little too shaky. Your bags are packed, but you can't seem to find a bus with open seats for weeks on end.

Simply put, the door won't open. You're standing in front of it. There are no red flags waving; you can't even find subtle yellowing lights flickering a warning. Everything looks morally right and promising, but there's this nagging feeling that what's good isn't what's best. As Job 30:17 says, "... my gnawing pains take no rest."

Many times, friend, this is the Holy Spirit tugging at your heartstrings. He's not shaming you for the decision you want to make. He doesn't think you're a fool for believing this could be a great opportunity for your life. He's simply holding you back because if you step into what's good, you could easily miss what's best. And while God does, indeed, have good things in store for our lives, He is far more concerned with us pursuing His best blessings. Sure, God's best won't always be easy and smooth sailing, but His plans will always offer contentment we wouldn't find if we settled for mediocre living.

Don't ignore that gnawing feeling in your gut, heart, and spirit. Take time to pray and consider God's voice before jumping into a "good" situation.

CONTINUED NEXT MONTH.....

Humor's Hallway...

My wife asked me how I slept last night....

I said "like a log.... I woke up in the fireplace."

I hope the weather is good tomorrow for my trip to Puerto Backyarda.

I'm getting sick of Los Livingroom.

I'm not saying I'm old, but... I think I'm approaching my "Best if used by" date.

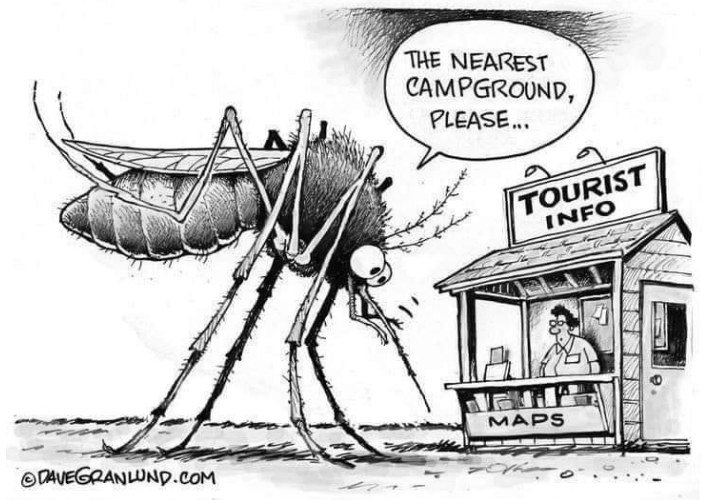
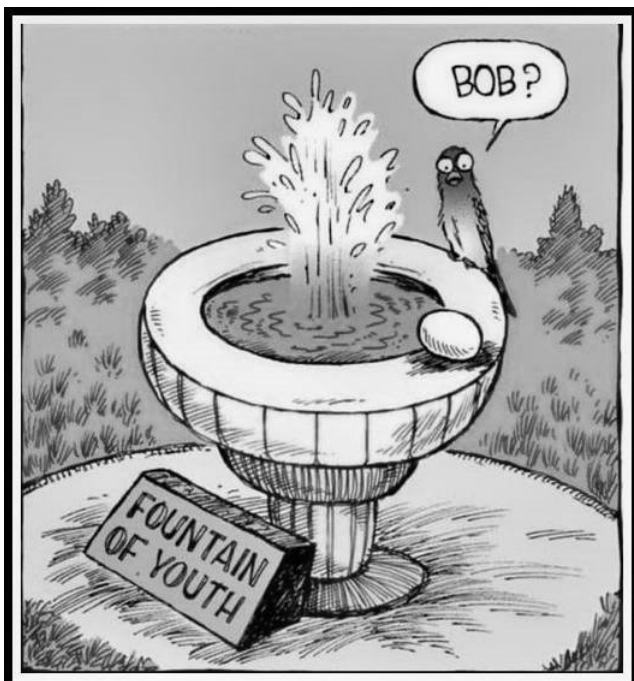
Celery... when you have that sudden urge to bite into water with hair in it.

VEGETARIAN: Old Indian word for lousy hunter.

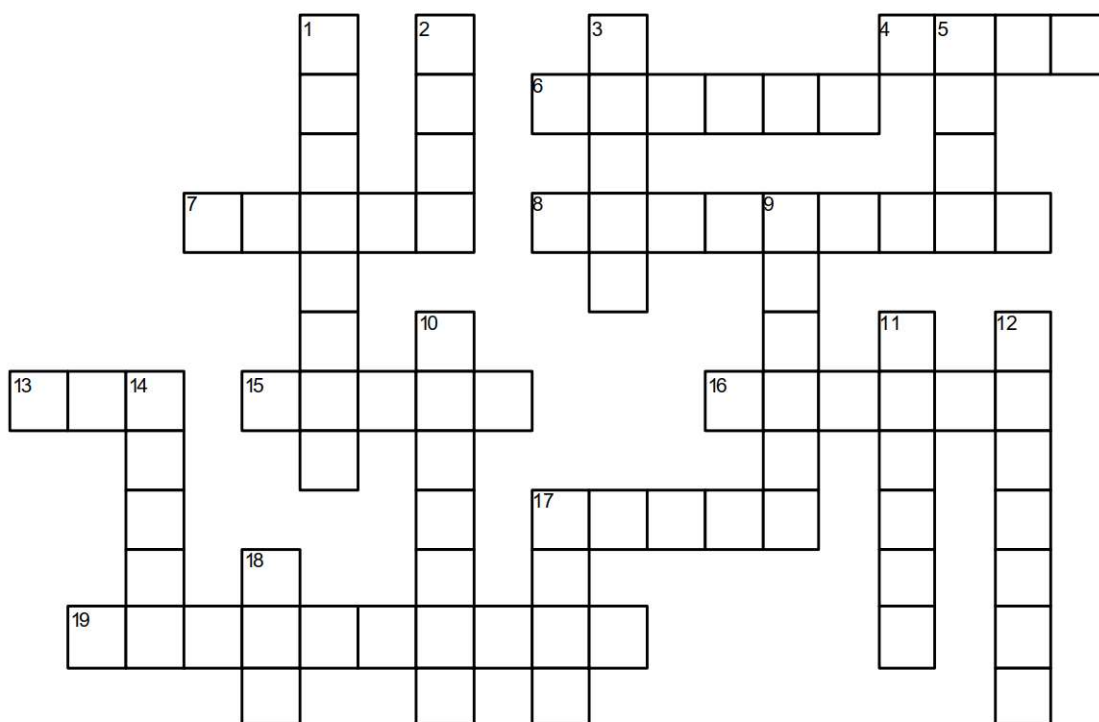
CARNIVORE: Old English word for lousy gardener.

My Grandson just made the mistake of telling me I was overdramatic. So... I just changed the WIFI password. We'll see who is overdramatic in about 5 minutes.

Be careful when digging for clams.... You might pull a mussel I'm writing a book about all the things I should be doing in my life.... It's called an oughtobiography.



2 Samuel 14 - 18

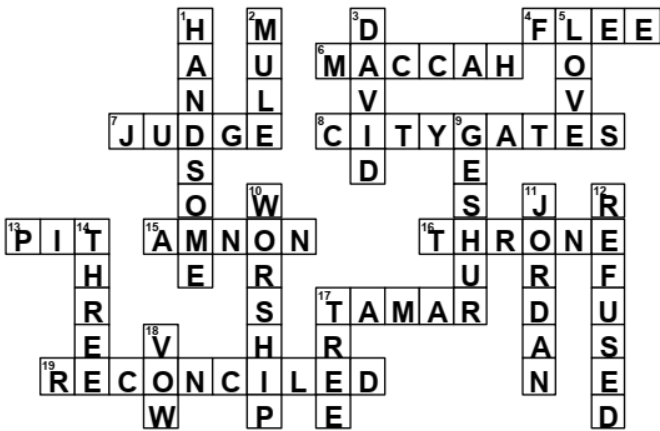
**ACROSS**

- 4 David had to _____ from his son Absalom. (2 Sa. 15:7)
- 6 Who was the mother of Absalom? (2 Sa. 3:3)
- 7 Absalom said, "If only I was appointed a _____ in the land." (2 Sa. 15:4)
- 8 Absalom would stand at the _____ and gave flattering attention to the inhabitants and Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. (2 Sa. 15:6)
- 13 When Absalom was buried, he was thrown into a big _____ in the forest and piled up a large heap of rocks over him. (2 Sa. 18:17)
- 15 Who did Absalom kill for the rape of his sister Tamar? (2 Sa. 13:14)
- 16 Later Absalom organized a plot to seize the _____ of his father David. (2 Sa. 13 - 14)
- 17 Who was Absalom's sister? (2 Sa. 13:1)
- 19 When Absalom returned to Jerusalem, he _____ to his father David. (2 Sa. 14:33)

DOWN

- 1 Absalom was praised for his _____ appearance. (2 Sa. 14:25)
- 2 What animal was Absalom riding when he hung in the branches of a large oak tree? (2 Sa. 18:9)
- 3 Who was the father of Absalom? (2 Sa. 3:3)
- 5 Even though Absalom rebelled against his father David to overthrow the reign of David, He (David) had great _____ for his son.
- 9 After Absalom fled and went to _____, he stayed there for three years. (2 Sa. 13:38)
- 10 What did Absalom tell his father he wanted to do in Hebron? (2 Sa. 15:7-8)
- 11 David and his people fled across the _____ River. (2 Sa. 17:24)
- 12 When Absalom returned to Jerusalem to see his father, David _____ to see him. (2 Sa. 14:24)
- 14 When Absalom was still hanging in the branches of an oak tree, Joab plunged _____ javelins into Absalom's heart when he was still alive. (2 Sa. 18:14)
- 17 As Absalom was fleeing from being defeated by David's army, his head was caught in the branch of the _____. (2 Sa. 18:9)
- 18 Absalom said he wanted to go to Hebron to fulfill a _____. (2 Sa. 15:7)

Puzzle answers....



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May God richly bless you as you study His word and plan for your life's journey