

Joy's Corner...

GOD'S INCREDIBLE LOVE

God is not sorry He made you. He has plans for you. Silently, tell Him your story. He can read your mind. Remember, God created your brain.

The crush of noise, the silence of solitude, the pain of your body or emotions, even honest guilt, is prison enough. In some ways, we all have a touch of prison-life. The truth is that God specializes in being close to people in jail.

No matter WHERE you are or what you have done, God really does have plans for you. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jer. 29:11, NIV).

Jesus stands at the door of your heart just waiting to hear you say, "Come in. You are welcome in my heart." JOY and PEACE walk in with Him. They accompany the presence of the Lord—no matter where you are, even if you are in prison. Jesus is GOD'S INCREDIBLE LOVE. John 3:16 (NIV) says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Whoever means YOU.

Eugene Peterson's The Message puts it this way: "This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life" (John 3:16, TM).

John 3:17 (TM) goes on to assure us: "God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again."

But, you may be wondering, "what about my crimes—and my sins? Well, just let Him into your heart. Tell him your story. He knows how

to forgive. Actually He did that already at the cross. In 1 John 1:9, His promise is this:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Jesus is ALWAYS at the door of your heart, waiting to come in. He assures us: "...lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:20).

In time, JOY will shine on your face; PEACE will grow in your heart. You really can live in His plan of LOVE right where you are, right now.

God Bless... Joy

I Am the Good Shepherd

By Emma Danzey

John 10:11 says, "I am the good shepherd"; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

Jesus is the Shepherd, and we are the sheep. He says that He lays down His life for us. This is not because we deserved it but because of His great love for us. It can be very easy to try to be independent from God. We so often get into our own mindsets in thinking we are in control and we do not need the Lord. However, this verse makes it clear that we not only need Jesus, we cannot survive without Him. We are called in Christ to be dependent as sheep are on their shepherd.

Our great Savior, Jesus, calls Himself our Good Shepherd. A shepherd's main role is to love the sheep, protect them, guide them, and care for their needs. Sheep are completely dependent upon their shepherd. Sheep are helpless without the guidance of a shepherd.

The Love of our Good Shepherd

Jesus loves us individually. We might be our own persons among many *sheep*; however, we are specially known and loved by our Good Shepherd. Scripture tells us in Matthew 18:12

that if one sheep wanders from His flock, He goes after that one and leaves the ninety-nine to rescue that particular sheep. This is the love and care that our God has for us. He values each person in His family of faith.

We live in a society where numbers matter and people are often seen as just faces in a crowd or on a social media app. Luke 15:7 says, "I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." When we ponder Jesus as our Good Shepherd, we need to remember that He truly cares about us individually. Just like a Shepherd knows His sheep by name, our God knows us each by name, thinks about us, and desires a relationship with us. This love is truly amazing.

An Enemy Is After the Flock

Matthew 7:15 says, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves."

The Bible warns us of wolves that try to disguise themselves as sheep in God's family; however, they are deceivers and false prophets. Our Good Shepherd is aware of our weaknesses and our susceptibility to deceit, so He reminds us constantly that His voice alone is the One we are to ultimately follow. There are many voices in this world; some will direct us to the Lord in Scripture, but others will twist the Word of God just like Satan did when tempting Jesus in the wilderness. It is our responsibility as sheep to always go back to what our Good Shepherd says. We can fully trust in Him and know that He has the best plan for our lives. We can confidently test the teachings of pastors, the health of a church, and the authenticity of a person with the Bible in our hands, hearts and minds. We are admonished to study to prove ourselves

worthy. We must always compare what we hear with the written word of God.

The Good Shepherd Leads Us Daily

Our Good Shepherd leads us each day. He meets our needs and walks with us. He shows us the best path. Psalm 23:2-3 says, "He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."

Jesus leads us down the best paths for His glory. This does not say the easy path or the popular path, but it is that path of blessing and the journey of walking closely with our Savior. It can be very challenging to walk the narrow path of faith and not stray from it. However, our Good Shepherd is always there to guide us. When a question comes up or we are seeking direction in life, we can pray with confidence and ask the Holy Spirit to lead us in the way that we should go. No, this may not always be the easiest route, but it will always be the best one when our Shepherd is leading.

Intersecting Faith and Life:

How is remembering that you are a sheep helpful when thinking about Jesus as your Good Shepherd? How does this parable teach you about the great love that Jesus has for you? How can you be more careful to listen to the voice of God in your life rather than the world around you?

Faithful in the Fire

By Kyle Norman

"Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods." (Daniel 3:24-25)

We would love to affirm that faith makes the problems of life disappear. How grand would it be if we could live our lives without hassle, discouragement, or frustration? Sadly, we know this is not the case. We are never removed from the frailty of life. We go through times of burden, hardship, and struggle. There may even be seasons where we feel tossed into a fiery furnace of affliction.

Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego knew about fiery afflictions...literally. These three young Hebrew men, probably no more than 20 years of age, find themselves on the wrong side of the King's ire. They are arrested and threatened with death, all because they will not violate their allegiance to God. In refusing to bow down before the golden statue, they oppose the royal edict and must suffer the consequences.

What do you think they would be feeling as they are hauled before the king? Do you think they were afraid? Do you think they felt overwhelmed, discouraged, or downcast? And what about when they were bound and brought to the furnace? Do you think they questioned if that would be the end? Have you ever felt this way, or been asked those questions, in your life? Have you ever felt tossed into the fire?

Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego, as faithful as they are, are not kept from the fiery furnace. There is no grand display of divine might that protects them from this experience. The three men are arrested. They are bound. They are tossed into a furnace.

I'm sorry to say this, but there may be times when we are asked to face a fiery furnace. There may be a season where life seems to turn against us, and where everything that we once knew feels ripped away. Israel was not immune from this. The disciples were not immune from this. Jesus was not immune from this. If we think that our faith in God means

that such things don't occur in our lives, then we will be left feeling condemned when these things befall us. We will feel that our fear, or our discouragement, somehow betrays the fullness of our faith. This is not true.

The truth upon which we stand is not that God shelters us from all struggles, but that God's love remains with us during those times; God is present within the flames. Our times of hardship and struggle speak not of God's absence. In fact, these are the times when God draws incredibly near. True, Shadrack Meshack and Abednego aren't saved from entering the furnace, but they are surrounded by the flames. It was in that oven, and not a moment before, that they meet the presence of the one who appears like the son of God. God dwells amid the fire. God incarnates God's self in the flames. And it is because God is present in that place, that the power of God extends over the three men, and the flames have no power over them.

God's response to the fiery furnaces of our lives isn't to destroy them, but to dwell in them. This is what is shown in this beloved tale in the book of Daniel. More importantly, this is what is revealed on the cross. The cross testifies that there is no place where the loving power of God will not be present. The cross, which is the most extreme example of the world's rejection, is transformed into the place where Christ's relentless love is disclosed.

Intersecting Faith and Life:

It hurts when we find ourselves in the fire. It is scary and dark. Yet we are not alone. Christ enters that darkness and bears that hurt. There is no place in our lives where Christ is not present. Jesus promises us; "Surely, I am with you to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

If you find yourself overwhelmed by struggles or stresses, simply repeat this truth. In fact, try inserting your name at the start of the verse as a way to hear this declaration spoken directly over you.

NEW EVERY MORNING

It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.... It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. LAM 3:22-26.

Diane, a perfectionist and a teacher pleaser, stood before her teacher, crying as if her heart would break. Why? Because she had completely spoiled the paper that she was to write her assignment on. "Teacher, may I have a new page?" she wailed. Her compassionate teacher comforted her and gave her a new sheet. A happy smile now lit up Diane's face. Every day our compassionate Saviour gives us a new page. "His compassions fail not. They are new every morning." So daily we can "both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." Although we should constantly be growing in our relationship with Christ and should not fall into sin again and again, nearly every day in our Christian walk we consciously or unconsciously fail in some way. How thankful we can be for the good news that Jesus gives us not only one new page, but a new page and a new opportunity every day. A woman came into me in deep distress. She felt she had committed a sin so terrible that God could not forgive her. I assured her that her concern itself clearly indicated that she had not committed the unpardonable sin. We read some of the wonderful promises of Scripture and prayed together. The Saviour gave her a new page. She left our home with a new hope and a realization that her salvation rested in the hands of a compassionate and loving Saviour.

Paul reminds us: "If a man is in Christ he becomes a new person altogether" (2 Cor. 5:17). As long as a person remains "in Christ"--- In close touch with Jesus--- this promise is renewed every day. United with Jesus through faith each day of the year, you can claim the promise that "the past is finished and gone, everything has become fresh and new"(verse 17). Each day Jesus will give you a new page. D.R. Guild

An Amazing Fact:

Black skimmers are graceful black and white gull-like birds. They get the name "skimmer" because the birds love to fly just above the surface of the water, with their lower bill skimming through the water for fish. Skimmers have elliptical-shaped eye pupils that allow them to tolerate the bright sun on the sand or shell surfaces where they love to rest and nest. In 1968 a flock of 38 black skimmers decided to set up housekeeping on a large Dow Chemical parking lot made of oyster shells. The Texas chemical company was pleased to host the birds, hoping it would improve their environmental public image. Then one day someone removed the shells from the parking lot and the colony of black skimmers moved elsewhere. Removing the bird's habitat caused a great deal of negative publicity for the chemical company, so Dow immediately ordered that the oyster shell parking lot be restored.

But the skimmers didn't return. Dow consulted a wildlife expert who recommended placing a pair of plastic decoys on the shell surface. It worked! Soon, a few live skimmers noticed what appeared to be two of their own kind enjoying this new real estate, so they joined them. Eventually the lot was again covered with nesting skimmers. When left to themselves skimmers will always face away from the wind. But when the decoys were placed with their head facing into the wind, the real skimmers copied them. And when the decoys were placed very close together and off by themselves, the real skimmers began their nesting rituals.

The Bible teaches that in the last days many will be led astray by false Christs and false prophets. How can we tell the difference? We will not be deceived if we know the real from the fake. That comes from studying the Bible very carefully. When we are daily in the Word of God looking at Jesus, we will know the true from the false. Paul's advice to Timothy sums it up well: "But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things

which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them” (2 Timothy 3:13, 14).

The key to winning life’s challenges

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matthew 6:33

Years ago in Tennessee, two men were competing in an all-day wood chopping competition. The first man worked very hard, stopping only for a brief lunch break. The second man had a leisurely lunch and took several breaks during the day. At the end of the day, the first man was infuriated to see he had lost the competition even though he had worked so hard.

“I don’t get it,” he said. “Every time I looked at you, you were resting. But you chopped more wood than I did. How did that happen?!”

“One thing you didn’t notice,” the winner said, “is that every time I sat down, I was sharpening my axe.”

Most people today underestimate the power of taking time to sharpen their axe. They want to have good relationships with others and to do something great with their lives. But they forget that those things take a sharpened axe... character produced by taking time to seek God.

Don’t neglect your axe. Spend time daily sharpening yourself in God’s Word. Connect with God regularly through heartfelt prayer. When you take time to sharpen your axe, you’ll be ready to face any challenge life throws your way as you maximize your Kingdom impact!

Prayer Challenge

Pray and ask God to help you commit daily time toward sharpening yourself to be used for the Kingdom and face any challenge that comes your way.

5 Lessons We Can Learn from Abraham

Matthew Pryor

The dramatic story of God testing Abraham’s faith is ripe with lessons we can apply to our lives. Those lessons are easy to miss because the premise of the story is so compelling.

Let’s hit rewind and see what God can teach us. We pick up the story in Genesis 22:2:

“Then God said, ‘Take your son, your only son, whom you love— Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.’”

Stop! Hold on a second. I’m not one to question God, but I’m pretty sure I would have responded with something like, “Ha ha ha. Good one God. It sounded like you said you wanted me to sacrifice ‘Isaac.’ That’s hilarious. You’re too much. But for real, how many goats? One? Two? Twelve?”

God doesn’t mince words. God knew just how precious Isaac was to Abraham, having had to wait until he was 100 years old to have him. It would be far less of a test of Abraham’s faith if the sacrifice didn’t mean much.

LESSON #1: The greater the cost, the greater the sacrifice.

The story continues in verse 3.

“Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac.”

Two things strike me about this. The first is that Abraham had all night and morning to be terrified about the coming events... and to talk himself out of it.

Ever had a deadline that you dreaded? Root canal. Sending your child off to college. A firing. At least with those events, you knew the reason behind them. Abraham was given no explanation. He was just told to do it, plain and simple.

LESSON #2: Sacrifice doesn’t always come with answers.

Secondly, notice also that verse 3 says, “Early the next morning...” There was no delay. Not dilly-dallying or procrastination. Pure... unwavering... obedience.

LESSON #3: Godly obedience should be swift.

Next, we read in verse 5 that Abraham tells his servants:

"Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

Notice that Abraham says "we" will come back to you after worshiping, meaning he *and* Isaac. Abraham believed the Lord would salvage the situation.

We see this faith displayed again when Isaac asks his dad where the lamb was:

"Abraham answered, 'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.'"—

Genesis 22:8

LESSON #4: Obedience both relies on God for strength and expects God to deliver.

The altar got built but still no lamb. Now if I'm Abraham, I'm facing a crisis of belief. *Where's the help? Where's the provision? Where's the relief?*

Not Abraham. He continues in obedience:

"He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son."—

Genesis 22:9-10

Imagine the anguish and horror in that moment. Envision reconciling the internal conflict of sacrificing someone you love for someone you love more. Your knife is raised high and ready to cut short the life of someone so important to you.

Of course, we know the story doesn't end there. God interrupts:

"Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide."—Genesis 22:12-14 (NIV)

God came through, *just as Abraham had expected*. Not only did God provide, He then rewarded Abraham's obedience. Abraham would have "descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore."

LESSON #5: What God requires, He provides.

As a fitness trainer, I see people reluctant to make sacrifices necessary to reach their goals: junk food, too much exercise, not enough exercise, free time, TV, alcohol, comfort zones, caffeine, accountability, and so on.

The Real Definition of 'Wealth'

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." -Matthew 10:29-31

According to a survey of the general American public, most perceive the status of "rich" to be attained when a person has between \$1 million and \$5 million in assets. But here's the catch: In that same survey, only 45% of people whose assets ranged from \$1 million to \$5 million actually considered themselves to be wealthy. Financial well-being is almost always judged by our status compared to the status of others around us. Think about it... Someone who makes \$50,000 yearly might not consider himself wealthy. Yet compared to all the people who've ever lived on earth, he would be in the top 5% of wage earners ever.

So what's the attitude behind this phenomenon? It's the fleshly tendency of allowing our perception of others to determine our perception of ourselves. In other words, we're prone to comparing and competing, assigning ourselves value based upon how we see others.

But the Bible tells us that, in Christ, our value is of infinite worth. In fact, we're so valued that God sent His Son, Jesus, to die in our place so that we can spend eternity with Him!

So the next time you're tempted to compare yourself with others, remember what God says about you in John 3:16: your value is so great that He sent Jesus to die to purchase you for eternity!

Humor's Hallway...



The anesthesiologist offered to use knock out gas or just whack me over the head with a canoe paddle. It was an ether/oar situation.

I went to the paint store to get thinner. It didn't work.

Gym Class,,,

Coach: Okay class, today we are going to play a game. When I say a fruit, you run to the right side of the court. And when I say a color, you run to the left side of the court. got it?

Class: Got it.

Coach: Okay... Ready, set... **ORANGE!**

Kids today want an iPad. When I was a kid I wanted a 64 pack of Crayolas with a built-in sharpener.

Got my DNA kit results back today. Found out I'm 86% Danish.... Danish butter cookie from the Costco region of Deli. The other 14% is from Bavaria.... Bavarian Creme!

Decaf coffee is **DEPRESSO**.

Don't let anyone call you average... That's just mean.

Bad puns.... That's how eye roll.

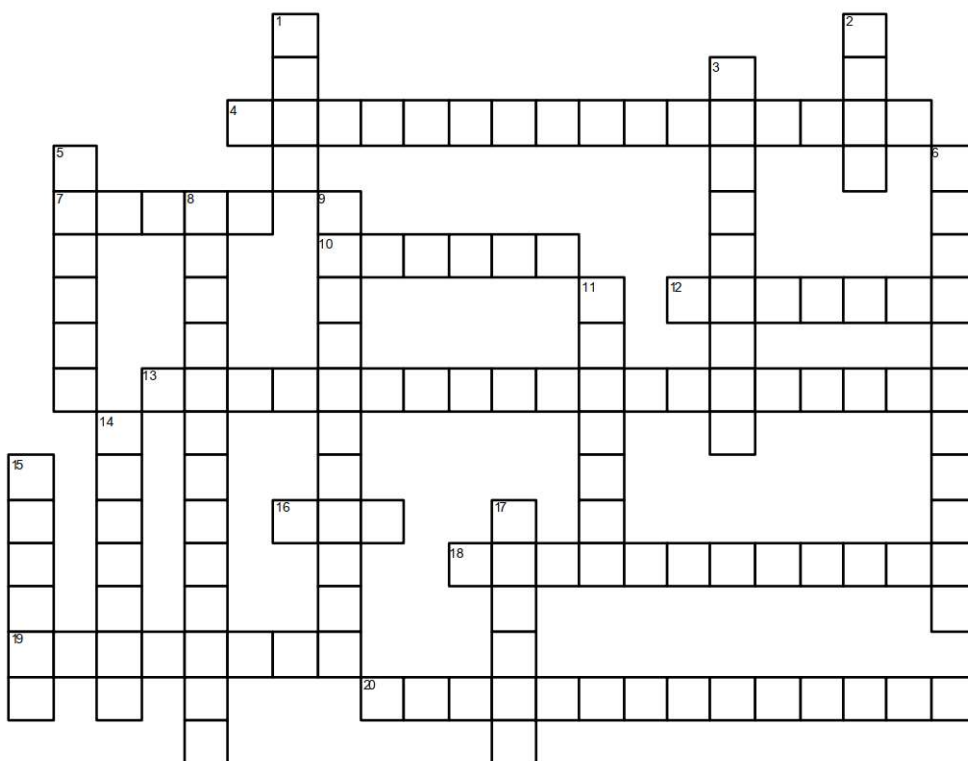
I named my tablet titanic. It's syncing now.

I asked my Granddaughter to fetch me a newspaper. She laughed and said "Grandpa, you are so old school, here, just use my phone." So, I slammed her phone against the wall and killed that big hairy spider!

What did the bald man say when he received a comb for a birthday present?
"Thanks.... I'll never part with it!"

DAVID AS KING

2 Samuel 1 - 9



ACROSS

- 4 Not only did David make Jerusalem the religious center of Israel, he brought to the city the _____ . (2 Sa. 6:1-19) four words
- 7 David's seed (descendants) would build a _____ for the Lord's name. (2 Sa. 7:13)
- 10 When the remaining descendants of Saul was vanquished, the elders of all Israel came to David and anointed him of all of _____. (2 Sa. 3 - 5:5)
- 12 When David conquered Jerusalem from the Jebusites, he made this city his home and the _____ city of Israel. (2 Sa. 5:6-10)
- 13 When David brought the ark of the covenant to the tabernacle (tent), what did he offer before the Lord, blessing the people in the name of the Lord of hosts? (2 Sa. 6:17-18) two words
- 16 After David was anointed king over the house of Israel, what broke out between those loyal to David and the remaining descendants of Saul? (2 Sa. 3 - 5:5)
- 18 How many years did David reign over a united Israel and Judah? (2 Sa. 5:4) two words
- 19 After David and his family went to Hebron, the men of Judah _____ David king over the house of Judah. (2 Sa. 2:1, 4)
- 20 When David brought the ark of the covenant to the tabernacle (tent), what did he offer before the Lord, blessing the people in the name of the Lord of hosts? (2 Sa. 6:17-18) two words

DOWN

- 1 After Saul's death, who directed David to go to Hebron? (2 Sa. 2:1, 4)
- 2 When David brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, where was it placed? (2 Sa. 6:17)
- 3 David's first military victory after becoming king over the united tribes was to capture what city? (2 Sa. 5:6-13)
- 5 How old was David when he became king? (2 Sa. 5:4)
- 6 Saul, Jonathan, and two other sons of Saul were eventually killed in a battle with the _____. (1 Sa. 31)
- 8 Many of the Psalms were written by David. What is David called? (2 Sa. 23:1) three words
- 9 When David conquered Jerusalem, he took up residence in this fortress and named this city the _____. (2 Sa. 5:9) three words
- 11 David charged Solomon to walk in the ways of the Lord God, to keep his statutes, commandments, judgments, and testimonies written in the law of Moses that he might _____. (1 Ki. 2:1-3)
- 14 To whom did David give the plans for the temple and said the Lord did not allow him to build the house? (1 Chron. 22:8)
- 15 Through what prophet did the Lord promise He would set up David's seed (descendants) after him and establish his kingdom? (2 Sa. 7:12)
- 17 Through David's descendants the Lord would establish the _____ of his kingdom forever. (2 Sa. 7:13)

Puzzle answers....

DAVID AS KING
2 Samuel 1 - 9



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or comments you may have.
Editor Al

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