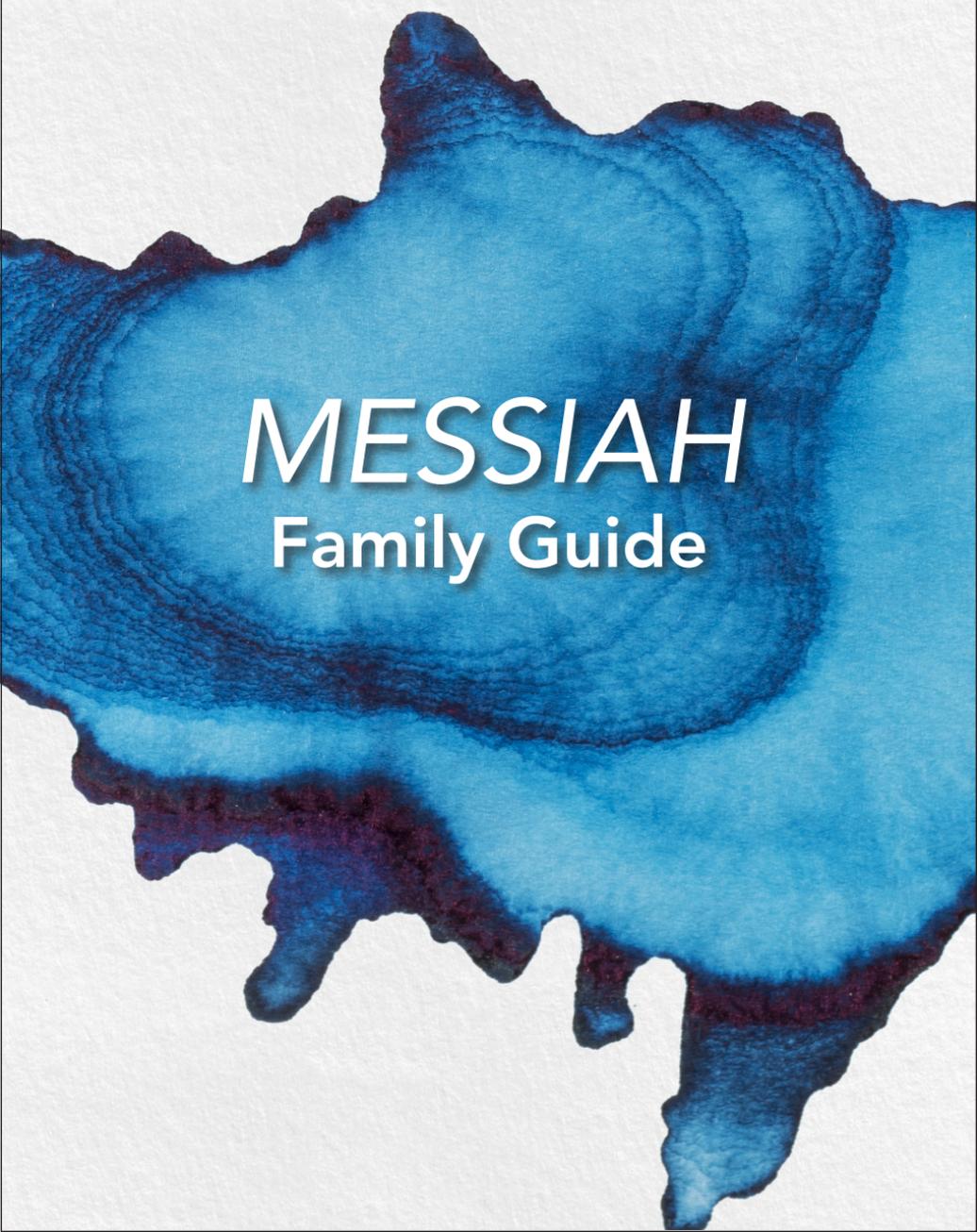


I M M E R S E

The **Bible** Reading Experience™



*MESSIAH*  
Family Guide

—— Welcome to ——

# I M M E R S E

## The Bible Reading Experience

Leading a family is arguably one of the most challenging tasks a person can undertake. And since families are the core unit in the church, their growth and development directly impacts the health of the communities where they serve. The *Immerse: Messiah Family Reading Guide* is a resource designed to assist parents, guardians, and other family leaders in guiding their families through the transformative Immerse experience.

### Planning Your Family Experience

This family guide is essentially an abridged version of *Immerse: Messiah*. So it's an excellent way for young readers in your family to participate in the Immerse experience without becoming overwhelmed. The readings are shorter than the readings in *Immerse: Messiah* and are always drawn from within a single day's reading. This helps everyone in the family to stay together, whether reading from the family guide or the complete *Messiah* volume.

Each daily Bible reading in the family guide is introduced by a short paragraph to orient young readers to what they are about to read. This paragraph will also help to connect the individual daily Scripture passages to the big story revealed in the whole Bible. (This is an excellent tool for helping you guide your family discussions.)

The family guide readings end with a feature called Thinking Together, created especially for young readers. These provide reflective statements and questions to help them think more deeply about the Scriptures they

have read. (Thinking Together is also useful for guiding your family discussions.)

The readings in the family guide are intended primarily for children in grades 4 to 8. Older children may be better suited for reading the full text of *Immerse: Messiah*. (These age suggestions are only provided as a guideline. You know what is most appropriate for your children.)

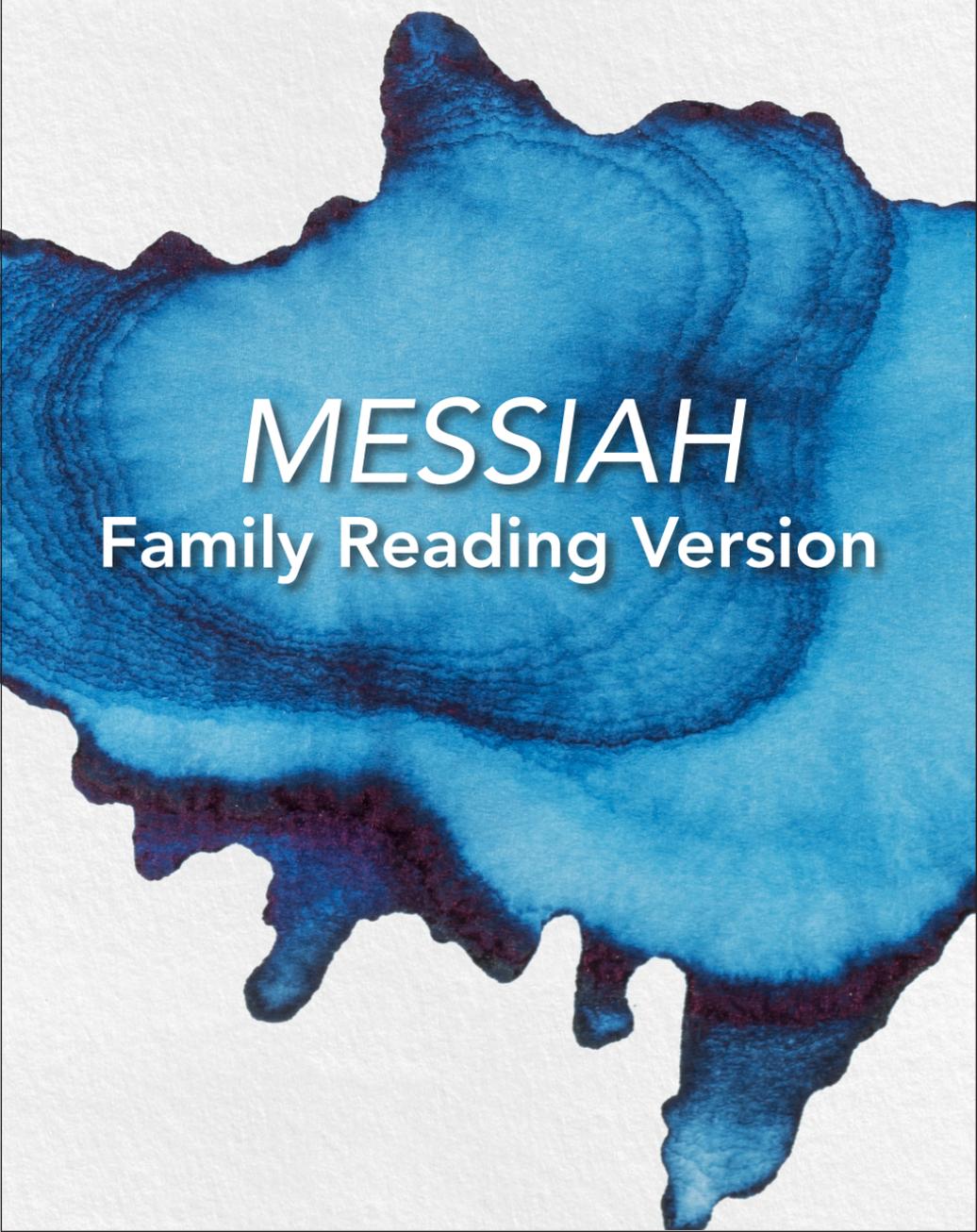
Sometimes the best way to get everyone on the same page is to read something together aloud. If your family enjoys reading aloud together on a regular basis, that may be the most natural way for you to use the family reading guide. For families that haven't tried this, you may want to experiment with it by reading from this guide. Begin each daily reading with the introductory paragraph to give context, followed immediately by the daily Scripture passage. Then the Thinking Together feature can help you lead a family discussion.

And don't forget about the audio and video resources that are available at [ImmerseBible.com](http://ImmerseBible.com). These small group tools could be just what your family needs to stay engaged in the Immerse experience.

Enjoy your journey into Scripture with your family. We hope and pray that this family resource will help you and your family to experience God's word together.

I M M E R S E

The **Bible** Reading Experience™



*MESSIAH*  
Family Reading Version

## DAY 1

# Hope Is on the Way

(from *Messiah*, pages 3-6)

*The Bible is the story of Israel—the people of God. God had chosen their ancestor Abraham and his family to be the channel he would use to heal and restore the whole world. Through the great prophet Moses God had given Israel his instructions for good living. Through the great King David God had promised to send a new king—the Messiah—who would save Israel and the world. Now the story of the coming of the Messiah is ready to begin. And it all starts with the birth of God’s messenger, named John, to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord.*



Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write an accurate account for you, most honorable Theophilus, so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught.



When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God’s eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord’s commandments and regulations. They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old.

One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying.

While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. Zechariah was shaken and

overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly."

Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I be sure this will happen? I'm an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years."

Then the angel said, "I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news! But now, since you didn't believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time."

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah to come out of the sanctuary, wondering why he was taking so long. When he finally did come out, he couldn't speak to them. Then they realized from his gestures and his silence that he must have seen a vision in the sanctuary.

When Zechariah's week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home. Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. "How kind the Lord is!" she exclaimed. "He has taken away my disgrace of having no children." . . .

When it was time for Elizabeth's baby to be born, she gave birth to a son. And when her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had been very merciful to her, everyone rejoiced with her.

When the baby was eight days old, they all came for the circumcision ceremony. They wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father. But Elizabeth said, "No! His name is John!"

"What?" they exclaimed. "There is no one in all your family by that name." So they used gestures to ask the baby's father what he wanted to name him. He motioned for a writing tablet, and to everyone's surprise he wrote, "His name is John." Instantly Zechariah could speak again, and he began praising God.

Awe fell upon the whole neighborhood, and the news of what had happened spread throughout the Judean hills. Everyone who heard about it reflected on these events and asked, "What will this child turn out to be?" For the hand of the Lord was surely upon him in a special way.

Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy:

“Praise the Lord, the God of Israel,  
because he has visited and redeemed his people.  
He has sent us a mighty Savior  
from the royal line of his servant David,  
just as he promised  
through his holy prophets long ago.  
Now we will be saved from our enemies  
and from all who hate us.  
He has been merciful to our ancestors  
by remembering his sacred covenant—  
the covenant he swore with an oath  
to our ancestor Abraham.  
We have been rescued from our enemies  
so we can serve God without fear,  
in holiness and righteousness  
for as long as we live.

“And you, my little son,  
will be called the prophet of the Most High,  
because you will prepare the way for the Lord.  
You will tell his people how to find salvation  
through forgiveness of their sins.  
Because of God’s tender mercy,  
the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us,  
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
and to guide us to the path of peace.”

John grew up and became strong in spirit. And he lived in the wilderness until he began his public ministry to Israel.

—*from the Gospel of Luke*

**THINKING TOGETHER:**

Zechariah sings about God keeping his promise to send Israel a new king. This was a very old promise made many years earlier to King David. How important do you think it is to keep promises? Have you ever had to wait a long time for someone to keep a promise?

**DAY 2****A New Beginning for the World**

(from *Messiah*, pages 13-14)

*So John the Baptizer came and called the people of Israel to return to God with their whole hearts. He baptized people in the Jordan River, showing them that God was going to do something new for his people. Then Jesus came and was baptized by John, too. He was filled with the power of God's Holy Spirit. God's enemy Satan came and tested Jesus, trying to turn him away from his important work. But Jesus was faithful to God his Father. God had sent his Son into the world to become King of all things and to defeat the power of wrongdoing and death in God's world. Jesus came to bring us back to God and restore the power of life.*



Then Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit's power. Reports about him spread quickly through the whole region. He taught regularly in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written:

“The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,  
for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,  
that the blind will see,  
that the oppressed will be set free,  
and that the time of the LORD's favor has come.”

He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. Then he began to speak to them. “The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!”

Everyone spoke well of him and was amazed by the gracious words that came from his lips. “How can this be?” they asked. “Isn't this Joseph's son?”

Then he said, “You will undoubtedly quote me this proverb: ‘Physician, heal yourself’—meaning, ‘Do miracles here in your hometown like those

you did in Capernaum.’ But I tell you the truth, no prophet is accepted in his own hometown.

“Certainly there were many needy widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the heavens were closed for three and a half years, and a severe famine devastated the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them. He was sent instead to a foreigner—a widow of Zarephath in the land of Sidon. And many in Israel had leprosy in the time of the prophet Elisha, but the only one healed was Naaman, a Syrian.”

When they heard this, the people in the synagogue were furious. Jumping up, they mobbed him and forced him to the edge of the hill on which the town was built. They intended to push him over the cliff, but he passed right through the crowd and went on his way.

Then Jesus went to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and taught there in the synagogue every Sabbath day. There, too, the people were amazed at his teaching, for he spoke with authority.

Once when he was in the synagogue, a man possessed by a demon—an evil spirit—cried out, shouting, “Go away! Why are you interfering with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

But Jesus reprimanded him. “Be quiet! Come out of the man,” he ordered. At that, the demon threw the man to the floor as the crowd watched; then it came out of him without hurting him further.

Amazed, the people exclaimed, “What authority and power this man’s words possess! Even evil spirits obey him, and they flee at his command!” The news about Jesus spread through every village in the entire region.

After leaving the synagogue that day, Jesus went to Simon’s home, where he found Simon’s mother-in-law very sick with a high fever. “Please heal her,” everyone begged. Standing at her bedside, he rebuked the fever, and it left her. And she got up at once and prepared a meal for them.

As the sun went down that evening, people throughout the village brought sick family members to Jesus. No matter what their diseases were, the touch of his hand healed every one. Many were possessed by demons; and the demons came out at his command, shouting, “You are the Son of God!” But because they knew he was the Messiah, he rebuked them and refused to let them speak.

Early the next morning Jesus went out to an isolated place. The crowds searched everywhere for him, and when they finally found him, they begged him not to leave them. But he replied, “I must preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God in other towns, too, because that is why

I was sent.” So he continued to travel around, preaching in synagogues throughout Judea.

—*from the Gospel of Luke*

**THINKING TOGETHER:**

Jesus started attracting crowds right away. Why do you think that happened? What message did Jesus bring to the people of Israel? What kind of work did Jesus come to do?

**DAY 3**  
**God’s Kingdom  
and What Really Matters**  
(from *Messiah*, pages 34-35)

*The work of Jesus was to forgive people and to heal them, to deliver them from the power of God’s enemy. This is what it meant for God’s Kingdom to come to earth. Jesus told his disciples that he had to travel to Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel. In Jerusalem, Jesus would fulfill his purpose for coming into our world. Along the way, Jesus also taught God’s people about what it means to follow God with all their hearts.*



Then someone called from the crowd, “Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father’s estate with me.”

Jesus replied, “Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?” Then he said, “Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own.”

Then he told them a story: “A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. He said to himself, ‘What should I do? I don’t have room for all my crops.’ Then he said, ‘I know! I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I’ll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I’ll sit back and say to myself, “My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!”’

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?’

“Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.”

Then, turning to his disciples, Jesus said, “That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food to eat or enough clothes to wear. For life is more than food, and your body more than clothing. Look at the ravens. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for God feeds them. And you are far more valuable to him than any birds! Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? And if worry can’t accomplish a little thing like that, what’s the use of worrying over bigger things?

“Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?

“And don’t be concerned about what to eat and what to drink. Don’t worry about such things. These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need.

“So don’t be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom.

“Sell your possessions and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! And the purses of heaven never get old or develop holes. Your treasure will be safe; no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.”

—*from the Gospel of Luke*

**THINKING TOGETHER:**

Money is a very important thing in people’s lives. It can be very hard when someone doesn’t have enough money for things like food and clothes. But trying to get too much money can also ruin people’s lives. What did Jesus say about money?

## DAY 4

## The Never-Ending Love of God

(from *Messiah*, pages 39-41)

*By the time Jesus was born into the story of Israel, the people had been suffering for a long time. Other nations had been ruling over them and treating them badly. Israel had a history of struggling to obey God. Instead of showing other nations what it meant to follow God well, the people of Israel often failed to love and worship God alone. And they failed to love and care for each other. This raised questions: Had God abandoned them? Did God still love them? Would God be faithful to his covenant promises to them? So Jesus told some stories about how God's love would never fail, no matter how far Israel wandered away from God.*



Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them!

So Jesus told them this story: “If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’ In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven’t strayed away!

“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Won’t she light a lamp and sweep the entire house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors and say, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost coin.’ In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God’s angels when even one sinner repents.”

To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: “A man had two sons. The younger son told his father, ‘I want my share of your estate now before you die.’ So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.

“A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. About the

time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.

“When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.’”

“So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’

“But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.

“Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, and he asked one of the servants what was going on. ‘Your brother is back,’ he was told, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.’

“The older brother was angry and wouldn’t go in. His father came out and begged him, but he replied, ‘All these years I’ve slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!’

“His father said to him, ‘Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!’”

—*from the Gospel of Luke*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

How did the actions of the younger son hurt his father? Did the father show anger when the son finally came back home? How did the actions of the older son hurt his father? What does this story tell us about our Father God?

**DAY 5****The Surprising Victory of Jesus**

(from *Messiah*, pages 58-59)

*When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, his conflict with Israel's religious leaders came to its climax. Even as Jesus taught the people in the Temple, one of his own closest followers had a secret meeting with the leaders to betray him. After eating a special meal with his disciples, Jesus was arrested and brought to trial. He was handed over to the Romans and then killed on a cross. All the followers of Jesus thought for sure that this was the end not only of Jesus but also of his entire movement. Jesus, however, had other plans. It's just that no one saw it coming.*



That same day two of Jesus' followers were walking to the village of Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem. As they walked along they were talking about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus himself suddenly came and began walking with them. But God kept them from recognizing him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?"

They stopped short, sadness written across their faces. Then one of them, Cleopas, replied, "You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn't heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days."

"What things?" Jesus asked.

"The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth," they said. "He was a prophet who did powerful miracles, and he was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God and all the people. But our leading priests and other religious leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. We had hoped he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel. This all happened three days ago.

"Then some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive! Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, his body was gone, just as the women had said."

Then Jesus said to them, "You foolish people! You find it so hard to

believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. Wasn't it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?" Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus acted as if he were going on, but they begged him, "Stay the night with us, since it is getting late." So he went home with them. As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared!

They said to each other, "Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?" And within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven disciples and the others who had gathered with them, who said, "The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter."

Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road, and how they had recognized him as he was breaking the bread.

And just as they were telling about it, Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them. "Peace be with you," he said. But the whole group was startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost!

"Why are you frightened?" he asked. "Why are your hearts filled with doubt? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do." As he spoke, he showed them his hands and his feet.

Still they stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder. Then he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he ate it as they watched.

Then he said, "When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said, "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day. It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: 'There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.' You are witnesses of all these things.

"And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven."

Then Jesus led them to Bethany, and lifting his hands to heaven, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up to heaven. So they worshiped him and then returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy. And they spent all of their time in the Temple, praising God.

—*from the Gospel of Luke*

**THINKING TOGETHER:**

Have you ever wanted something so much you could hardly believe it when it actually happened? What were the disciples supposed to do now that Jesus had risen from the dead?

**DAY 6**

**The Message of Jesus for All People**

(from *Messiah*, pages 63-64)

*After his resurrection from the dead, Jesus spent forty days with his disciples, teaching them about the coming of God's reign into the world. After this time, he told his followers to go to all nations with this message of life and renewal. He promised to send the Holy Spirit to them to give them power and direction for this new mission. On the day of Pentecost, a great festival in Israel, the Spirit came to all the believers who were gathered together, and they began to speak in the languages of other nations. The apostles then used this opportunity to tell people the Good News about Jesus—that he had risen from the dead and was now Israel's true King and the world's true Lord.*



Then Peter stepped forward with the eleven other apostles and shouted to the crowd, "Listen carefully, all of you, fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem! Make no mistake about this. These people are not drunk, as some of you are assuming. Nine o'clock in the morning is much too early for that. No, what you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel:

'In the last days,' God says,  
'I will pour out my Spirit upon all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy.  
Your young men will see visions,  
and your old men will dream dreams.  
In those days I will pour out my Spirit  
even on my servants—men and women alike—  
and they will prophesy.  
And I will cause wonders in the heavens above  
and signs on the earth below—  
blood and fire and clouds of smoke.  
The sun will become dark,  
and the moon will turn blood red  
before that great and glorious day of the LORD arrives.  
But everyone who calls on the name of the LORD  
will be saved.’

“People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him. But God released him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life, for death could not keep him in its grip. King David said this about him:

‘I see that the LORD is always with me.  
I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me.  
No wonder my heart is glad,  
and my tongue shouts his praises!  
My body rests in hope.  
For you will not leave my soul among the dead  
or allow your Holy One to rot in the grave.  
You have shown me the way of life,  
and you will fill me with the joy of your presence.’

“Dear brothers, think about this! You can be sure that the patriarch David wasn’t referring to himself, for he died and was buried, and his tomb is still here among us. But he was a prophet, and he knew God had promised with an oath that one of David’s own descendants would sit on his throne. David was looking into the future and speaking of the Messiah’s resurrection. He was saying that God would not leave him among the dead or allow his body to rot in the grave.

“God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this. Now he is exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven, at God’s right hand. And the Father, as he had promised, gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out

upon us, just as you see and hear today. For David himself never ascended into heaven, yet he said,

“The LORD said to my Lord,  
“Sit in the place of honor at my right hand  
until I humble your enemies,  
making them a footstool under your feet.””

“So let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!”

Peter’s words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?”

Peter replied, “Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away—all who have been called by the Lord our God.” Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation!”

Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer.

A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord’s Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

—*from the book of Acts*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

Once the people had heard the Good News about Jesus being the King, what were they supposed to do? Describe what it was like when the followers of Jesus met together.

## DAY 7

## An Enemy of Jesus Turns Around

(from *Messiah*, pages 73-77)

*The new message about King Jesus spread quickly in and around Jerusalem. But some people immediately opposed it and began to fight against it. The early church leader Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke powerfully in public about the story of Jesus. This made many Jewish leaders angry, and they began to debate and argue with him. Then Stephen was arrested and brought before the high council to defend himself. Stephen reminded them of Israel's history of disobedience to God and then reported to them his vision of Jesus standing in the place of honor in God's presence. This was more than the Jewish leaders could take.*



Then they put their hands over their ears and began shouting. They rushed at him and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul.

As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He fell to his knees, shouting, "Lord, don't charge them with this sin!" And with that, he died.

Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen.

A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria. (Some devout men came and buried Stephen with great mourning.) But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison. . . .

Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.

As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"

"Who are you, lord?" Saul asked.

And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

The men with Saul stood speechless, for they heard the sound of someone's voice but saw no one! Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink.

Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord!" he replied.

The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right now. I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him so he can see again."

"But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name."

But the Lord said, "Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake."

So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. Afterward he ate some food and regained his strength.

Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days. And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is indeed the Son of God!"

All who heard him were amazed. "Isn't this the same man who caused such devastation among Jesus' followers in Jerusalem?" they asked. "And didn't he come here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests?"

Saul's preaching became more and more powerful, and the Jews in Damascus couldn't refute his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. After a while some of the Jews plotted together to kill him. They were watching for him day and night at the city gate so they could murder him, but Saul

was told about their plot. So during the night, some of the other believers lowered him in a large basket through an opening in the city wall.

When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to meet with the believers, but they were all afraid of him. They did not believe he had truly become a believer! Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles and told them how Saul had seen the Lord on the way to Damascus and how the Lord had spoken to Saul. He also told them that Saul had preached boldly in the name of Jesus in Damascus.

So Saul stayed with the apostles and went all around Jerusalem with them, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. He debated with some Greek-speaking Jews, but they tried to murder him. When the believers heard about this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus, his hometown.

The church then had peace throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and it became stronger as the believers lived in the fear of the Lord. And with the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, it also grew in numbers.

—*from the book of Acts*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

Have you ever completely changed your mind about something? What did you do differently when that happened? Why did Jesus appear to Saul? What did he want him to do?

## **DAY 8**

# The Dangerous Work of Following Jesus

(from *Messiah*, pages 89-91)

*After his encounter with the risen Jesus, Saul changed his name to Paul and dedicated his life to spreading the Good News about King Jesus to all peoples. He traveled from city to city speaking to everyone he could about what God had done through Jesus and how they could become followers of the new King. God had chosen Paul to lead the movement bringing this message of forgiveness and salvation throughout the Roman Empire.*



One day as we were going down to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit that enabled her to tell the future. She earned a lot of money for her masters by telling fortunes. She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, and they have come to tell you how to be saved."

This went on day after day until Paul got so exasperated that he turned and said to the demon within her, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And instantly it left her.

Her masters' hopes of wealth were now shattered, so they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities at the marketplace. "The whole city is in an uproar because of these Jews!" they shouted to the city officials. "They are teaching customs that are illegal for us Romans to practice."

A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn't escape. So the jailer put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks.

Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself. But Paul shouted to him, "Stop! Don't kill yourself! We are all here!"

The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household." And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. He brought them into his house and set a meal before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God.

The next morning the city officials sent the police to tell the jailer, "Let those men go!" So the jailer told Paul, "The city officials have said you and Silas are free to leave. Go in peace."

But Paul replied, "They have publicly beaten us without a trial and put

us in prison—and we are Roman citizens. So now they want us to leave secretly? Certainly not! Let them come themselves to release us!”

When the police reported this, the city officials were alarmed to learn that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. So they came to the jail and apologized to them. Then they brought them out and begged them to leave the city. When Paul and Silas left the prison, they returned to the home of Lydia. There they met with the believers and encouraged them once more. Then they left town.

Paul and Silas then traveled through the towns of Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As was Paul’s custom, he went to the synagogue service, and for three Sabbaths in a row he used the Scriptures to reason with the people. He explained the prophecies and proved that the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead. He said, “This Jesus I’m telling you about is the Messiah.” Some of the Jews who listened were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with many God-fearing Greek men and quite a few prominent women.

But some of the Jews were jealous, so they gathered some troublemakers from the marketplace to form a mob and start a riot. They attacked the home of Jason, searching for Paul and Silas so they could drag them out to the crowd. Not finding them there, they dragged out Jason and some of the other believers instead and took them before the city council. “Paul and Silas have caused trouble all over the world,” they shouted, “and now they are here disturbing our city, too. And Jason has welcomed them into his home. They are all guilty of treason against Caesar, for they profess allegiance to another king, named Jesus.”

The people of the city, as well as the city council, were thrown into turmoil by these reports. So the officials forced Jason and the other believers to post bond, and then they released them.

That very night the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea. When they arrived there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul’s message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth. As a result, many Jews believed, as did many of the prominent Greek women and men.

But when some Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God in Berea, they went there and stirred up trouble. The believers acted at once, sending Paul on to the coast, while Silas and Timothy remained behind. Those escorting Paul went with him all the way to Athens; then they returned to Berea with instructions for Silas and Timothy to hurry and join him.

—*from the book of Acts*

**THINKING TOGETHER:**

Because the gospel announces that there is a new King—Jesus!—it can be controversial and even get believers in trouble. Many Christians around the world continue to be persecuted and arrested today. Pray for them right now.

**DAY 9****God's Protection at Sea**

(from *Messiah*, pages 107-110)

*Paul's entire life began to follow the pattern of Jesus' own life. Jesus came from a position of honor and power in heaven but then humbled himself to serve God's plan to save the world. He was even willing to give up his own life on a Roman cross of torture and death. And Jesus told his followers that they must also be willing to give up their own rights and privileges for the sake of serving others. So we see Paul suffering continually as he worked hard to spread the Good News. He was arrested and then sent on the long sea voyage to Rome to stand trial.*



We had several days of slow sailing, and after great difficulty we finally neared Cnidus. But the wind was against us, so we sailed across to Crete and along the sheltered coast of the island, past the cape of Salmone. We struggled along the coast with great difficulty and finally arrived at Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea. We had lost a lot of time. The weather was becoming dangerous for sea travel because it was so late in the fall, and Paul spoke to the ship's officers about it.

"Men," he said, "I believe there is trouble ahead if we go on—shipwreck, loss of cargo, and danger to our lives as well." But the officer in charge of the prisoners listened more to the ship's captain and the owner than to Paul. And since Fair Havens was an exposed harbor—a poor place to spend the winter—most of the crew wanted to go on to Phoenix, farther up the coast of Crete, and spend the winter there. Phoenix was a good harbor with only a southwest and northwest exposure.

When a light wind began blowing from the south, the sailors thought they could make it. So they pulled up anchor and sailed close to the

shore of Crete. But the weather changed abruptly, and a wind of typhoon strength (called a “northeaster”) burst across the island and blew us out to sea. The sailors couldn’t turn the ship into the wind, so they gave up and let it run before the gale.

We sailed along the sheltered side of a small island named Cauda, where with great difficulty we hoisted aboard the lifeboat being towed behind us. Then the sailors bound ropes around the hull of the ship to strengthen it. They were afraid of being driven across to the sandbars of Syrtis off the African coast, so they lowered the sea anchor to slow the ship and were driven before the wind.

The next day, as gale-force winds continued to batter the ship, the crew began throwing the cargo overboard. The following day they even took some of the ship’s gear and threw it overboard. The terrible storm raged for many days, blotting out the sun and the stars, until at last all hope was gone.

No one had eaten for a long time. Finally, Paul called the crew together and said, “Men, you should have listened to me in the first place and not left Crete. You would have avoided all this damage and loss. But take courage! None of you will lose your lives, even though the ship will go down. For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me, and he said, ‘Don’t be afraid, Paul, for you will surely stand trial before Caesar! What’s more, God in his goodness has granted safety to everyone sailing with you.’ So take courage! For I believe God. It will be just as he said. But we will be shipwrecked on an island.”

About midnight on the fourteenth night of the storm, as we were being driven across the Sea of Adria, the sailors sensed land was near. They dropped a weighted line and found that the water was 120 feet deep. But a little later they measured again and found it was only 90 feet deep. At this rate they were afraid we would soon be driven against the rocks along the shore, so they threw out four anchors from the back of the ship and prayed for daylight.

Then the sailors tried to abandon the ship; they lowered the lifeboat as though they were going to put out anchors from the front of the ship. But Paul said to the commanding officer and the soldiers, “You will all die unless the sailors stay aboard.” So the soldiers cut the ropes to the lifeboat and let it drift away.

Just as day was dawning, Paul urged everyone to eat. “You have been so worried that you haven’t touched food for two weeks,” he said. “Please eat something now for your own good. For not a hair of your heads will perish.” Then he took some bread, gave thanks to God before them all, and broke off a piece and ate it. Then everyone was encouraged and began to

eat—all 276 of us who were on board. After eating, the crew lightened the ship further by throwing the cargo of wheat overboard.

When morning dawned, they didn't recognize the coastline, but they saw a bay with a beach and wondered if they could get to shore by running the ship aground. So they cut off the anchors and left them in the sea. Then they lowered the rudders, raised the foresail, and headed toward shore. But they hit a shoal and ran the ship aground too soon. The bow of the ship stuck fast, while the stern was repeatedly smashed by the force of the waves and began to break apart.

The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners to make sure they didn't swim ashore and escape. But the commanding officer wanted to spare Paul, so he didn't let them carry out their plan. Then he ordered all who could swim to jump overboard first and make for land. The others held on to planks or debris from the broken ship. So everyone escaped safely to shore. . . .

It was three months after the shipwreck that we set sail on another ship that had wintered at the island—an Alexandrian ship with the twin gods as its figurehead. Our first stop was Syracuse, where we stayed three days. From there we sailed across to Rhegium. A day later a south wind began blowing, so the following day we sailed up the coast to Puteoli. There we found some believers, who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome.

The brothers and sisters in Rome had heard we were coming, and they came to meet us at the Forum on the Appian Way. Others joined us at The Three Taverns. When Paul saw them, he was encouraged and thanked God.

When we arrived in Rome, Paul was permitted to have his own private lodging, though he was guarded by a soldier. . . .

For the next two years, Paul lived in Rome at his own expense. He welcomed all who visited him, boldly proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. And no one tried to stop him.

—*from the book of Acts*

**THINKING TOGETHER:**

The circumstances of life can sometimes cause us real trouble. But God can work things out for our good in the long term even when things go badly in the short term. And he is always right there with us, no matter what happens. What can you do to keep your hope alive even when things go terribly wrong?

**DAY 10****When Jesus Returns as King**

(from *Messiah*, pages 113, 116-117)

*As you've read, one of the cities where Paul declared his allegiance to King Jesus was Thessalonica (in modern-day Greece). People there had joyfully received this message and had become followers of Jesus. But Paul had moved on to preach the Good News in other cities, and the Thessalonians still had much to learn about their new faith. So Paul began to communicate with them by sending letters of encouragement and instruction. In this way, sending letters to young churches became a standard part of Paul's leadership and ministry as Christianity grew and spread.*



This letter is from Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

We are writing to the church in Thessalonica, to you who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

May God give you grace and peace.



We always thank God for all of you and pray for you constantly. As we pray to our God and Father about you, we think of your faithful work, your loving deeds, and the enduring hope you have because of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We know, dear brothers and sisters, that God loves you and has chosen you to be his own people. For when we brought you the Good News, it was not only with words but also with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance that what we said was true. And you know of our concern for you from the way we lived when we were with you. So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you. In this way, you imitated both us and the Lord. As a result, you have become an example to all the believers in Greece—throughout both Macedonia and Achaia.

And now the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, even beyond Macedonia and Achaia, for wherever we go we find people telling us about your faith in God. We don't need to tell them about it, for they keep talking about the wonderful welcome you gave us and how you turned away from idols to serve the living and true God. And they speak of how you are looking forward to the coming of God's Son from heaven—Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the one who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgment. . . .

And now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died.

We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever. So encourage each other with these words. . . .

Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in the Lord's work. They work hard among you and give you spiritual guidance. Show them great respect and wholehearted love because of their work. And live peacefully with each other.

Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone.

See that no one pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to all people.

Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

Do not stifle the Holy Spirit. Do not scoff at prophecies, but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good. Stay away from every kind of evil.

Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. God will make this happen, for he who calls you is faithful.

+ + +

Dear brothers and sisters, pray for us.

Greet all the brothers and sisters with a sacred kiss.

I command you in the name of the Lord to read this letter to all the brothers and sisters.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

—*from Paul's first letter to the  
Thessalonians*

**THINKING TOGETHER:**

Have you ever thought about what it will be like when King Jesus returns to us? Imagine yourself with a brand new body that can never be hurt again and that never gets sick. Imagine all the people who have loved and followed Jesus being together for the first time. Imagine the whole world made new, without all the wrongdoing, pain, and brokenness.

**DAY 11**

**The Deeper Wisdom of God**

(from *Messiah*, pages 127-129)

*The people of the ancient city of Corinth knew all about the philosophy and wisdom of the world. The teachings of the famous philosopher Plato were well-known there. So Paul wrote the believers in this city a letter telling them that even while dying on a cross Jesus was winning a surprising victory. This shows us the deeper wisdom that God has. He is saving the world through the death and resurrection of this Jewish King who is now the world's highest ruler.*

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This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and from our brother Sosthenes.

I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus, just as he did for all people everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.

May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

+ + +

I always thank my God for you and for the gracious gifts he has given you, now that you belong to Christ Jesus. Through him, God has enriched your church in every way—with all of your eloquent words and all of your knowledge. This confirms that what I told you about Christ is true. Now you have every spiritual gift you need as you eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will keep you strong to the end so that you will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. God will do this, for he is faithful to do what he says, and he has invited you into partnership with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

+

I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose. For some members of Chloe's household have told me about your quarrels, my dear brothers and sisters. Some of you are saying, "I am a follower of Paul." Others are saying, "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Peter," or "I follow only Christ."

Has Christ been divided into factions? Was I, Paul, crucified for you? Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not! I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, for now no one can say they were baptized in my name. (Oh yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas, but I don't remember baptizing anyone else.) For Christ didn't send me to baptize, but to preach the Good News—and not with clever speech, for fear that the cross of Christ would lose its power.

The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. As the Scriptures say,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise  
and discard the intelligence of the intelligent."

So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe. It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom. So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense.

But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.

Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.

God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin. Therefore, as the Scriptures say, "If you want to boast, boast only about the LORD."

When I first came to you, dear brothers and sisters, I didn't use lofty words and impressive wisdom to tell you God's secret plan. For I decided that while I was with you I would forget everything except Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified. I came to you in weakness—timid and trembling. And my message and my preaching were very plain. Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit. I did this so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God.

Yet when I am among mature believers, I do speak with words of wisdom, but not the kind of wisdom that belongs to this world or to the rulers of this world, who are soon forgotten. No, the wisdom we speak of is the mystery of God—his plan that was previously hidden, even though he made it for our ultimate glory before the world began. But the rulers of this world have not understood it; if they had, they would not have crucified our glorious Lord. That is what the Scriptures mean when they say,

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard,  
and no mind has imagined

what God has prepared  
for those who love him.”

—*from Paul’s first letter to the  
Corinthians*

**THINKING TOGETHER:**

It looked like weakness when Jesus died on the cross. But this was actually part of the secret power of God. When Jesus died, he was breaking the power of wrongdoing and death. Jesus was bringing the power of new life into the world. Have you or has someone you know been hurt by someone else? Do you know someone who’s been very sick or had a disease? What does it mean to you to know that the new life from Jesus will one day fill the whole world?

**DAY 12**

**The Resurrection Is Everything**

(from *Messiah*, pages 145-147)

*Paul ended his letter to the believers in Corinth by reminding them of the basics of the Good News about Jesus. Jesus died to take away the penalty for our wrongdoing. But then God raised him from the dead to show that Jesus really was the long-promised King. This is the message that is going out to the whole world. This is the message that changes everything.*



Let me now remind you, dear brothers and sisters, of the Good News I preached to you before. You welcomed it then, and you still stand firm in it. It is this Good News that saves you if you continue to believe the message I told you—unless, of course, you believed something that was never true in the first place.

I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. After that,

he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him. For I am the least of all the apostles. In fact, I'm not even worthy to be called an apostle after the way I persecuted God's church.

But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor on me—and not without results. For I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not I but God who was working through me by his grace. So it makes no difference whether I preach or they preach, for we all preach the same message you have already believed.

But tell me this—since we preach that Christ rose from the dead, why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead? For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.

But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.

So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back.

After that the end will come, when he will turn the Kingdom over to God the Father, having destroyed every ruler and authority and power. For Christ must reign until he humbles all his enemies beneath his feet. And the last enemy to be destroyed is death. For the Scriptures say, "God has put all things under his authority." (Of course, when it says "all things are under his authority," that does not include God himself, who gave Christ his authority.) Then, when all things are under his authority, the Son will put himself under God's authority, so that God, who gave his Son authority over all things, will be utterly supreme over everything everywhere.

If the dead will not be raised, what point is there in people being baptized for those who are dead? Why do it unless the dead will someday rise again?

And why should we ourselves risk our lives hour by hour? For I swear, dear brothers and sisters, that I face death daily. This is as certain as my pride in what Christ Jesus our Lord has done in you. And what value was there in fighting wild beasts—those people of Ephesus—if there will be no resurrection from the dead? And if there is no resurrection, “Let’s feast and drink, for tomorrow we die!” Don’t be fooled by those who say such things, for “bad company corrupts good character.” Think carefully about what is right, and stop sinning. For to your shame I say that some of you don’t know God at all. . . .

But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.

Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.  
O death, where is your victory?  
O death, where is your sting?”

For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.

—*from Paul’s first letter to the  
Corinthians*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

The Good News about Jesus is that he was raised from the dead. The Good News for us is that we will also be raised from the dead with new bodies. How could this hope change how we live today?

## DAY 13

# Suffering and Glory in the Way of Jesus

(from *Messiah*, pages 151, 153-154)

*Paul was a strong and well-known leader in the early church. But he had a challenging relationship with the church at Corinth. Some other people came to Corinth and said Paul couldn't really be God's chosen leader because he got into a lot of trouble and suffered so much. So Paul had to remind them that the way of Jesus is the way of suffering—for now. But God comforts us in all our troubles, and one day he will renew and restore us, just like he raised Jesus from the dead and honored him.*



This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and from our brother Timothy.

I am writing to God's church in Corinth and to all of his holy people throughout Greece.

May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.



All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ. Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us. . . .



When I came to the city of Troas to preach the Good News of Christ, the Lord opened a door of opportunity for me. But I had no peace of mind because my dear brother Titus hadn't yet arrived with a report from you. So I said good-bye and went on to Macedonia to find him.

But thank God! He has made us his captives and continues to lead us along in Christ's triumphal procession. Now he uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume. Our lives are a Christ-like fragrance rising up to God. But this fragrance is perceived differently by those who are being saved and by those who are perishing. To those who are perishing, we are a dreadful smell of death and doom. But to those who are being saved, we are a life-giving perfume. And who is adequate for such a task as this?

You see, we are not like the many hucksters who preach for personal profit. We preach the word of God with sincerity and with Christ's authority, knowing that God is watching us.

Are we beginning to praise ourselves again? Are we like others, who need to bring you letters of recommendation, or who ask you to write such letters on their behalf? Surely not! The only letter of recommendation we need is you yourselves. Your lives are a letter written in our hearts; everyone can read it and recognize our good work among you. Clearly, you are a letter from Christ showing the result of our ministry among you. This "letter" is written not with pen and ink, but with the Spirit of the living God. It is carved not on tablets of stone, but on human hearts.

We are confident of all this because of our great trust in God through Christ. It is not that we think we are qualified to do anything on our own. Our qualification comes from God. He has enabled us to be ministers of his new covenant. This is a covenant not of written laws, but of the Spirit. The old written covenant ends in death; but under the new covenant, the Spirit gives life.

The old way, with laws etched in stone, led to death, though it began with such glory that the people of Israel could not bear to look at Moses' face. For his face shone with the glory of God, even though the brightness was already fading away. Shouldn't we expect far greater glory under the new way, now that the Holy Spirit is giving life? If the old way, which brings condemnation, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new way, which makes us right with God! In fact, that first glory was not glorious at all compared with the overwhelming glory of the new way. So if the old way, which has been replaced, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new, which remains forever!

Since this new way gives us such confidence, we can be very bold. We are not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so the people of Israel

would not see the glory, even though it was destined to fade away. But the people's minds were hardened, and to this day whenever the old covenant is being read, the same veil covers their minds so they cannot understand the truth. And this veil can be removed only by believing in Christ. Yes, even today when they read Moses' writings, their hearts are covered with that veil, and they do not understand.

But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.

—*from Paul's second letter to the  
Corinthians*

**THINKING TOGETHER:**

Do you ever need to be comforted? Has God ever used another person to bring you comfort in some trouble you were having?

**DAY 14**

**The Children of Abraham**

(from *Messiah*, pages 167, 170-171)

*Paul brought the same message about God's new family in Jesus to the cities of Galatia (in modern-day Turkey) that he brought everywhere. But other people came there after he left and told the Galatians that only those who obeyed the whole Jewish law could be in God's family. So Paul had to write them a letter to make it perfectly clear that it was faith in Jesus that made them the true children of Abraham. Those who believe in and faithfully follow King Jesus will inherit everything that God has planned for his children.*



This letter is from Paul, an apostle. I was not appointed by any group of people or any human authority, but by Jesus Christ himself and by God the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead.

All the brothers and sisters here join me in sending this letter to the churches of Galatia.

May God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. Jesus gave his life for our sins, just as God our Father planned, in order to rescue us from this evil world in which we live. All glory to God forever and ever! Amen.

+ + +

I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who called you to himself through the loving mercy of Christ. You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News but is not the Good News at all. You are being fooled by those who deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ.

Let God's curse fall on anyone, including us or even an angel from heaven, who preaches a different kind of Good News than the one we preached to you. I say again what we have said before: If anyone preaches any other Good News than the one you welcomed, let that person be cursed.

Obviously, I'm not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ's servant. . . .

Dear brothers and sisters, here's an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or amend an irrevocable agreement, so it is in this case. God gave the promises to Abraham and his child. And notice that the Scripture doesn't say "to his children," as if it meant many descendants. Rather, it says "to his child"—and that, of course, means Christ. This is what I am trying to say: The agreement God made with Abraham could not be canceled 430 years later when God gave the law to Moses. God would be breaking his promise. For if the inheritance could be received by keeping the law, then it would not be the result of accepting God's promise. But God graciously gave it to Abraham as a promise.

Why, then, was the law given? It was given alongside the promise to show people their sins. But the law was designed to last only until the coming of the child who was promised. God gave his law through angels to Moses, who was the mediator between God and the people. Now a mediator is helpful if more than one party must reach an agreement. But God, who is one, did not use a mediator when he gave his promise to Abraham.

Is there a conflict, then, between God's law and God's promises? Absolutely not! If the law could give us new life, we could be made right with God by obeying it. But the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of

sin, so we receive God's promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus Christ.

Before the way of faith in Christ was available to us, we were placed under guard by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until the way of faith was revealed.

Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith. And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.

For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.

Think of it this way. If a father dies and leaves an inheritance for his young children, those children are not much better off than slaves until they grow up, even though they actually own everything their father had. They have to obey their guardians until they reach whatever age their father set. And that's the way it was with us before Christ came. We were like children; we were slaves to the basic spiritual principles of this world.

But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.

—*from Paul's letter to the  
Galatians*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

God's new family in Jesus is spread all around the world. They don't all look and talk the same, and sometimes they have very different customs. What can we do to show our love for Christians from other parts of the world?

## DAY 15

## The Spirit Gives Life

(from *Messiah*, pages 179, 188-190)

*Paul had never met the believers in Rome, but he writes them a letter because he wants to visit them and get their support so he can bring the message about Jesus to more people. His letter reminds them of the key points of the message about Jesus. The whole world has been in slavery to sin and death. But the work of Jesus has broken those chains. Now the Holy Spirit can bring life and freedom to all people everywhere. And one day the whole creation will also be set free from death and decay. It will be renewed and restored, the perfect home for God and his people.*



This letter is from Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News. God promised this Good News long ago through his prophets in the holy Scriptures. The Good News is about his Son. In his earthly life he was born into King David's family line, and he was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus Christ our Lord. Through Christ, God has given us the privilege and authority as apostles to tell Gentiles everywhere what God has done for them, so that they will believe and obey him, bringing glory to his name.

And you are included among those Gentiles who have been called to belong to Jesus Christ.

I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people.

May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. . . .



So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. The law of Moses was

unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.

Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God.

But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.) And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God. The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too,

wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it. But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.)

And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory.

—*from Paul's letter to the Romans*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

God loves the world he made. And God loves his children. He is going to bring life to his whole creation. What can we do to show that we love his good creation too? What can we do to show that we love our brothers and sisters in Christ?

## **DAY 16**

### **Living the Jesus Way**

(*from Messiah*, pages 196-198)

*The first part of Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome presents a detailed look at the meaning of the work that Jesus did on earth. Then in the second part of the letter Paul goes on to give them a good, clear challenge to start living the Jesus way. Jesus has brought us back into relationship with God. Now the followers of Jesus are to live under the law of love, as the new community of God's people.*



And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.

In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!

Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say,

“I will take revenge;  
I will pay them back,”  
says the LORD.

Instead,

“If your enemies are hungry, feed them.  
If they are thirsty, give them something to drink.  
In doing this, you will heap  
burning coals of shame on their heads.”

Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God. So anyone who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and they will be punished. For the authorities do not strike fear in people who are doing right, but in those who are doing wrong. Would you like to live without fear of the authorities? Do what is right, and they will honor you. The authorities are God's servants, sent for your good. But if you are doing wrong, of course you should be afraid, for they have the power to punish you. They are God's servants, sent for the very purpose of punishing those who do what is wrong. So you must submit to them, not only to avoid punishment, but also to keep a clear conscience.

Pay your taxes, too, for these same reasons. For government workers need to be paid. They are serving God in what they do. Give to everyone what you owe them: Pay your taxes and government fees to those who collect them, and give respect and honor to those who are in authority.

Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God's law. For the commandments say, “You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not covet.” These—and other such commandments—are summed up in this one commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfills the requirements of God's law.

—*from Paul's letter to the Romans*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

Paul writes that all the people in Christ's church belong together like the parts of a body. They only really work when they work together. Different people in the body of Christ have different gifts. What gifts do you think you have? How can you use them to help other people in Christ's body?

**DAY 17**

## A Song to the Messiah, Who Is Over All

(from *Messiah*, pages 209-210)

*The apostle Paul traveled throughout the Roman Empire to spread the message of Jesus and start new churches. Sadly, many people came after him and tried to confuse things. They said that Christians had to follow a long list of rules from the Jewish law. But Paul clearly and powerfully taught that Jesus is supreme, the One who made peace with everything in heaven and on earth. He is the head over all things. Christians have everything they need in Jesus himself.*



This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and from our brother Timothy.

We are writing to God's holy people in the city of Colosse, who are faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.

May God our Father give you grace and peace.



We always pray for you, and we give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. For we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all of God's people, which come from your confident hope of what God has reserved for you in heaven. You have had this expectation ever since you first heard the truth of the Good News.

This same Good News that came to you is going out all over the world. It is bearing fruit everywhere by changing lives, just as it changed your lives from the day you first heard and understood the truth about God's wonderful grace.

You learned about the Good News from Epaphras, our beloved co-worker. He is Christ's faithful servant, and he is helping us on your behalf. He has told us about the love for others that the Holy Spirit has given you.

So we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about

you. We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better.

We also pray that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. May you be filled with joy, always thanking the Father. He has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light. For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins.

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,

for through him God created everything  
in the heavenly realms and on earth.

He made the things we can see  
and the things we can't see—

such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.

Everything was created through him and for him.

He existed before anything else,  
and he holds all creation together.

Christ is also the head of the church,  
which is his body.

He is the beginning,  
supreme over all who rise from the dead.

So he is first in everything.

For God in all his fullness  
was pleased to live in Christ,  
and through him God reconciled  
everything to himself.

He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth  
by means of Christ's blood on the cross.

*—from Paul's letter to the  
Colossians*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

Jesus is the head over everything—not just his people in the church, but all things. We have been transferred into his Kingdom, and this is

the most important truth in our lives. How can we follow Jesus in our everyday lives? How can we show that we believe he is the King over everything?

## DAY 18

# God's One New Family in Jesus

(from *Messiah*, pages 217-219)

*In the ancient world, as in our world today, people were deeply divided into different groups. Various races and tribes looked down on each other, and rich people thought they were better than poor people. Men were viewed as being better and more important than women. Jews and Gentiles (all the non-Jewish peoples) were also separated and very suspicious of each other. A crucial part of the announcement of the Good News about Jesus is that God is now welcoming all people everywhere to join his one new family as equals. Faith and loyalty to Jesus brings together people from different tribes, nations, and races into a single, united people. This was God's plan for the world all along.*



This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus.

I am writing to God's holy people in Ephesus, who are faithful followers of Christ Jesus.

May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. . . .



Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere, I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.

I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.

Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.

But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called "uncircumcised heathens" by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.

For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. He did this by ending the system of law

with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.

He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near. Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

—*from Paul's letter to the  
Ephesians*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

God created us so we could know and love him. God made us new in Jesus so we could do all the good things he planned for us. What is something good you could do right now? What is something good you could do tomorrow?

## **DAY 19**

# **The Song of the Servant King**

(from *Messiah*, pages 227-229)

*How can the followers of Jesus live together and get along in a single family? How can Christians show the world what the love of God looks like? The key is following the example that the Messiah himself gave us. He gave up his position of privilege in order to come here and serve us. He humbled himself, even to the point of death, for us. This is the kind of love that changes the world.*



This letter is from Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus.

I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus, including the church leaders and deacons.

May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. . . .



And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear.

It's true that some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about Christ with pure motives. They preach because they love me, for they know I have been appointed to defend the Good News. Those others do not have pure motives as they preach about Christ. They preach with selfish ambition, not sincerely, intending to make my chains more painful to me. But that doesn't matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice. For I know that as you pray for me and the Spirit of Jesus Christ helps me, this will lead to my deliverance.

For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live.

Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith. And when I come to you again, you will have even more reason to take pride in Christ Jesus because of what he is doing through me.

Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News. Don't be intimidated in any way by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed,

but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself. For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him. We are in this struggle together. You have seen my struggle in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it.

+

Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

Though he was God,

he did not think of equality with God  
as something to cling to.

Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;

he took the humble position of a slave  
and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form,

he humbled himself in obedience to God  
and died a criminal's death on a cross.

Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor

and gave him the name above all other names,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

Do everything without complaining and arguing, so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people. Hold firmly to the word of life; then, on the day of Christ's return, I will be proud that

I did not run the race in vain and that my work was not useless. But I will rejoice even if I lose my life, pouring it out like a liquid offering to God, just like your faithful service is an offering to God. And I want all of you to share that joy. Yes, you should rejoice, and I will share your joy.

—*from Paul's letter to the  
Philippians*

**THINKING TOGETHER:**

Jesus took the attitude of a servant. Even though he had full equality with God, he was humble, willing to give up his own life for the sake of others. What are some practical ways you can show that you are willing to be a servant to other people?

**DAY 20**

**Staying True**

(from *Messiah*, pages 251-252, 254)

*Paul's life was constantly in danger, so as he grew older he began concentrating on preparing new leaders for the church. One of these was Timothy, a young co-worker who had been in ministry alongside Paul for some time. Paul urges Timothy to stay true to the teaching about Jesus that he had heard from the beginning. Paul tells him that the holy Scriptures (that is, the Bible) have been given to us as a gift from God. The Scriptures will teach us the truth and help to guide our lives.*



This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. I have been sent out to tell others about the life he has promised through faith in Christ Jesus.

I am writing to Timothy, my dear son.

May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord give you grace, mercy, and peace.

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Timothy, I thank God for you—the God I serve with a clear conscience, just as my ancestors did. Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. I long to see you again, for I remember your tears as we parted. And I will be filled with joy when we are together again.

I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother, Eunice. And I know that same faith continues strong in you. This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you. For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.

So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord. And don't be ashamed of me, either, even though I'm in prison for him. With the strength God gives you, be ready to suffer with me for the sake of the Good News. For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus. And now he has made all of this plain to us by the appearing of Christ Jesus, our Savior. He broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the Good News. And God chose me to be a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of this Good News.

That is why I am suffering here in prison. But I am not ashamed of it, for I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until the day of his return.

Hold on to the pattern of wholesome teaching you learned from me—a pattern shaped by the faith and love that you have in Christ Jesus. Through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, carefully guard the precious truth that has been entrusted to you.

As you know, everyone from the province of Asia has deserted me—even Phygelus and Hermogenes.

May the Lord show special kindness to Onesiphorus and all his family because he often visited and encouraged me. He was never ashamed of me because I was in chains. When he came to Rome, he searched everywhere until he found me. May the Lord show him special kindness on the day of Christ's return. And you know very well how helpful he was in Ephesus.

Timothy, my dear son, be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus. You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.

Endure suffering along with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Soldiers don't get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them. And athletes cannot win the prize unless they follow the rules. And hardworking farmers should be the first to enjoy the fruit of their labor. Think about what I am saying. The Lord will help you understand all these things.

Always remember that Jesus Christ, a descendant of King David, was raised from the dead. This is the Good News I preach. And because I preach this Good News, I am suffering and have been chained like a criminal. But the word of God cannot be chained. So I am willing to endure anything if it will bring salvation and eternal glory in Christ Jesus to those God has chosen.

This is a trustworthy saying:

If we die with him,  
we will also live with him.  
If we endure hardship,  
we will reign with him.  
If we deny him,  
he will deny us.  
If we are unfaithful,  
he remains faithful,  
for he cannot deny who he is. . . .

But you, Timothy, certainly know what I teach, and how I live, and what my purpose in life is. You know my faith, my patience, my love, and my endurance. You know how much persecution and suffering I have endured. You know all about how I was persecuted in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra—but the Lord rescued me from all of it. Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil people and impostors will flourish. They will deceive others and will themselves be deceived.

But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you. You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

—from Paul's second letter to  
Timothy

**THINKING TOGETHER:**

There are many things that can make us want to give up on our faith in Jesus. Some people experience real opposition from other people because of their faith, and they experience suffering. Sometimes we can be distracted by other things, and we can forget about our faith for a while. Pray together with your family today that God will help you stay strong in your faith and hang on to it no matter what happens.

**DAY 21****The Coming of God's Rule**

(from *Messiah*, pages 259-261)

*A great rebellion had come into God's world, so God himself created a plan to return to his people and their land to fight against it. Jesus was born into our world and announced the return of God's rule. Then he began to do God's good work. He healed those who had diseases. He restored those who were controlled by evil spirits. He taught the people what it meant to really follow God. The new world that God was planning was beginning to take shape.*



This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. It began just as the prophet Isaiah had written:

“Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
and he will prepare your way.  
He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,  
‘Prepare the way for the LORD’s coming!  
Clear the road for him!’”

This messenger was John the Baptist. He was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. All of Judea, including all the people of Jerusalem, went out to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. His clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey.

John announced: “Someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not even worthy to stoop down like a slave and untie the straps of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!”

One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, “You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.”

The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness, where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. He was out among the wild animals, and angels took care of him.

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Later on, after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God’s Good News. “The time promised by God has come at last!” he announced. “The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!”

One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!” And they left their nets at once and followed him.

A little farther up the shore Jesus saw Zebedee’s sons, James and John, in a boat repairing their nets. He called them at once, and they also followed him, leaving their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired men.

Jesus and his companions went to the town of Capernaum. When the Sabbath day came, he went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, for he taught with real authority—quite unlike the teachers of religious law.

Suddenly, a man in the synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, “Why are you interfering with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

But Jesus reprimanded him. “Be quiet! Come out of the man,” he ordered. At that, the evil spirit screamed, threw the man into a convulsion, and then came out of him.

Amazement gripped the audience, and they began to discuss what had happened. “What sort of new teaching is this?” they asked excitedly. “It has

such authority! Even evil spirits obey his orders!” The news about Jesus spread quickly throughout the entire region of Galilee.

After Jesus left the synagogue with James and John, they went to Simon and Andrew’s home. Now Simon’s mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. They told Jesus about her right away. So he went to her bedside, took her by the hand, and helped her sit up. Then the fever left her, and she prepared a meal for them.

That evening after sunset, many sick and demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus. The whole town gathered at the door to watch. So Jesus healed many people who were sick with various diseases, and he cast out many demons. But because the demons knew who he was, he did not allow them to speak.

Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray. Later Simon and the others went out to find him. When they found him, they said, “Everyone is looking for you.”

But Jesus replied, “We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too. That is why I came.” So he traveled throughout the region of Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and casting out demons.

—*from the Gospel of Mark*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

Name some of the things that are wrong or broken in our world. How will the Good News of Jesus take care of these things? What can we do to help heal the world?

## **DAY 22**

# **A Surprising Kind of King**

(from *Messiah*, pages 272-274, 278-279)

*Everybody was used to kings and rulers who looked out for themselves and only cared about their own honor and glory. So many people didn't understand how Jesus could be a king when he wasn't like that. He came to serve others. He came to give up his life for others. He came to suffer. Even Jesus' own disciples struggled to understand*

*this. But this is how God was defeating evil and changing the world. And Jesus taught his disciples that this way of living for others was not just for him but also for them.*

+ + +

About this time another large crowd had gathered, and the people ran out of food again. Jesus called his disciples and told them, “I feel sorry for these people. They have been here with me for three days, and they have nothing left to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will faint along the way. For some of them have come a long distance.”

His disciples replied, “How are we supposed to find enough food to feed them out here in the wilderness?”

Jesus asked, “How much bread do you have?”

“Seven loaves,” they replied.

So Jesus told all the people to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves, thanked God for them, and broke them into pieces. He gave them to his disciples, who distributed the bread to the crowd. A few small fish were found, too, so Jesus also blessed these and told the disciples to distribute them.

They ate as much as they wanted. Afterward, the disciples picked up seven large baskets of leftover food. There were about 4,000 men in the crowd that day, and Jesus sent them home after they had eaten. Immediately after this, he got into a boat with his disciples and crossed over to the region of Dalmanutha.

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had arrived, they came and started to argue with him. Testing him, they demanded that he show them a miraculous sign from heaven to prove his authority.

When he heard this, he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, “Why do these people keep demanding a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, I will not give this generation any such sign.” So he got back into the boat and left them, and he crossed to the other side of the lake.

But the disciples had forgotten to bring any food. They had only one loaf of bread with them in the boat. As they were crossing the lake, Jesus warned them, “Watch out! Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod.”

At this they began to argue with each other because they hadn’t brought any bread. Jesus knew what they were saying, so he said, “Why are you arguing about having no bread? Don’t you know or understand even yet? Are your hearts too hard to take it in? ‘You have eyes—can’t you see? You have ears—can’t you hear?’ Don’t you remember anything at all? When I

fed the 5,000 with five loaves of bread, how many baskets of leftovers did you pick up afterward?"

"Twelve," they said.

"And when I fed the 4,000 with seven loaves, how many large baskets of leftovers did you pick up?"

"Seven," they said.

"Don't you understand yet?" he asked them.

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When they arrived at Bethsaida, some people brought a blind man to Jesus, and they begged him to touch the man and heal him. Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. Then, spitting on the man's eyes, he laid his hands on him and asked, "Can you see anything now?"

The man looked around. "Yes," he said, "I see people, but I can't see them very clearly. They look like trees walking around."

Then Jesus placed his hands on the man's eyes again, and his eyes were opened. His sight was completely restored, and he could see everything clearly. Jesus sent him away, saying, "Don't go back into the village on your way home."

Jesus and his disciples left Galilee and went up to the villages near Caesarea Philippi. As they were walking along, he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

"Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other prophets."

Then he asked them, "But who do you say I am?"

Peter replied, "You are the Messiah."

But Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. . . .

+ + +

They were now on the way up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. The disciples were filled with awe, and the people following behind were overwhelmed with fear. Taking the twelve disciples aside, Jesus once more began to describe everything that was about to happen to him. "Listen," he said, "we're going up to Jerusalem, where the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence him to die and hand him over to the Romans. They will mock him, spit on him, flog him with a whip, and kill him, but after three days he will rise again."

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came over and spoke to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do us a favor.”

“What is your request?” he asked.

They replied, “When you sit on your glorious throne, we want to sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left.”

But Jesus said to them, “You don’t know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink? Are you able to be baptized with the baptism of suffering I must be baptized with?”

“Oh yes,” they replied, “we are able!”

Then Jesus told them, “You will indeed drink from my bitter cup and be baptized with my baptism of suffering. But I have no right to say who will sit on my right or my left. God has prepared those places for the ones he has chosen.”

When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant. So Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

—*from the Gospel of Mark*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

Do you think you can see clearly who Jesus is? Do you understand what the Bible says about him and what he came to do? The fact is, we all need help with this. Pray for God to open the eyes of your heart to see and know Jesus truly.

## **DAY 23**

### **Facing Evil Head-On**

(from *Messiah*, pages 286, 289-290)

*On the night before his death on the cross, Jesus ate a Passover meal with his closest disciples. Passover was an ancient Jewish celebration of the time when God came down and rescued the people of Israel from*

*slavery in Egypt. Jesus chose Passover as the time he would willingly lay down his life. This helped his followers see that his death would be the way that he would save them. Jesus was bringing a new Passover, a time of freedom and new life. His death would pay for the sins of the people and be the decisive and winning blow in God's fight against evil.*



On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go to prepare the Passover meal for you?"

So Jesus sent two of them into Jerusalem with these instructions: "As you go into the city, a man carrying a pitcher of water will meet you. Follow him. At the house he enters, say to the owner, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room where I can eat the Passover meal with my disciples?' He will take you upstairs to a large room that is already set up. That is where you should prepare our meal." So the two disciples went into the city and found everything just as Jesus had said, and they prepared the Passover meal there.

In the evening Jesus arrived with the Twelve. As they were at the table eating, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, one of you eating with me here will betray me."

Greatly distressed, each one asked in turn, "Am I the one?"

He replied, "It is one of you twelve who is eating from this bowl with me. For the Son of Man must die, as the Scriptures declared long ago. But how terrible it will be for the one who betrays him. It would be far better for that man if he had never been born!"

As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Take it, for this is my body."

And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And he said to them, "This is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice for many. I tell you the truth, I will not drink wine again until the day I drink it new in the Kingdom of God."

Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives. . . .

Very early in the morning the leading priests, the elders, and the teachers of religious law—the entire high council—met to discuss their next step. They bound Jesus, led him away, and took him to Pilate, the Roman governor.

Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

Jesus replied, "You have said it."

Then the leading priests kept accusing him of many crimes, and Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer them? What about all these charges they are bringing against you?" But Jesus said nothing, much to Pilate's surprise.

Now it was the governor's custom each year during the Passover celebration to release one prisoner—anyone the people requested. One of the prisoners at that time was Barabbas, a revolutionary who had committed murder in an uprising. The crowd went to Pilate and asked him to release a prisoner as usual.

"Would you like me to release to you this 'King of the Jews'?" Pilate asked. (For he realized by now that the leading priests had arrested Jesus out of envy.) But at this point the leading priests stirred up the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus. Pilate asked them, "Then what should I do with this man you call the king of the Jews?"

They shouted back, "Crucify him!"

"Why?" Pilate demanded. "What crime has he committed?"

But the mob roared even louder, "Crucify him!"

So to pacify the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip, then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified.

The soldiers took Jesus into the courtyard of the governor's headquarters (called the Praetorium) and called out the entire regiment. They dressed him in a purple robe, and they wove thorn branches into a crown and put it on his head. Then they saluted him and taunted, "Hail! King of the Jews!" And they struck him on the head with a reed stick, spit on him, and dropped to their knees in mock worship. When they were finally tired of mocking him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be crucified.

A passerby named Simon, who was from Cyrene, was coming in from the countryside just then, and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross. (Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus.) And they brought Jesus to a place called Golgotha (which means "Place of the Skull"). They offered him wine drugged with myrrh, but he refused it.

Then the soldiers nailed him to the cross. They divided his clothes and threw dice to decide who would get each piece. It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. A sign announced the charge against him. It read, "The King of the Jews." Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.

The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. "Ha! Look at you now!" they yelled at him. "You said you were going to

destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Well then, save yourself and come down from the cross!”

The leading priests and teachers of religious law also mocked Jesus. “He saved others,” they scoffed, “but he can’t save himself! Let this Messiah, this King of Israel, come down from the cross so we can see it and believe him!” Even the men who were crucified with Jesus ridiculed him.

At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o’clock. Then at three o’clock Jesus called out with a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*” which means “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”

Some of the bystanders misunderstood and thought he was calling for the prophet Elijah. One of them ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, holding it up to him on a reed stick so he could drink. “Wait!” he said. “Let’s see whether Elijah comes to take him down!”

Then Jesus uttered another loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

When the Roman officer who stood facing him saw how he had died, he exclaimed, “This man truly was the Son of God!”

—*from the Gospel of Mark*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

The people mocking Jesus said he wouldn’t be dying if he was the true King of Israel. But Jesus was the true King, and even though he knew he would die when he went to Jerusalem, he went anyway. He knew his Father had sent him to give up his life for others, including us. Was it easy for Jesus to do this? To help answer that question, answer this one: Is it easy for us to give things up for other people?

## **DAY 24**

### **A New Community, A Holy Nation**

(from *Messiah*, pages 295-297)

*The apostle Peter (whom we read about in the Gospels) was one of the earliest followers of Jesus, and he became a key leader in the early church. Here in his first letter he is writing to believers in Jesus who are spread around the Roman Empire (mostly in modern-day Turkey). They were spread out, tended to be in smaller groups, and were fiercely*

*persecuted by others. But Peter reminds them of who they really are—God's chosen people, a new community, a holy nation. They have come out of the darkness and into the light of living for Jesus.*



This letter is from Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.

I am writing to God's chosen people who are living as foreigners in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

May God give you more and more grace and peace.



All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation, and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see.

So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.

You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. The reward for trusting him will be the salvation of your souls.

This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you. They wondered what time or situation the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ's suffering and his great glory afterward.

They were told that their messages were not for themselves, but for you. And now this Good News has been announced to you by those who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is

all so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen. . . .

You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor.

And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. As the Scriptures say,

"I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem,  
chosen for great honor,  
and anyone who trusts in him  
will never be disgraced."

Yes, you who trust him recognize the honor God has given him. But for those who reject him,

"The stone that the builders rejected  
has now become the cornerstone."

And,

"He is the stone that makes people stumble,  
the rock that makes them fall."

They stumble because they do not obey God's word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them.

But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

"Once you had no identity as a people;  
now you are God's people.  
Once you received no mercy;  
now you have received God's mercy."

—*from the first letter of Peter*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

If we are part of the same family as followers of Jesus all over the world, what can we do for them? Many followers of Jesus are suffering persecution every day. How can we help our sisters and brothers in Jesus from other places?

**DAY 25****What Is Now and What Is Coming**

(from *Messiah*, pages 305-308)

*In Peter's second letter he writes to the believers in Jesus about two things. First, he gives them confidence about the truth of what they believe about Jesus. Peter tells them that he himself saw Jesus and that he heard the voice from heaven confirm that Jesus is God's Son. Second, Peter tells them about God's great future that is coming. God is going to renew the heavens and the earth, and he will fill them with everything that is right and good. Because of all this, Peter urges these believers to work hard for what is right and to love each other.*



This letter is from Simon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ.

I am writing to you who share the same precious faith we have. This faith was given to you because of the justice and fairness of Jesus Christ, our God and Savior.

May God give you more and more grace and peace as you grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord.



By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.

In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.

The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But those who fail to develop in this way are shortsighted or blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins.

So, dear brothers and sisters, work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Do these things, and you will never fall away. Then God will give you a grand entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Therefore, I will always remind you about these things—even though you already know them and are standing firm in the truth you have been taught. And it is only right that I should keep on reminding you as long as I live. For our Lord Jesus Christ has shown me that I must soon leave this earthly life, so I will work hard to make sure you always remember these things after I am gone.

For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw his majestic splendor with our own eyes when he received honor and glory from God the Father. The voice from the majestic glory of God said to him, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.” We ourselves heard that voice from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain.

Because of that experience, we have even greater confidence in the message proclaimed by the prophets. You must pay close attention to what they wrote, for their words are like a lamp shining in a dark place—until the Day dawns, and Christ the Morning Star shines in your hearts. Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet’s own understanding, or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God. . . .

This is my second letter to you, dear friends, and in both of them I have tried to stimulate your wholesome thinking and refresh your memory. I want you to remember what the holy prophets said long ago and what our Lord and Savior commanded through your apostles.

Most importantly, I want to remind you that in the last days scoffers will come, mocking the truth and following their own desires. They will say, “What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again? From before the times of our ancestors, everything has remained the same since the world was first created.”

They deliberately forget that God made the heavens long ago by the word of his command, and he brought the earth out from the water and surrounded it with water. Then he used the water to destroy the ancient world with a mighty flood. And by the same word, the present heavens

and earth have been stored up for fire. They are being kept for the day of judgment, when ungodly people will be destroyed.

But you must not forget this one thing, dear friends: A day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment.

Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, what holy and godly lives you should live, looking forward to the day of God and hurrying it along. On that day, he will set the heavens on fire, and the elements will melt away in the flames. But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness.

—*from the second letter of Peter*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

Christ shines in our hearts right now. But a new day is going to dawn when Jesus returns to us. He will judge everything. He will set all things right in our lives and in our world. Since we know Jesus is coming back to do this, what kind of lives should we be living right now?

## **DAY 26**

# **Living in God's New World**

(from *Messiah*, pages 318-321)

*We have four different accounts of Jesus' life in the Bible. Each of these is called a "Gospel" because each one tells the "Good News" about Jesus and what he's done. Matthew's Gospel ties the story of Jesus especially closely to the ancient story of Israel. It shows that everything Jesus said and did is the fulfillment of the story that came before. Israel's ancient story was always pointing toward Jesus because he is the one who brings God's rule to earth and teaches us what it means to live in that new world.*



Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. News about him spread as far as Syria, and people soon began bringing to him all who were sick. And whatever their sickness or disease, or if they were demon possessed or epileptic or paralyzed—he healed them all. Large crowds followed him wherever he went—people from Galilee, the Ten Towns, Jerusalem, from all over Judea, and from east of the Jordan River.



One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, and he began to teach them.

“God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him,  
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

God blesses those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.

God blesses those who are humble,  
for they will inherit the whole earth.

God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice,  
for they will be satisfied.

God blesses those who are merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.

God blesses those whose hearts are pure,  
for they will see God.

God blesses those who work for peace,  
for they will be called the children of God.

God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right,  
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

“God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.

“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

“You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

“Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God’s law will disappear until its purpose is achieved. So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God’s laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

“But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven! . . .

“You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

“Watch out! Don’t do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. When you give to someone in need, don’t do as the hypocrites do—blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get. But when you give to someone in need, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

“When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

“When you pray, don’t babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and

again. Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! Pray like this:

Our Father in heaven,  
    may your name be kept holy.  
May your Kingdom come soon.  
May your will be done on earth,  
    as it is in heaven.  
Give us today the food we need,  
and forgive us our sins,  
    as we have forgiven those who sin against us.  
And don't let us yield to temptation,  
    but rescue us from the evil one."

—*from the Gospel of Matthew*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

Everything we believe about Jesus and the coming of God's Kingdom depends on God keeping his promises. If we love him and follow him now, he says he will comfort us, show us mercy, and bring justice to the world. Do we have reasons for believing that God will do what he says? Can you name some of the promises God kept by sending Jesus the Messiah? Has he kept any of his promises in your life?

## **DAY 27**

# **The Struggle against Evil**

(from *Messiah*, pages 331-333)

*The reign of wrongdoing and death in our world has caused tremendous pain and suffering. Jesus came into the world to fight against these great enemies of God and to restore all things to what God intended in the first place. This is why Jesus healed people, proclaimed justice, and cast evil spirits out of people. But not everyone was happy with what Jesus was doing, especially the leaders. They saw their own power and position being threatened.*



Then Jesus went over to their synagogue, where he noticed a man with a deformed hand. The Pharisees asked Jesus, “Does the law permit a person to work by healing on the Sabbath?” (They were hoping he would say yes, so they could bring charges against him.)

And he answered, “If you had a sheep that fell into a well on the Sabbath, wouldn’t you work to pull it out? Of course you would. And how much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Yes, the law permits a person to do good on the Sabbath.”

Then he said to the man, “Hold out your hand.” So the man held out his hand, and it was restored, just like the other one! Then the Pharisees called a meeting to plot how to kill Jesus.

But Jesus knew what they were planning. So he left that area, and many people followed him. He healed all the sick among them, but he warned them not to reveal who he was. This fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah concerning him:

“Look at my Servant, whom I have chosen.  
 He is my Beloved, who pleases me.  
 I will put my Spirit upon him,  
 and he will proclaim justice to the nations.  
 He will not fight or shout  
 or raise his voice in public.  
 He will not crush the weakest reed  
 or put out a flickering candle.  
 Finally he will cause justice to be victorious.  
 And his name will be the hope  
 of all the world.”

Then a demon-possessed man, who was blind and couldn’t speak, was brought to Jesus. He healed the man so that he could both speak and see. The crowd was amazed and asked, “Could it be that Jesus is the Son of David, the Messiah?”

But when the Pharisees heard about the miracle, they said, “No wonder he can cast out demons. He gets his power from Satan, the prince of demons.”

Jesus knew their thoughts and replied, “Any kingdom divided by civil war is doomed. A town or family splintered by feuding will fall apart. And if Satan is casting out Satan, he is divided and fighting against himself. His own kingdom will not survive. And if I am empowered by Satan, what

about your own exorcists? They cast out demons, too, so they will condemn you for what you have said. But if I am casting out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has arrived among you. For who is powerful enough to enter the house of a strong man and plunder his goods? Only someone even stronger—someone who could tie him up and then plunder his house.

“Anyone who isn’t with me opposes me, and anyone who isn’t working with me is actually working against me.

“So I tell you, every sin and blasphemy can be forgiven—except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which will never be forgiven. Anyone who speaks against the Son of Man can be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, either in this world or in the world to come.

“A tree is identified by its fruit. If a tree is good, its fruit will be good. If a tree is bad, its fruit will be bad. You brood of snakes! How could evil men like you speak what is good and right? For whatever is in your heart determines what you say. A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. And I tell you this, you must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak. The words you say will either acquit you or condemn you.”

One day some teachers of religious law and Pharisees came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, we want you to show us a miraculous sign to prove your authority.”

But Jesus replied, “Only an evil, adulterous generation would demand a miraculous sign; but the only sign I will give them is the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.

“The people of Nineveh will stand up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, for they repented of their sins at the preaching of Jonah. Now someone greater than Jonah is here—but you refuse to repent. The queen of Sheba will also stand up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, for she came from a distant land to hear the wisdom of Solomon. Now someone greater than Solomon is here—but you refuse to listen.”

—*from the Gospel of Matthew*

**THINKING TOGETHER:**

In the battle for the fate of the world, Jesus is stronger than Satan and will defeat him in the end. But along the way, sometimes even the leaders of God's people will work against what God is doing in the world. That's what happened to Jesus. What should we do if we see that happening today?

**DAY 28****The Jesus Way, Not Our Way**

(from *Messiah*, pages 338-339, 341)

*Ever since the great rebellion happened among human beings, we've been trying to do things our own way. Jesus came into this world and began to show us a new way—how to live a new kind of life, the way of God. But there was opposition to this new way. Sometimes people were committed to the old way and traditions that didn't reflect God's new way of love and self-sacrifice. Sometimes Jesus' own disciples had a hard time accepting that they too had to give up their own lives to follow Jesus.*



After they had crossed the lake, they landed at Gennesaret. When the people recognized Jesus, the news of his arrival spread quickly throughout the whole area, and soon people were bringing all their sick to be healed. They begged him to let the sick touch at least the fringe of his robe, and all who touched him were healed.

Some Pharisees and teachers of religious law now arrived from Jerusalem to see Jesus. They asked him, "Why do your disciples disobey our age-old tradition? For they ignore our tradition of ceremonial hand washing before they eat."

Jesus replied, "And why do you, by your traditions, violate the direct commandments of God? For instance, God says, 'Honor your father and mother,' and 'Anyone who speaks disrespectfully of father or mother must be put to death.' But you say it is all right for people to say to their parents, 'Sorry, I can't help you. For I have vowed to give to God what I would have given to you.' In this way, you say they don't need to honor their parents.

And so you cancel the word of God for the sake of your own tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, for he wrote,

“These people honor me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me.  
Their worship is a farce,  
for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.”

Then Jesus called to the crowd to come and hear. “Listen,” he said, “and try to understand. It’s not what goes into your mouth that defiles you; you are defiled by the words that come out of your mouth.”

Then the disciples came to him and asked, “Do you realize you offended the Pharisees by what you just said?”

Jesus replied, “Every plant not planted by my heavenly Father will be uprooted, so ignore them. They are blind guides leading the blind, and if one blind person guides another, they will both fall into a ditch.”

Then Peter said to Jesus, “Explain to us the parable that says people aren’t defiled by what they eat.”

“Don’t you understand yet?” Jesus asked. “Anything you eat passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer. But the words you speak come from the heart—that’s what defiles you. For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander. These are what defile you. Eating with unwashed hands will never defile you.” . . .

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

“Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.”

Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.”

Then he sternly warned the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of

religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead.

But Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. “Heaven forbid, Lord,” he said. “This will never happen to you!”

Jesus turned to Peter and said, “Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s.”

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul? For the Son of Man will come with his angels in the glory of his Father and will judge all people according to their deeds. And I tell you the truth, some standing here right now will not die before they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom.”

—*from the Gospel of Matthew*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

It’s hard for anyone to give up doing things their own way. We all naturally want to watch out for our own interests. What do you think Jesus meant when he said we have to take up our cross if we want to follow him?

## **DAY 29**

# **The True and Humble King**

(from *Messiah*, pages 348-349, 357-358)

*As the climax to his ministry in Israel, Jesus came into the capital city of Jerusalem as a king. But not just any king. Jesus chose to ride in on a donkey’s colt, probably a smaller, young animal that had not been ridden before. Roman rulers would have come in proudly on a big royal horse. But Jesus was demonstrating a different kind of rule. By this humility, Jesus was showing that true power and authority is not based on promoting yourself. In the same way, Jesus then taught his followers that the true test of their loyalty to him was in how they treated those who were hurting and in need.*



As Jesus and the disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the town of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead. "Go into the village over there," he said. "As soon as you enter it, you will see a donkey tied there, with its colt beside it. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone asks what you are doing, just say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will immediately let you take them."

This took place to fulfill the prophecy that said,

"Tell the people of Jerusalem,  
Look, your King is coming to you.  
He is humble, riding on a donkey—  
riding on a donkey's colt."

The two disciples did as Jesus commanded. They brought the donkey and the colt to him and threw their garments over the colt, and he sat on it.

Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting,

"Praise God for the Son of David!  
Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the LORD!  
Praise God in highest heaven!"

The entire city of Jerusalem was in an uproar as he entered. "Who is this?" they asked.

And the crowds replied, "It's Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out all the people buying and selling animals for sacrifice. He knocked over the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves. He said to them, "The Scriptures declare, 'My Temple will be called a house of prayer,' but you have turned it into a den of thieves!"

The blind and the lame came to him in the Temple, and he healed them. The leading priests and the teachers of religious law saw these wonderful miracles and heard even the children in the Temple shouting, "Praise God for the Son of David."

But the leaders were indignant. They asked Jesus, "Do you hear what these children are saying?"

"Yes," Jesus replied. "Haven't you ever read the Scriptures? For they say,

‘You have taught children and infants to give you praise.’ Then he returned to Bethany, where he stayed overnight. . . .

“But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.’

“Then these righteous ones will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?’

“And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’

“Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, ‘Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons. For I was hungry, and you didn’t feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn’t give me a drink. I was a stranger, and you didn’t invite me into your home. I was naked, and you didn’t give me clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn’t visit me.’

“Then they will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?’

“And he will answer, ‘I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.’

“And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life.”

—*from the Gospel of Matthew*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

Jesus came into Jerusalem as a humble king. But he showed strength and confidence when he cleared the Temple of those who were just using it to make money. Can we serve and show love to other people while still standing up for what is right? Why is this hard to do?

**DAY 30****The Dawn of a New Day**

(from *Messiah*, pages 364-366)

*Jesus died on a Roman cross. Everyone, including his own followers, assumed this was the end of Jesus and of everything he had worked for. He couldn't really be the promised King if he was dead, could he? But God had sent Jesus to earth on a mission. So God raised Jesus from the dead to show that he really was the true King. A new world had been born. The sins of the people had been paid for. All authority in heaven and on earth have now been given to Jesus. This story about the world's true King is for everyone, and our job is to share it.*



As evening approached, Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea who had become a follower of Jesus, went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. And Pilate issued an order to release it to him. Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a long sheet of clean linen cloth. He placed it in his own new tomb, which had been carved out of the rock. Then he rolled a great stone across the entrance and left. Both Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting across from the tomb and watching.

The next day, on the Sabbath, the leading priests and Pharisees went to see Pilate. They told him, "Sir, we remember what that deceiver once said while he was still alive: 'After three days I will rise from the dead.' So we request that you seal the tomb until the third day. This will prevent his disciples from coming and stealing his body and then telling everyone he was raised from the dead! If that happens, we'll be worse off than we were at first."

Pilate replied, "Take guards and secure it the best you can." So they sealed the tomb and posted guards to protect it.

Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb.

Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. His face shone like

lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint.

Then the angel spoke to the women. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He isn’t here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying. And now, go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and he is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. Remember what I have told you.”

The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy, and they rushed to give the disciples the angel’s message. And as they went, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they ran to him, grasped his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t be afraid! Go tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there.”

As the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and told the leading priests what had happened. A meeting with the elders was called, and they decided to give the soldiers a large bribe. They told the soldiers, “You must say, ‘Jesus’ disciples came during the night while we were sleeping, and they stole his body.’ If the governor hears about it, we’ll stand up for you so you won’t get in trouble.” So the guards accepted the bribe and said what they were told to say. Their story spread widely among the Jews, and they still tell it today.

Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted!

Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

—*from the Gospel of Matthew*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

The resurrection of Jesus was a great surprise to everyone, even his own closest followers. No one knew that God would begin restoring the world by raising one person from the dead before everyone else. What are some of the surprising ways God is renewing the world today? Can you see evidence of God’s love spreading around the world?

**DAY 31****The One and Only Son of God**

(from *Messiah*, pages 369-371)

*God has been speaking for a long time. He spoke through the ancient prophets. He's spoken in the holy Scriptures, the Bible. But the clearest and best way God has revealed himself is in Jesus his Son. If you want to know who God is, look at Jesus. He radiates the very heart of God and shows us his deepest love. Jesus broke the power of evil in the world. And Jesus knows what it is to be tested and tempted, so he can help us in our own trials and difficulties.*



Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe. The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven. This shows that the Son is far greater than the angels, just as the name God gave him is greater than their names. . . .



So we must listen very carefully to the truth we have heard, or we may drift away from it. For the message God delivered through angels has always stood firm, and every violation of the law and every act of disobedience was punished. So what makes us think we can escape if we ignore this great salvation that was first announced by the Lord Jesus himself and then delivered to us by those who heard him speak? And God confirmed the message by giving signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit whenever he chose.

And furthermore, it is not angels who will control the future world we are talking about. For in one place the Scriptures say,

“What are mere mortals that you should think about them,  
or a son of man that you should care for him?”

Yet for a little while you made them a little lower than the angels  
and crowned them with glory and honor.  
You gave them authority over all things.”

Now when it says “all things,” it means nothing is left out. But we have not yet seen all things put under their authority. What we do see is Jesus, who for a little while was given a position “a little lower than the angels”; and because he suffered death for us, he is now “crowned with glory and honor.” Yes, by God’s grace, Jesus tasted death for everyone. God, for whom and through whom everything was made, chose to bring many children into glory. And it was only right that he should make Jesus, through his suffering, a perfect leader, fit to bring them into their salvation.

So now Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters. For he said to God,

“I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters.  
I will praise you among your assembled people.”

He also said,

“I will put my trust in him,”  
that is, “I and the children God has given me.”

Because God’s children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.

We also know that the Son did not come to help angels; he came to help the descendants of Abraham. Therefore, it was necessary for him to be made in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters, so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. Then he could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people. Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested.

—*from the book of Hebrews*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

The Bible is a very big book, actually made up of lots of smaller books. But when we put all the books together, they tell us the story of God and the world. The book of Hebrews opens by telling us Jesus is the center of the whole story of the Bible. If we want to know what God is like, we can look at Jesus. The battle against evil is the biggest problem

in the story of the Bible. What did Jesus do about this problem? What are some of the ways Jesus helps us?

## DAY 32

# Our New High Priest

(from *Messiah*, pages 377-381)

*In the ancient world priests would represent a group of people to a god. It was the priests who would offer animal sacrifices to that god. This was true in Israel's first covenant too. But then Jesus came as the new High Priest. He didn't come to offer animal sacrifices, but to offer himself as a sacrifice. By doing this, he took away the penalty for our wrongdoing forever. Because of the new covenant through Jesus, we can come right into God's presence, and he hears us and accepts us.*



Here is the main point: We have a High Priest who sat down in the place of honor beside the throne of the majestic God in heaven. There he ministers in the heavenly Tabernacle, the true place of worship that was built by the Lord and not by human hands.

And since every high priest is required to offer gifts and sacrifices, our High Priest must make an offering, too. If he were here on earth, he would not even be a priest, since there already are priests who offer the gifts required by the law. They serve in a system of worship that is only a copy, a shadow of the real one in heaven. For when Moses was getting ready to build the Tabernacle, God gave him this warning: "Be sure that you make everything according to the pattern I have shown you here on the mountain."

But now Jesus, our High Priest, has been given a ministry that is far superior to the old priesthood, for he is the one who mediates for us a far better covenant with God, based on better promises.

If the first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no need for a second covenant to replace it. But when God found fault with the people, he said:

"The day is coming, says the LORD,  
when I will make a new covenant  
with the people of Israel and Judah.

This covenant will not be like the one  
I made with their ancestors  
when I took them by the hand  
and led them out of the land of Egypt.  
They did not remain faithful to my covenant,  
so I turned my back on them, says the LORD.  
But this is the new covenant I will make  
with the people of Israel on that day, says the LORD:  
I will put my laws in their minds,  
and I will write them on their hearts.  
I will be their God,  
and they will be my people.  
And they will not need to teach their neighbors,  
nor will they need to teach their relatives,  
saying, 'You should know the LORD.'  
For everyone, from the least to the greatest,  
will know me already.  
And I will forgive their wickedness,  
and I will never again remember their sins."

When God speaks of a "new" covenant, it means he has made the first one obsolete. It is now out of date and will soon disappear. . . .

So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever.

Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer could cleanse people's bodies from ceremonial impurity. Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. That is why he is the one who mediates a new covenant between God and people, so that all who are called can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them. For Christ died to set them free from the penalty of the sins they had committed under that first covenant. . . .

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And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. By his death, Jesus opened a new and

life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

—*from the book of Hebrews*

### THINKING TOGETHER:

All of us struggle with wrongdoing. We fail to love God more than anything else and to follow his ways for living. But because of Jesus, God washes us clean and forgives us. Why is it important that through Jesus we have God's law written on our hearts? Are you glad to be part of God's new covenant with his people?

## DAY 33

# The Wisdom of Following Jesus

(from *Messiah*, pages 391-393)

*James was an important teacher of God's wisdom, and the leader of the early church in Jerusalem. He helps us see that it is not enough to just say we believe in Jesus. We have to put our faith into action. We must be careful about what we say. We must take care of the poor and anybody who needs help. We must live as new people who really love and follow Jesus. This is the wisdom of God for us.*



This letter is from James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am writing to the "twelve tribes"—Jewish believers scattered abroad.

Greetings!

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Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do. . . .

But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless. Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.

My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others?

For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor"—well, doesn't this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?

Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him? But you dishonor the poor! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear?

Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the

Scriptures: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law.

For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God’s laws. For the same God who said, “You must not commit adultery,” also said, “You must not murder.” So if you murder someone but do not commit adultery, you have still broken the law.

So whatever you say or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law that sets you free. There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you.

What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, “Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well”—but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

Now someone may argue, “Some people have faith; others have good deeds.” But I say, “How can you show me your faith if you don’t have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.”

You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. How foolish! Can’t you see that faith without good deeds is useless?

Don’t you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.” He was even called the friend of God. So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.

—*from the book of James*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

God made us humans, people who are meant to wisely follow God’s good ways of living. Through Jesus, we can see what kind of people

God wants us to be. What are some ways we can help people who are poor? What's a good way to remember to be careful about what we say to other people? How can we encourage each other when we go through hard times?

## DAY 34

# Light Comes into the Darkness

(from *Messiah*, pages 399, 402-403)

*We were all born into the darkness, into a world of pain and loss and death. But this was never what God intended for us. He wanted us to live. He wanted us to love and serve him and to care for others and for his good creation. So when people embraced the darkness, God decided to send his light right into the middle of the darkness. Jesus is that light, the light that will bring us life.*



In the beginning the Word already existed.

The Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.

He existed in the beginning with God.

God created everything through him,  
and nothing was created except through him.

The Word gave life to everything that was created,  
and his life brought light to everyone.

The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness can never extinguish it.

God sent a man, John the Baptist, to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

John testified about him when he shouted to the crowds, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.'"

From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses, but God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us. . . .

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There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you."

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?"

Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

"How are these things possible?" Nicodemus asked.

Jesus replied, "You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don't understand these things? I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won't believe our testimony. But if you don't believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

"There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone

who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants."

—*from the Gospel of John*

**THINKING TOGETHER:**

Jesus was not afraid to risk rejection. He still came to us. And sure enough, his people did not understand him. But he came anyway because he knew the world needed light, and he was that light. Jesus came to bring life, not death. Why do you think it was hard for people to understand and to accept Jesus?

**DAY 35**

## The Resurrection and the Life

(from *Messiah*, pages 419-421)

*The ultimate enemy of God and his good creation is death itself. Death seeks to destroy all that God has made. So the real test of the work of Jesus is whether or not he can defeat death. When Jesus lost his good friend Lazarus, he was overcome by grief. Jesus is fully human, and he experienced real human emotions. Jesus wept because of his loss and because of what death can take away. But then Jesus did what he came to do: He brought life back. He raised Lazarus from the dead to show us what God's intention is. God's work is to bring full and abundant life back into our world.*



A man named Lazarus was sick. He lived in Bethany with his sisters, Mary and Martha. This is the Mary who later poured the expensive perfume on the Lord's feet and wiped them with her hair. Her brother, Lazarus, was sick. So the two sisters sent a message to Jesus telling him, "Lord, your dear friend is very sick."

But when Jesus heard about it he said, "Lazarus's sickness will not end in death. No, it happened for the glory of God so that the Son of God will receive glory from this." So although Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, he stayed where he was for the next two days. Finally, he said to his disciples, "Let's go back to Judea."

But his disciples objected. "Rabbi," they said, "only a few days ago the people in Judea were trying to stone you. Are you going there again?"

Jesus replied, "There are twelve hours of daylight every day. During the day people can walk safely. They can see because they have the light of this world. But at night there is danger of stumbling because they have no light." Then he said, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but now I will go and wake him up."

The disciples said, "Lord, if he is sleeping, he will soon get better!" They thought Jesus meant Lazarus was simply sleeping, but Jesus meant Lazarus had died.

So he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. And for your sakes, I'm glad I wasn't there, for now you will really believe. Come, let's go see him."

Thomas, nicknamed the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let's go, too—and die with Jesus."

When Jesus arrived at Bethany, he was told that Lazarus had already been in his grave for four days. Bethany was only a few miles down the road from Jerusalem, and many of the people had come to console Martha and Mary in their loss. When Martha got word that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him. But Mary stayed in the house. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask."

Jesus told her, "Your brother will rise again."

"Yes," Martha said, "he will rise when everyone else rises, at the last day."

Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?"

"Yes, Lord," she told him. "I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God." Then she returned to Mary. She called Mary aside from the mourners and told her, "The Teacher is here and wants to see you." So Mary immediately went to him.

Jesus had stayed outside the village, at the place where Martha met him. When the people who were at the house consoling Mary saw her leave so hastily, they assumed she was going to Lazarus's grave to weep. So they followed her there. When Mary arrived and saw Jesus, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died."

When Jesus saw her weeping and saw the other people wailing with her,

a deep anger welled up within him, and he was deeply troubled. “Where have you put him?” he asked them.

They told him, “Lord, come and see.” Then Jesus wept. The people who were standing nearby said, “See how much he loved him!” But some said, “This man healed a blind man. Couldn’t he have kept Lazarus from dying?”

Jesus was still angry as he arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone rolled across its entrance. “Roll the stone aside,” Jesus told them.

But Martha, the dead man’s sister, protested, “Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible.”

Jesus responded, “Didn’t I tell you that you would see God’s glory if you believe?” So they rolled the stone aside. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, thank you for hearing me. You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me.” Then Jesus shouted, “Lazarus, come out!” And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in graveclothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth. Jesus told them, “Unwrap him and let him go!”

Many of the people who were with Mary believed in Jesus when they saw this happen. But some went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the leading priests and Pharisees called the high council together. “What are we going to do?” they asked each other. “This man certainly performs many miraculous signs. If we allow him to go on like this, soon everyone will believe in him. Then the Roman army will come and destroy both our Temple and our nation.”

Caiaphas, who was high priest at that time, said, “You don’t know what you’re talking about! You don’t realize that it’s better for you that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed.”

He did not say this on his own; as high priest at that time he was led to prophesy that Jesus would die for the entire nation. And not only for that nation, but to bring together and unite all the children of God scattered around the world.

—*from the Gospel of John*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

Jesus came to bring life back to God’s world—full and abundant life. Sometimes Christians haven’t heard or they forget that our hope is that God will raise our bodies from the dead in God’s new creation. Our hope is for resurrection. How could knowing this truth change how we think about our life now? How could it change how we think about the future?

## DAY 36

## Joined to the Messiah

(from *Messiah*, pages 424, 426-427)

*It was right before the Passover—the ancient Jewish freedom festival—and Jesus’ last meal with his disciples before he died. Jesus used this crucial moment to show his closest followers that he was a Servant King. He was there to serve them and to save them. The world tells us to watch out for our own interests. Jesus teaches us to care for the interests of others. All those who are united with Jesus will obey his great command: Love each other.*



Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end. It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.

When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”

Jesus replied, “You don’t understand now what I am doing, but someday you will.”

“No,” Peter protested, “you will never ever wash my feet!”

Jesus replied, “Unless I wash you, you won’t belong to me.”

Simon Peter exclaimed, “Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!”

Jesus replied, “A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not all of you.” For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, “Do you understand what I was doing? You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you are right, because that’s what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet.

I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them. . . .

“I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid. Remember what I told you: I am going away, but I will come back to you again. If you really loved me, you would be happy that I am going to the Father, who is greater than I am. I have told you these things before they happen so that when they do happen, you will believe.

“I don’t have much more time to talk to you, because the ruler of this world approaches. He has no power over me, but I will do what the Father requires of me, so that the world will know that I love the Father. Come, let’s be going.

“I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.

“I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn’t confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. You didn’t choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. This is my command: Love each other.”

—*from the Gospel of John*

**THINKING TOGETHER:**

The heart of our new life in Jesus is to stay connected to Jesus. We are to love him, to worship him, and to follow his teaching. What did Jesus mean when he told us to “produce much fruit”? What are some practical ways we can obey his command to love each other?

**DAY 37****Living in the Light of Jesus**

(from *Messiah*, pages 441-442)

*The apostle John wrote this letter to a group of Christians in crisis. False teachers had joined their group, misleading people about who Jesus was and what he had come to do. So John reminds them that to live in the light means to follow the way of Jesus in practice. It means to show real love and concern for others, to live the way Jesus himself did. Jesus has taken away our sin and made us clean, so that we can now live for him.*



We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.

This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth. But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living

in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.

My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.

And we can be sure that we know him if we obey his commandments. If someone claims, “I know God,” but doesn’t obey God’s commandments, that person is a liar and is not living in the truth. But those who obey God’s word truly show how completely they love him. That is how we know we are living in him. Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did.

Dear friends, I am not writing a new commandment for you; rather it is an old one you have had from the very beginning. This old commandment—to love one another—is the same message you heard before. Yet it is also new. Jesus lived the truth of this commandment, and you also are living it. For the darkness is disappearing, and the true light is already shining.

If anyone claims, “I am living in the light,” but hates a fellow believer, that person is still living in darkness. Anyone who loves a fellow believer is living in the light and does not cause others to stumble. But anyone who hates a fellow believer is still living and walking in darkness. Such a person does not know the way to go, having been blinded by the darkness.

I am writing to you who are God’s children  
 because your sins have been forgiven through Jesus.  
 I am writing to you who are mature in the faith  
 because you know Christ, who existed from the beginning.  
 I am writing to you who are young in the faith  
 because you have won your battle with the evil one.  
 I have written to you who are God’s children  
 because you know the Father.  
 I have written to you who are mature in the faith  
 because you know Christ, who existed from the beginning.  
 I have written to you who are young in the faith  
 because you are strong.  
 God’s word lives in your hearts,  
 and you have won your battle with the evil one.

Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.

—*from the first letter of John*

**THINKING TOGETHER:**

Light and darkness are in a struggle. The darkness of wrongdoing and death is always attacking God's world. But through Jesus, even those who are young in the faith already know that the light will win in the end. We know that Jesus has already defeated the evil one. How does knowing this help us when we are still struggling with the darkness?

**DAY 38**

**Staying True to the King**

(from *Messiah*, pages 455-456, 459)

*As the message about the victory of Jesus first spread throughout the Roman Empire, many people became followers of Jesus and new churches were started. But Caesar (the title of the ruler of the Roman Empire) still demanded to be worshiped as the lord and ruler of everything. So many Christians were harassed and persecuted, and they were tempted to deny that they followed Jesus. The book of Revelation was written to encourage and strengthen these Christians in their faith. It uses a special way of writing with symbols and visions to describe things. This letter was shared among the churches so all the believers would continue to worship and follow King Jesus.*



This is a revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants the events that must soon take place. He sent an angel to present this

revelation to his servant John, who faithfully reported everything he saw. This is his report of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

God blesses the one who reads the words of this prophecy to the church, and he blesses all who listen to its message and obey what it says, for the time is near.

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This letter is from John to the seven churches in the province of Asia.

Grace and peace to you from the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come; from the sevenfold Spirit before his throne; and from Jesus Christ. He is the faithful witness to these things, the first to rise from the dead, and the ruler of all the kings of the world.

All glory to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by shedding his blood for us. He has made us a Kingdom of priests for God his Father. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen.

Look! He comes with the clouds of heaven.

And everyone will see him—  
even those who pierced him.  
And all the nations of the world  
will mourn for him.

Yes! Amen!

“I am the Alpha and the Omega—the beginning and the end,” says the Lord God. “I am the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come—the Almighty One.”

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I, John, am your brother and your partner in suffering and in God’s Kingdom and in the patient endurance to which Jesus calls us. I was exiled to the island of Patmos for preaching the word of God and for my testimony about Jesus. It was the Lord’s Day, and I was worshiping in the Spirit. Suddenly, I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet blast. It said, “Write in a book everything you see, and send it to the seven churches in the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.”

When I turned to see who was speaking to me, I saw seven gold lampstands. And standing in the middle of the lampstands was someone like the Son of Man. He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow. And

his eyes were like flames of fire. His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice thundered like mighty ocean waves. He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword came from his mouth. And his face was like the sun in all its brilliance.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as if I were dead. But he laid his right hand on me and said, "Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last. I am the living one. I died, but look—I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave.

"Write down what you have seen—both the things that are now happening and the things that will happen. This is the meaning of the mystery of the seven stars you saw in my right hand and the seven gold lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." . . .

"Write this letter to the angel of the church in Laodicea. This is the message from the one who is the Amen—the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's new creation:

"I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth! You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. So I advise you to buy gold from me—gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. Also buy white garments from me so you will not be shamed by your nakedness, and ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see. I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent and turn from your indifference.

"Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends. Those who are victorious will sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne.

"Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches."

—*from the book of Revelation*

### THINKING TOGETHER:

When Jesus was on earth, his glory was hidden. Now, since his resurrection and his ascension to heaven, his glory is revealed. And when he returns to earth, everyone will see that he really is our glorious King! What are your favorite symbols of Jesus? What do they teach us about him?

## DAY 39

## The Lamb Who Is a Lion

(from *Messiah*, pages 460-461)

*Ancient kings loved to use symbols of great, strong animals for themselves. So they would say they were like an eagle, or a lion, or a mighty ox. But Jesus came as a tiny lamb, a lamb who was willing to give up his own life and to be killed as a sacrifice for others. But because he was willing to serve others before himself, God made Jesus the great King over all things. Now Jesus is like a lion, the One who rules. And God says we will join Jesus in bringing his good, peaceful rule to all the earth.*



Then as I looked, I saw a door standing open in heaven, and the same voice I had heard before spoke to me like a trumpet blast. The voice said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after this.” And instantly I was in the Spirit, and I saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it. The one sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones—like jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled his throne like a rainbow. Twenty-four thrones surrounded him, and twenty-four elders sat on them. They were all clothed in white and had gold crowns on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder. And in front of the throne were seven torches with burning flames. This is the sevenfold Spirit of God. In front of the throne was a shiny sea of glass, sparkling like crystal.

In the center and around the throne were four living beings, each covered with eyes, front and back. The first of these living beings was like a lion; the second was like an ox; the third had a human face; and the fourth was like an eagle in flight. Each of these living beings had six wings, and their wings were covered all over with eyes, inside and out. Day after day and night after night they keep on saying,

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty—  
the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come.”

Whenever the living beings give glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever), the twenty-four

elders fall down and worship the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever). And they lay their crowns before the throne and say,

“You are worthy, O Lord our God,  
to receive glory and honor and power.  
For you created all things,  
and they exist because you created what you pleased.”

Then I saw a scroll in the right hand of the one who was sitting on the throne. There was writing on the inside and the outside of the scroll, and it was sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel, who shouted with a loud voice: “Who is worthy to break the seals on this scroll and open it?” But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll and read it.

Then I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll and read it. But one of the twenty-four elders said to me, “Stop weeping! Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the heir to David’s throne, has won the victory. He is worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals.”

Then I saw a Lamb that looked as if it had been slaughtered, but it was now standing between the throne and the four living beings and among the twenty-four elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which represent the sevenfold Spirit of God that is sent out into every part of the earth. He stepped forward and took the scroll from the right hand of the one sitting on the throne. And when he took the scroll, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they held gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of God’s people. And they sang a new song with these words:

“You are worthy to take the scroll  
and break its seals and open it.  
For you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed people for God  
from every tribe and language and people and nation.  
And you have caused them to become  
a Kingdom of priests for our God.  
And they will reign on the earth.”

Then I looked again, and I heard the voices of thousands and millions of angels around the throne and of the living beings and the elders. And they sang in a mighty chorus:

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered—  
to receive power and riches  
and wisdom and strength  
and honor and glory and blessing.”

And then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea. They sang:

“Blessing and honor and glory and power  
belong to the one sitting on the throne  
and to the Lamb forever and ever.”

And the four living beings said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped the Lamb.

—*from the book of Revelation*

**THINKING TOGETHER:**

Jesus is worthy to receive all our praise. He has won the victory over evil! What are some of the different ways we can praise and honor him?

**DAY 40**

## A New Heaven and a New Earth

(from *Messiah*, pages 477, 479-481)

*When God's great battle against evil is finally over, he will renew and restore the entire creation. There will be a new heaven and a new earth—this world cleansed and purified. Imagine life on earth without evil or any wrongdoing, without pain or death. Imagine God coming to make his home with us, right here in our world. Imagine doing the work God always intended for us—making things, exploring, caring for each other and the rest of creation. Imagine being with God and worshiping him with pure joy. The entire story of the Bible is headed toward this vision. All God's work is to make this vision a reality.*



And again their voices rang out:

“Praise the LORD!  
The smoke from that city ascends forever and ever!”

Then the twenty-four elders and the four living beings fell down and worshiped God, who was sitting on the throne. They cried out, "Amen! Praise the LORD!"

And from the throne came a voice that said,

"Praise our God,  
all his servants,  
all who fear him,  
from the least to the greatest."

Then I heard again what sounded like the shout of a vast crowd or the roar of mighty ocean waves or the crash of loud thunder:

"Praise the LORD!

For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.

Let us be glad and rejoice,  
and let us give honor to him.

For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb,  
and his bride has prepared herself.

She has been given the finest of pure white linen to wear."

For the fine linen represents the good deeds of God's holy people.

And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb." And he added, "These are true words that come from God." . . .

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."

And the one sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new!" And then he said to me, "Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true." And he also said, "It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children.

"But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those

who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.” . . .

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I saw no temple in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its light. The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the world will enter the city in all their glory. Its gates will never be closed at the end of day because there is no night there. And all the nations will bring their glory and honor into the city. Nothing evil will be allowed to enter, nor anyone who practices shameful idolatry and dishonesty—but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. It flowed down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations.

No longer will there be a curse upon anything. For the throne of God and of the Lamb will be there, and his servants will worship him. And they will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads. And there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever.

Then the angel said to me, “Everything you have heard and seen is trustworthy and true. The Lord God, who inspires his prophets, has sent his angel to tell his servants what will happen soon.”

“Look, I am coming soon! Blessed are those who obey the words of prophecy written in this book.”

—*from the book of Revelation*

#### **THINKING TOGETHER:**

Think about all the things that have ever made you sad. Now think about God coming to our world to make everything right. Does that make you excited? Why is it important to have hope in a world like ours?