


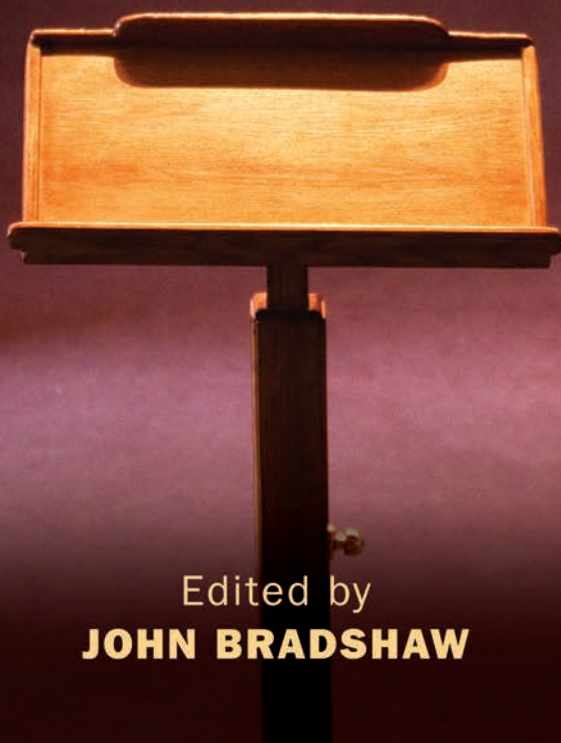
VOLUME 2

104

USEFUL SERMON

ILLUSTRATIONS

FROM
 IT IS WRITTEN®



Edited by
JOHN BRADSHAW

VOLUME 2

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USEFUL **SERMON** ILLUSTRATIONS

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 IT IS WRITTEN®

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104 Useful Sermon Illustrations from It Is Written, Volume 2, by John Bradshaw

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Introduction

Preachers know that good illustrations are critical to good preaching. And even though sermon illustrations are all around us, there are times that they're not where you need them most: at your fingertips. Welcome to *104 Useful Sermon Illustrations, Volume 2*. From mountain lions to gold-infused milkshakes; from narrow escapes to Michelin stars, this book contains illustrations that will not only enhance your communication, but will also spark your creativity.

God bless you as you proclaim the urgent message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. It is my prayer that this book will help you reach one more soul for Him.

John Bradshaw

President, It Is Written

P.S. If you have a sermon illustration you feel would bless other preachers or teachers, I'd love to include it in *104 Useful Sermon Illustrations, Volume 3*. Please submit sermon illustrations at **itiswritten.com/preach**.

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Sermon Illustrations

1. Lion; Victory; Strength; Love

If someone dared you to fight a mountain lion, I'm sure you'd be wise enough not to. I expect most people would say that going toe to toe with a mountain lion isn't on the top of their to-do list, but you don't know what you're capable of until you're called to do something.

When a 5-year-old boy in Southern California was attacked by a mountain lion and dragged 45 yards, the boy's mother, hearing the commotion, ran outside and started punching and hitting the mountain lion with her bare hands. The mountain lion let go of the little boy and fled. The boy was taken to a hospital, where he was treated for significant injuries.

Desperate times call for desperate measures, but the mother's love for her child was so strong that she didn't think twice about going at the mountain lion. Most people are capable of more than they realize, and that's certainly true spiritually.

"I could never stop smoking." "That sin is always going to get the better of me." "I could never share my faith with another person." "I could never give a Bible study." None of that is true, but it's the sort of thing many people think. When Jesus is living His life in you, there's no limit to what you can accomplish.

Associated verses: Philippians 4:13, Matthew 19:26, 1 Peter 5:8

2. Food; Expensive; Gold; Fulfillment; Priorities; Service

If you wanted to, and evidently, people do, you could spend \$6,000 on a burger. You could purchase a cronut—that's a cross between a croissant and a donut—for more than \$2,000, a milkshake for a hundred dollars, fries for \$200, or an ice cream sundae for a thousand.

These aren't entirely regular food items. The burger, sold in a Dutch town 45 minutes out of Amsterdam, features wagyu beef and Alaskan king crab. The cronut, available in London, England, is filled with caviar, the fries are cooked with champagne and truffle oil and truffled cheeses, the milkshake is served in a crystal-encrusted glass, and the "Gold Encrusted Opulence" sundae, as it's called, features caviar and edible gold leaf. (The milkshake, fries, and sundae can be bought at a place on East 60th Street in New York City.)

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For the right price, you can have it all. But the question remains, why **WOULD** you? Well, the BBC reports that after being limited by the pandemic, many people were ready to do something special—ready to splurge a little bit—and craved a unique experience. Evidently, this means that being deprived makes people think of...themselves.

But we know that's not where fulfillment comes from. A man who was offered a scholarship to a prestigious music school chose to go in a different direction after he got his first taste of mission service. His priorities changed, so he chose to serve God with the rest of his life.

Contrary to the opinion of those who sell \$6,000 burgers, we're not on this Earth to serve our own desires, but to serve others. When you discover that, you're really living.

Associated verses: Matthew 20:28 (KJV), Matthew 9:37–38

3. Donation; Rich; Mission; Gift; Salvation; Undeserving; Value

You've heard it said that if a thing seems too good to be true, then it probably is. But that's not always the case.

When a charity received an email saying that someone wanted to give a gift of \$15 million, the recipients suspected the email was a phishing hoax and ignored it for a month. Several emails to one organization about a \$20 million gift were ignored because no one recognized the name of the sender, and they all thought it was fake.

But those emails and many others like them were anything but fake. They were sent by MacKenzie Scott, the fourth-richest woman in the world. In the last few years, she's become a major-league philanthropist, giving away billions of dollars to organizations whose work and mission she values. Many organizations simply couldn't believe large, unexpected gifts could come seemingly from out of nowhere, and they were thrilled to be the beneficiaries of such kindness. It wasn't too good to be true, after all.

Now think about the gift of salvation. God gives sinners—undeserving, faulty people—the gift of eternal life. For free. You don't deserve it, you can't earn it, and you'll never be worthy of it. But God gives it to you anyway.

In the case of the nonprofits that received Ms. Scott's donations, they were organizations (such as colleges, YMCAs, and groups that feed the hungry) doing work that Ms. Scott believed was worthy and valuable. But God gives salvation to people who can't point to their good works, who have done nothing at all to warrant such kindness. Thank God, salvation is not too good to be true.

Associated verses: John 3:16 (KJV), Romans 5:8

4. Stress; Sports; Heart; Loss; Super Bowl; Emotions; Faith

You want to be careful about what you attach your heart to. Some years ago, NBC News reported that a loss by your favorite sports team could actually kill you! Researchers found that overall and circulatory death rates both rose significantly in Los Angeles after the LA Rams lost the Super Bowl in 1980. Conversely, death rates declined after the city's other team at the time, the Raiders, WON the Super Bowl the next year.

Emotional stress combined with the intensity of a game can be bad or good for some people. There's no need to take a game THAT seriously, but it's easy to attach your heart, your loyalties, and your emotions to the wrong things. The one thing you can safely connect your heart to is faith in God. Learn to love what God loves, and you'll be in good shape.

Associated verses: Psalm 86:12; 1 John 2:15–17

5. Drought; Canyon; Water; Trials; Character; Faith

Drought in the western United States was so serious in 2022 that the water level of Lake Powell in southern Utah plunged by 50 feet in just 12 months, and was down by 150 feet since 2000. As a result, the canyon that was flooded in 1963 to create Lake Powell began to emerge.

Before it was flooded, Glen Canyon was a masterpiece; some say it was more spectacular than the Grand Canyon, with cliffs and sandstone arches. As the lake level dropped, Glen Canyon's remarkable features became visible again. The hardship of drought revealed the beauty of the once-flooded canyon.

Trials can have that effect on people. You'll notice that when natural disasters strike, many people will band together to help their neighbors or even strangers. Often when families or individuals are challenged, unseen qualities become visible. While it might otherwise be hidden beneath the surface, a person's true character or the depth of their faith can be seen.

No one wants trials, and they can be brutally difficult. But when they come, God will reveal the beauty of your character—if you'll let Him.

Associated verses: James 1:2–3,12; Romans 12:12; John 16:33; 1 Corinthians 10:13

6. Raphael; Michelangelo; Artist; Change; Transformation; Refining; Growth

Even though he was one of history's great artists, 16th-century painter Raphael was overshadowed by his more famous rival. It's said that after seeing Michelangelo's artworks, Raphael was moved to refine his own. And that should be our experience. As you look to Jesus, you'll be inspired to change and become more like Jesus.

Associated verses: 2 Corinthians 3:18 (KJV); Malachi 3:2; Matthew 5:48; Hebrews 12:2–4

7. Nobel Prize; Pointlessness; Death; Religion; Universe; Creation; Purpose

After he died at the age of 88, Steven Weinberg was described in *Scientific American* as “not only a Nobel laureate physicist but also one of the most eloquent science writers of the last half century.” His most famous statement was one he made in his first popular book: “The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless.”

It appears the same man who considered the universe “pointless” had also thought about matters of faith. He said, “We’re going to die, and our loved ones are going to die, and it would be very nice to believe that that was not the end and that we would live beyond the grave and meet those we love again.” On another occasion he stated: “Living without God is not that easy. And I feel the appeal of religion in that sense.”

Dr. Weinberg came to the conclusion that the universe was pointless, which is tragic, because the universe is anything but pointless. It was created intentionally by a loving God. Although we can't see God, we can see His fingerprints and read His handwriting.

Are you seeing the point to the universe? God made you to know Him and to spend eternity with Him. That's a great point.

Associated verses: Romans 1:20 (KJV); Jeremiah 29:11–13; 1 Peter 2:9

8. Deals; Frequent flier miles; Eternal Life; Salvation; Food

In 1999, a food company offered frequent flier miles to people who sent in barcodes from its products. So David Phillips bought 12,000 containers of Healthy Choice pudding at just 25 cents each, meaning that for a little over \$3,000 he earned more than 1.2 million airline miles, which he used to travel the world over the next five years.

But as good as that deal was, the best decision you could EVER make would be to accept eternal life. You lose nothing, and you gain everything.

Associated verses: Romans 6:23 (KJV); Ephesians 2:8–9; John 3:16

9. Rain; Dam; Failure; Strength; Emergency; Resilience

Rain was so heavy in California in 2017 that the main spillway of a major dam was damaged. Problems with the dam's auxiliary spillway meant that almost 200,000 people were evacuated due to fears there would be a catastrophic failure. Billions of gallons of water could have burst from the reservoir all at once. But experts found a way to handle the large volumes of water and alleviate the emergency.

In the same way that you don't expect a dam to fail, most people don't expect themselves to fail. But what happens if there's a crisis, a death, a financial loss, a job loss, a divorce? Where do you find strength so as not to completely fall apart?

Associated verses: Psalm 18:2 (KJV); Psalm 56:3; Psalm 91:10–12

10. Menus; Psychology; Restaurants; Words; Perception; Grace; Mercy; Benefits; Blessings

Many people don't realize that restaurant menus are often the result of a lot of hard work, research, and psychology. People known as menu engineers help restaurants create menus that will encourage customers to spend more.

Menu engineers know that certain fonts used on menus convey ideas of class and quality. They know words are important. The BBC reported that for meat-eaters, "grass-fed Aberdeen Angus fillet with thick-cut rosemary fries" sounds much more appetizing than a simple "steak and chips."

An advertisement for department store Marks and Spencer said: "This is not just a pudding. This is a melt-in-the-middle, Belgian chocolate pudding served with extra thick Channel Island cream." Sales jumped by 3,500 percent.

Using fancy words can make some dishes seem like better value for the money, with one researcher finding that when longer words are used to describe a dish, it tends to cost more. A restaurant consultant said, "We can increase the profits of a restaurant by thousands simply by rearranging the items on the menu." It seems it's all in how you sell it.

Isn't faith in Jesus like that? If you're going to share Christianity as a matter of "don'ts," or if you emphasize the most challenging teachings of the Bible, you may end up being offensive. But if you first share the most appealing things—Jesus, forgiveness, grace, and mercy—you're more likely to draw that person who is looking for a better way.

You want to make Jesus more attractive to people, not less, and how you present Jesus is important. When you share the benefits and blessings, you're advertising faith in God in an effective way.

Associated verses: Psalm 34:8; John 4:29; John 1:40–41

11. Menus; Pain Points; Money; God's law; Sacrifice; Obedience; Cross; Perception; Reality

I expect you've noticed that some restaurant menus don't feature dollar signs. They'll say, "Salad, 9." Or, "Burger and Fries, 14," for example.

Experts describe the dollar sign as a "pain point" that reminds customers they're spending money. Could it be that some churches use that same approach, identifying talking of God's law, or sacrifice, or obedience as "pain points"? But Christianity involves a cross, and we don't want to shy away from taking it up. Hiding the dollar sign doesn't change reality.

Associated verses: Luke 9:23; Revelation 22:17; Luke 14:33

12. Lottery; Money; Loss; Everlasting Life; Salvation

Weeks after a 45-year-old German woman bought a lottery ticket, she checked to see if it was worth anything and discovered she had won the equivalent of \$46 million! She'd had the winning ticket for weeks but hadn't done anything with it. She could have easily lost it.

Some years ago, a winning ticket bought in New York City that was worth \$68 million was never cashed, and the same was true for a \$46 million winning ticket bought in the same city a few years later. But there's a much greater loss, and it's happening every day to people everywhere. Every human alive is offered everlasting life. It's worth far too much to waste.

Associated verses: Romans 10:9; Mark 10:17–27; Acts 26:28

13. Leaks; Barrier; Tests; Trials

Although water leaked through a temporary flood barrier during testing, engineers were pleased. The leaks let them know not only that they needed to make adjustments to the barrier, but also where to make them. They knew that once they made those corrections, the flood barrier would work well when a serious challenge came.

No one likes to be challenged, or tested, but trials are really your friends. They show you where the leaks are in your experience, helping you know where to make adjustments.

Associated verses: James 1:2–3; Romans 5:3; Philippians 4:6–7

14. Airplane; Seatbelts; Hawaii; Trouble; Surrender; Turbulence

Less than 15 minutes after Aloha Airlines flight 243 departed from Hilo, Hawaii, bound for Honolulu, the unthinkable happened. A 20-foot section of the fuselage peeled away directly behind the cockpit, exposing terrified passengers to the elements almost five miles above the Earth.

In the 13 minutes it took for the pilot to land the plane, some passengers prayed, others cried, while still others waited to die. Tragically, a flight attendant lost her life in the 1988 incident, although, incredibly, everyone else survived, some with serious injuries. More lives would certainly have been lost except that the passengers in the most-affected section of the stricken airliner were buckled in.

We can find a lesson there. The question for your life isn't, "Shall trouble come?" Scripture assures us it will. The question to be asked (and answered) is, "Are you buckled in?" If you're buckled in—if Jesus has you, if you're surrendered to Him—you can know that you're facing the future with your life hidden in the life of Jesus.

The turbulence we're experiencing in this world is a call from God to be ready for Jesus' return.

Associated verses: John 15:4

15. Bicycle; Florida; Alligator; Injury; Hazards; Bible

A man was riding his bicycle along a path in a park in Stuart, Florida, 110 miles north of Miami, when he lost control of the bike, fell off, and tumbled six feet down an embankment. Unfortunately for the man, he landed near a female alligator, who was near her nest and was therefore aggressive. The alligator attacked the man, who was seriously injured and taken to a nearby medical center.

It's a reminder that hazards are always nearby. Danger is everywhere, especially spiritual danger. It's important to stand on the Bible and let your footing be secure.


Associated verses: 1 Peter 5:8; Isaiah 8:20

16. President; Japan; Pilot; Air Force; Rescue; Second Chance; Opportunities

George almost didn't make it. And if he hadn't, history would have turned out much differently.

In 1944, U.S. aircraft conducted a bombing raid on tiny Chichi Jima Island, 700 miles south of Tokyo. Several American planes were shot down, and of the nine airmen who escaped, eight were captured and then executed. Some of them were cannibalized, in view of the survivors. But George escaped.

After flying his plane as far away from Chichi Jima as he could, George bailed out at the last possible moment and saw his plane crash into the sea. As Japanese patrol



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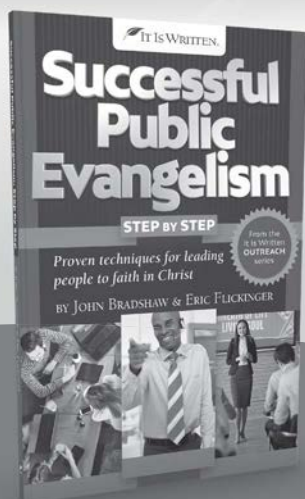
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Minimum System Recommendations:

- Microsoft Windows 7, or Mac OS X 10.6
- 4 GB RAM
- 10 GB drive space
- PowerPoint 2013 or Keynote 6



boats advanced to apprehend him, the airman started mentally preparing himself for capture. But U.S. planes arrived on the scene just in time to intervene, and George was taken aboard an American vessel and was saved.

If one of any number of things had not happened as they did, George would not have made it, and George H.W. Bush would not have gone on to become the 41st president of the United States. He got a dramatic second chance, and he made the best of it.

So what are you doing with your second chances? Every new day is another day to serve God. Every day is filled with potential and possibility. Make the most of the opportunities God gives you.

Associated verses: Lamentations 3:22–23 (KJV); Matthew 27:22

17. Africa; Safari; Monkeys; Campfires; Imitation; Fire; Authenticity

While on safari in Africa, a man noticed that at the end of the day, his guides would pitch camp and make a fire. They would put little pieces of wood on the bottom and big pieces of wood on the top. But in the morning when they would wake up, two or three similar piles would be out in the woods, with the little wood on the bottom and big wood on the top.

The man didn't know how to explain what he was seeing and began to wonder if a ghost was arranging the wood. He said to some of the experienced people on the safari: "I don't understand this. In the evening we pile up our wood with little wood on the bottom and big wood on the top, and when we wake up, there are piles of wood in the jungle, with little wood on the bottom and big wood on the top."

"How does that happen?" he asked. And the old man who was experienced with the jungle replied: "Ah, that's easy to explain. Come here for a minute." He took him out into an opening and said, "Look up into that tree; what do you see?" The man said, "I see monkeys." The first man continued: "That's the answer. Monkeys are great imitators. They watch us build the fire, putting the little wood on the bottom and big wood on the top. When we go to sleep, they gather some wood. Notice that they've got the little wood on the bottom and big wood on the top. In fact, they've got everything except the fire."

That can be said of many Christians and churches today. They've got Bibles and books and choirs and organs and pews. They've got community programs, they have family members working for the church, and they know what day to show up for worship. They've got everything except the fire.

Associated verses: Luke 11:13; James 2:18–26; 1 Corinthians 2:1–5

18. Abduction; China; Human Trafficking; Love of a Father; Faithfulness; God's Love; Impossibilities

In 1997, a 2-year-old boy was abducted near his home in eastern China by a couple who sold the boy to traffickers. Police investigated the case, and the boy's father followed up leads he uncovered as he searched for his son. He rode 310,000 miles on 10 different motorbikes, spending his life's savings as he desperately sought to locate him.

Two dozen years after he was abducted, the boy—now 26 years old—was reunited with his parents. His mother said, “My baby, you came back.”

Jesus taught a parable about a man who went searching for the lost. We read about it in Luke 15: “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’” (verses 4–6). And then Jesus said, “I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance” (verse 7). That's how God feels about sinners.

When you see someone you feel has gone too far—maybe someone in your own family has wandered from God, or perhaps was never any kind of believer—keep in mind that that person is God's son or daughter. And just as earthly parents don't stop loving their children, God hasn't stopped loving the lost. He still cares, and He still searches.

Associated verses: Luke 15:8–10; Luke 15:22–24; Jeremiah 29:11; Jeremiah 31:3

19. Britain; India; Cobras; Snakes; Consequences; Being Good; Behavior

When Britain ruled India, so many cobras plagued the city of Delhi that the government offered a bounty for every dead cobra that was handed in to authorities. But it didn't take long for enterprising individuals to figure out that farming cobras was easier than catching cobras.

City officials wondered why the number of snakes being turned in never subsided, and before long they figured out what was going on. When the government abruptly halted the cobra payment program, cobra breeders turned their snakes loose in the city, meaning that the number of deadly snakes on the loose increased, rather than decreased. The “cobra effect” refers to unintended consequences and how good ideas can end up with negative outcomes.

We have a “cobra effect” in matters of faith. People want to go to heaven, which is appropriate, but they determine that they need to be good in order to go to heaven.

Their behavior needs to meet a certain standard before they can go to heaven. So, they work on their behavior because, of course, they want to be a “good” Christian. But the outcome is always, always, always frustration. That’s because, in spite of their best efforts, no men or women can change themselves.

You simply can’t change your own heart. Only Jesus can do that.

Associated verses: Jeremiah 10:23; Jeremiah 13:23; Romans 12:2

20. Picture; Children; God

It’s one of those “out of the mouths of babes” stories.

A young boy was asked to draw a picture of God. He did, but there was clearly something missing, and his mother asked him about it. The drawing showed a man with legs, and a torso, which was basically filled up with a heart... but that’s where the picture ended. The person had no head, no face. So the mother said, “Son, you haven’t included all of God.”

His answer was profound. “But God is too big to fit into the picture.”

How big is YOUR God? When Solomon was planning to construct the temple, he said, “But who is able to build him an house, seeing the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him?” That’s 2 Chronicles 2:6.

What are you facing today? What are you in the midst of? If your God is big enough, you’ll believe He can get you through.

—Tony Kimbley, Pastor, Tennessee

Associated verses: Matthew 19:26; Psalm 147:5; Isaiah 41:10

21. Gold Medal; Olympic Games; Plane Crash; Comeback

Three years after Betty Robinson won a gold medal in the 100-meter track event at the Amsterdam Olympic Games in 1928, she was involved in a plane crash that very nearly took her life. People were concerned that she wouldn’t survive. But she did more than survive. Even though she couldn’t walk normally again for two years, and therefore missed the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles, Betty Robinson competed at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. She won another gold medal in the 4 x 100 meters relay, in one of the most phenomenal comebacks you’ll ever hear.

But there’s one that’s even more impressive. Jesus told a story about a son who left his family home and became stuck in sin. When his father welcomed him back home, he said, “For this my son was dead, and is alive again” (Luke 15:24, KJV). No matter where you are right now, through faith in Jesus, you can make a comeback.

Associated verses: John 14:1–3; John 8:3–11; Mark 5:1–20

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22. Lion; Africa; News; Value of People; Taking Action; Caring

You might remember the story of Cecil the lion, who was shot and killed by a hunter in Zimbabwe in July of 2015. There was a great outcry over Cecil's death. Social media erupted, protesters protested, and the man who hunted Cecil became the target of the vitriol of a great many people.

After the story had died down, a man involved in conservation in Zimbabwe was asked his thoughts. He said he found it fascinating that while people all over the world were outraged by Cecil's death, once the story had run its course in the news, those same voices became silent. He spoke about the drastically declining lion numbers in Africa and wondered where all the people who were concerned about Cecil's death had gone. "Social media seems to have gone silent about lions," he said.

A government official in Zambia said, "The West seemed more concerned with the welfare of a lion in Zimbabwe than of Africans themselves." One reason for that may be that it's easy to tweet or post something online but far less easy to do something that makes an actual difference.

When it comes to faith in God, followers of Jesus are called to care and to *demonstrate* that care. Christianity goes beyond Twitter posts or Instagram stories. Isaiah 58:7 tells us that active faith is "to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?"

Rather than getting caught up in the moment, God's people are called to care about others, all the time.

Associated verses: Isaiah 58:7; Matthew 10:29–31; Philippians 2:4; Ephesians 4:32

23. Death; France

Several years ago, a woman in France was declared dead even though she was very much alive, and she quickly learned what a problem it is to have been declared dead.

The Guardian reported that her trouble began when her passport application was declined. Figuring she must have forgotten some paperwork, she didn't think too much of it. But then her healthcare card was rejected during a visit to her doctor.

When she discovered that her bank accounts had been frozen, she realized things were really serious. The manager of her local bank said, "I'm sorry, but you don't exist." She and her husband figured it was nothing more than a bureaucratic mix-up that would be smoothed out in no time. But no. It seems someone initiated legal action against a company she ran, then claimed she was dead... and nobody checked. Courts have said there's nothing they can do to right the wrongs, which have cost her thousands of Euros and triggered both physical and mental health problems.

She was alive but declared to be dead. But according to the Bible, Christians should be dead while they are alive. Colossians 3:3 says, “For you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” The person who comes to Jesus comes to Him to die. That is, your old life dies. The old you ceases to be, and God makes a completely new you. Your old life blends with the life of Jesus, and God makes a new person out of you.

Associated verses: Colossians 3:3; Romans 6:3–4

24. Train; Accident; Canada; Fire; Disaster; Trust; Bible

People began to wonder if there was something wrong. One of the five locomotives on the mile-long train had been left running, and there'd been a fire as the train sat in the town of Nantes, less than 20 miles from the border with Maine. Once the fire department put out the fire, officials believed the train was safe. However, when the locomotives were shut off after the fire, the air brakes no longer worked and the train began to roll. It rolled downhill toward the town of Lac Megantic, 7 miles away.

The runaway train included 72 cars that were filled with petroleum crude oil from North Dakota. By the time the train reached Lac Megantic, it was traveling at over 60 miles an hour when in some places the speed limit was as low as 10. Sparks were shooting from its wheels. When it derailed at about 1:15 in the morning, about a million and a half gallons of petroleum crude oil were released. The heat was so intense that it was felt more than a mile away.

The rail disaster of 2013, in which 47 people died, was Canada's worst in 150 years. If those brakes had held, the deaths and destruction would never have happened.

What's holding you? What's keeping you in place, keeping you from rolling away to disaster?

Hebrews 2:1 says, “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip” (KJV). Don't let go of the word of God or the Bible teachings that drew your heart to Jesus. Surrender to Jesus, and trust Him to keep you firmly in His grip. The alternatives are not good.

Associated verses: Hebrews 2:1; Psalm 91:1–16

25. Golf; Misconceptions; Giving Up; Hope

Figuring there was no way he could make the cut, professional golfer Bryson DeChambeau left the golf course and flew home to Texas. When he left he was in 90th position, and only 65 players were going to make the cut and play on into the third and fourth rounds. However, so many players carded bad scores that DeChambeau DID make the cut. The problem was that he was on his way back to Texas.

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So, at 2:45 the next morning, he got back onto a plane, flew to Charlotte, North Carolina, and drove to the course. He played so well that he finished the tournament tied for 9th place and earned \$229,000. DeChambeau had quit the tournament thinking he had no hope, but then ended up with a top-10 finish.

A lot of people act similarly in their spiritual lives. They think there's no hope and decide to quit, not realizing there's always hope for a sinner. Jesus said in Mark 2:17, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (KJV). If you're a sinner, you don't want to give up. What would that accomplish?

Instead you must hang on, and trust in Jesus to save you. That's what He has promised to do. Even when things go badly, Jesus doesn't give up on you. There's always hope in Jesus.

Associated verses: Mark 2:17; Philippians 1:6

26. Nose; Pain; Tiddlywinks; Past; Discomfort; Relief; Sins; Forgiveness

For most of her life, Mary McCarthy had a pain on the right side of her nose. She discovered why after a COVID-19 test made the pain much worse and prompted her to visit the emergency room. She'd had a small plastic disc stuck in her nose for 37 years!

Mary remembered that as a child, she and her siblings would take Tiddlywinks pieces and put them up their nostrils, then see how far they would go when they blew them out. One of them had obviously become stuck in her nose. Now 45 years old, Mary is relieved to be rid of the yellow plastic disc. It was something in her past that she had forgotten about, but years later it caused her great pain.

Sin can be like that. The things we have done in our past can come back and cause us pain.

Aren't you glad there's Someone who forgives us our sin? The grace of God will forgive us and cleanse us, and we don't have to live with the discomfort of sin in our lives.

Associated verses: Psalm 86:5; 1 John 1:9

27. Baptism; Bicycle; Australia; Allergies; Starting Over; Faith

In the Indian Pacific Wheel Race, riders cycle from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean—from Perth in Western Australia to the steps of the Sydney Opera House, a distance of 3,417 miles. That's further than from Los Angeles to Anchorage.

In 2017, a European cyclist named Juliana Buhring lined up in the field of 70 riders (8 women and 62 men) and set out from Perth. She was no stranger to endurance riding, having set a record for circumnavigating the planet by bike, a journey that took her 144 riding days.

After making it one-fifth of the way to Sydney, she developed a severe allergic reaction to medication she was taking. Her hands, feet, and head had swollen, she had a fever and was having difficulty breathing. She had no option but to pull out of the race.

After catching a ride back to Perth, she recovered so quickly that she started the race again. Juliana rode back over those first 715 miles, which included Australia's longest stretch of straight road. After pulling out of the race, Ms Buhring started over. Amazingly, when she arrived on the steps of the Sydney Opera House, she had passed a number of the other riders—riders she had given a 715-mile head start.

It's good to be able to start again. God offers you a new start when you come to faith in Jesus. He offers you a new start when you come to Him in baptism.

Associated verses: Acts 22:16; Galatians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:1–3

28. Florida; Cancer; Ignore; Truth

A Florida television news reporter was surprised to receive a message from a viewer expressing concern. The viewer had noticed a small lump on the reporter's neck and wrote to suggest that the reporter get it checked, as the viewer once had a similar lump that turned out to be cancerous.

The reporter initially was going to ignore the message, until her boyfriend encouraged her to get the lump checked. She discovered that she had thyroid cancer, which had spread to her lymph nodes. She underwent treatment, and the treatment was successful.

Her first instinct was to ignore the message she'd received. The truth isn't always pleasant, but it's always best.

Associated verses: Galatians 4:16 (KJV); John 8:32; 1 John 1:8

29. Photography; Experiment; Clothing; Lighting; Mirrors; Colors; Perceptions; Circumstances; Feelings; Faith

A British journalist wore the same outfit in the changing rooms of 10 different clothing stores, and she was photographed in each one by the same photographer using exactly the same camera. But when the photos were compared, the results were surprising. While she felt she looked good in some photos, there were some photos in which she didn't look good at all. She said that one photo made her look like "a pregnant hobbit."

Remember: same person, same outfit, same photographer, same camera. The one variable was that in those changing rooms, the lighting and the mirrors and the color

of the walls differed from store to store, so that while she really looked just fine, it often appeared that she didn't look good.

It pays to remember that circumstances can lie to you. You might be hungry or tired or have low blood sugar, and that can affect the way you feel about yourself. You can be a child of God and yet, for any number of reasons, not don't feel like one.

So, who should you believe? Should you believe what you see in the mirror on the wall? When you've chosen to be a follower of Christ, Satan will accuse you and tell you that you're not worthy. He'll try to crush your faith. What then? Hold on to God and don't let go.

As a believer surrendered to Jesus, you are a child of God. The lighting changes, and so do the mirrors. But when you know by faith that you are God's child, that's exactly what you are.

Associated verses: 2 Corinthians 5:7; Galatians 2:20; 1 John 3:1; 1 Samuel 16:7

30. Australia; Hiding; Beaches; Arrest; Fugitive; Guilt; Surrender; Running

A man in Australia turned himself in to authorities after living on the run for nearly 30 years. He'd been arrested for drug offenses but escaped custody in 1992, fearing he would be deported back to his home country of Yugoslavia. He went by an assumed name, did odd jobs to support himself, and most recently had been sleeping among sand dunes on Sydney's northern beaches. But after almost three decades as a fugitive, he surrendered to authorities, unwilling to live any longer with the guilt that has clung to him all of those years.

Many people today are living with crushing guilt, when all they need to do is surrender to Jesus, who will forgive their sins and give them a new heart. How are things with you? Are you living with guilt you could bring to God right now? Or instead of running to God, are you running from God?

Associated verses: Numbers 32:23; Isaiah 59:2; Jeremiah 2:22; Galatians 5:1; Romans 6:7

31. Michelin; Restaurant; Pressure; Family; Priorities; Children

The pinnacle of achievement for a restaurant is to be awarded a Michelin star. The coveted award, which speaks of excellence, is great for business and future industry success. But a couple in Wales handed back their Michelin star, saying they no longer wanted the pressure associated with it, because they intended to devote more time to their three young children. They loved having the award but wanted to put family first.

Getting the balance right in life isn't always easy. Getting it perfect might be impossible. But it's important that we do our best to get our priorities right. After your relationship with God, there's no more important relationship than the one you have with your children. Whatever you put before your kids is costing you way too much.

Is it time for you to reconsider your spiritual priorities, and then organize your life around them? Too often we give God what's left over in our lives. It's time to give God what comes first.

Associated verses: Psalm 127:3; Matthew 6:33; Luke 12:34; Exodus 20:3

32. Michelin; Restaurant; Chef; Priorities; Pressure; Food; Success; Essential

A Michelin star is one of the highest awards a restaurant can receive, yet an acclaimed French chef asked to have his three Michelin stars taken away. Three stars is the highest honor the Michelin restaurant guide bestows, and the chef—one of the most celebrated in all of France—had maintained those three stars for 20 years. *The Guardian* reported that the food at the restaurant, located in a remote French village, was “spellbinding,” but the chef said that he wanted “to give new meaning to my life ... and redefine what is essential.”

He talked about the intense pressure of being inspected two or three times a year, not knowing when the judges might stop by. He said, “Maybe I will be less famous, but I accept that.” He was one of only 27 French chefs to hold Michelin's top ranking.

Many people have longed to climb to the top of the mountain, only to get there and discover that the view isn't so great. Successful people tend to be busy people, and success brings with it a lot of demands. This is fine, unless it isn't. Sometimes it just isn't worth it.

The chef wanted to “redefine what is essential.” So what's essential for you? I know the answer already, because it's found in the Bible. In Matthew 6:33, Jesus said, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

Tangible “things” are important, but the most important thing according to Jesus is to put the principles of heaven first. Success is good. A thriving career is good. But it shouldn't be first. God is to be first. And notice that Jesus said you're able to have both; put God first, and He'll add the rest.

Is it time for you to redefine what is essential?

Associated verses: Matthew 6:33; Luke 12:34; Exodus 20:3

33. Pilot; Airplane; Pen; Little Things; Disaster

A 49-year-old pilot regained control of a vintage, single-engine aircraft just moments before it crashed into the ground. The pilot and plane were performing an aerobatic display when the plane nosedived.

So what would make a plane in the hands of an experienced pilot almost fly into the earth? A report into the incident found that a partially crushed pen had probably become lodged in the plane's rudder control circuit, jamming the controls. A pen!

As a result of the incident, the pilot decided that pens in his aircraft must be tied to the pilot's or student's flying suit. Something as small as a pen almost brought down a plane and very nearly caused a disaster. Sometimes, it's the little things that do the most damage, and that's true in our spiritual lives, as well.

Associated verse: Song of Solomon 2:15

34. Miracle; Storms; Wisconsin; Sewer; Firefighter; Manhole; Lost; Salvation; Rescue

If it wasn't a miracle, it was the closest thing to it. As storms pounded southern Wisconsin and southeastern Minnesota, an 11-year-old Wisconsin boy was sucked into a flooded storm sewer. Incredibly, an eagle-eyed firefighter saw the boy's fingers pop through an opening in a manhole cover.

The boy had been playing with friends in a flooded drainage ditch in the village of Harrison, about 30 miles southeast of Green Bay. When rescuers arrived, they found a man trying to hold onto the boy, who was nonetheless sucked into a culvert that led to the storm sewer. The water was rushing incredibly quickly. As they were trying to figure out where the flow of water might take the boy, they saw his fingers sticking through an opening in the cover. He had found an air pocket and was hanging onto a ladder beneath the manhole.

"I just thank God he was alive and he'd made it that long," said Wesley Pompa, the deputy fire chief. "It could have gone a million different ways, but this one way it worked out for him."

Can you imagine what it would be like to be swept away and to know you're lost? What if someone hadn't come to the boy's rescue?

This world is in that situation. It has been swept away, and it's filled with lost people looking forward to no future at all. Thank God Jesus came to our rescue.

If you ever feel like that lost boy, you can know that Jesus died to save you. No matter how bad it seems, Jesus can save you.

Associated verses: John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8,9; Romans 10:9; Acts 4:12

35. Settlement; Facebook; Age; Vacation; Florida; Foolish; Unwise; Careful

A man who was awarded \$80,000 in a discrimination settlement lost it all, because of a single Facebook post. When his contract at Gulliver Preparatory School near Miami, Florida, wasn't renewed, the man filed an age discrimination complaint and was awarded \$80,000.

But once he was awarded the payment, his daughter posted on Facebook, saying essentially: "Mom and Dad won the case against Gulliver. Gulliver is now officially paying for my vacation to Europe this summer!" Her message was sent to her 1,200 followers, which included many Gulliver students and alumni. The message spread like wildfire, and school officials found out about it. Eventually, the Third District Court of Appeal for the state of Florida ruled that the man had violated the confidentiality agreement he had agreed to, and he received nothing.

Associated verses: Matthew 12:37; Proverbs 21:23; Proverbs 10:19

36. Tornado; Theater; New York; Mind; Memory; History; Falsehood; Guidance; God's Presence

In 1996, a tornado tore through a drive-in movie theater in upstate New York as a movie about a devastating tornado was playing on the screen! At least, that's what some people claim.

Even today, many swear it happened. In fact, some people maintain they were in their cars watching the movie at the time. Except it didn't happen that way at all.

Yes, there was a tornado, and yes, a screen at the movie complex was destroyed, and yes, people were there at the time. But no tornado movie was playing at the time. In fact, NO movie was playing at the time, and if there had been, the tornado movie would have been playing on a different screen, not the one that was destroyed.

This tells you something about the human mind: People are able to alter their own history in their memories. Talk with friends about things you've done in the past—maybe your years in high school or college—and you'll find that different people remember things differently.

But here's a question: How do you remember the way God has worked in your life? When you were a child and got hurt, God was there. You lost a job, you were in a relationship that fell apart, you lost money, you were abandoned by friends, you were the victim of racism.

As you think back on your pain, how do you remember God's role in your life? Here's what Psalm 139:8 says on the subject: "If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell [the grave], behold, You are there." Don't let your mind play

tricks on you. You might be tempted to misremember how God led or guided you. Don't let your thinking about God get twisted.

Associated verses: Psalm 139:8; Exodus 33:14; Matthew 28:20

37. Diplomat; Switzerland; Germany; Hungary; World War 2; Jews; Deportation; Concentration Camp; Duplication; Safe Houses; Deliverance; Help; Salvation

Carl Lutz was a Swiss diplomat sent to German-occupied Budapest in 1942. During that time, Jews in the Hungarian countryside were being deported in very quick succession to Auschwitz. Lutz realized that he needed to act quickly. As an envoy for neutral Switzerland, Lutz represented the interests of countries that had closed their embassies in Hungary, including Britain and the United States.

To save Budapest's Jews, Lutz needed to persuade the Germans to let him issue diplomatic letters of protection—8,000 of them, to be exact. He then applied the letters not to individuals, as the Germans had intended, but to entire families. And once he reached 7,999, he simply started again at number 1, hoping the Nazis wouldn't notice the duplication.

Historians estimate that in this way he saved up to 62,000 people. Other diplomats learned from Lutz's methods and did the same.

Lutz's efforts frustrated Nazi officials in Budapest so much that they requested permission from Berlin to have him assassinated, but thankfully, it was never carried out.

When it became clear that Germany would lose the war, and Nazi actions became more desperate, Lutz set up 76 safe houses that were, diplomatically speaking, in Swiss territory. The shelters took in thousands. Sweden and the Red Cross set up safe houses, too. Altogether 120 of them were located across Budapest. In this way he placed under Swiss protection anyone connected to the countries he represented.

At war's end, when he finally returned home to Switzerland, Lutz expected some sort of welcome—especially given the sacrificial nature of his tenure in Budapest. Instead, when at the border gate of home, he was asked, "Do you have anything to declare?" Worse yet, he was reprimanded for overstepping his authority.

Carl Lutz's stepdaughter said of him: "He was a very shy man. It was not necessarily in his nature to do what he did. But he saw the misery of the Jews and he thought he had to help." (Story adapted from the BBC's online news story: "The Forgotten Swiss Diplomat Who Rescued Thousands From Holocaust," January 4, 2018.)

This one man, because he saw a need and was willing to act on it, saved 62,000 people from a horrific future! One man!

What can one person do to impact the kingdom of heaven? More than many of us often imagine. God has positioned each of us for greatness. And while Carl Lutz received no fanfare for his efforts, when all is said and done, God will say to the redeemed, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (Matthew 25:23).

—Dave Moench, Pastor, North Dakota

Associated verses: Matthew 25:23; 1 Peter 4:10; Galatians 5:13

38. France; Within; Philosopher; Faith; Strength; Hope; Resilience

French philosopher and author Albert Camus once said: “In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer. And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there’s something stronger—something better, pushing right back.”

While Camus wasn’t a Christian (he was an atheist), he makes a point we can adopt into our faith experience. As Christians, we have the same thing: the invincible summer with Christ in us. The world presses us, but Jesus inside us provides strength and hope.

Associated verses: Joshua 1:9; 2 Timothy 1:7; Philippians 4:13

39. Idol; Popularity; Television; New York City; London; Alcoholism; Liver Failure; Death; Time; Talent

David Cassidy was a teen idol, a pop star. In the early 1970s, he was a member of the cast of *The Partridge Family*, a successful television series. He performed in stadiums, selling out Madison Square Garden in New York City and Wembley Stadium in London.

But Cassidy wrestled with personal challenges, among them alcoholism, and when he died of liver failure at the age of 67, his last words were, “So much wasted time.”

What are you doing with the talent of time God has given you? Would you say on your deathbed, “So much wasted time”?

Associated verses: Matthew 25:15 (KJV); Ecclesiastes 9:10; Romans 12:6; Matthew 5:14–16

40. Social Media; Protection; Internet; Freedom; Hijack; Choice; Mind

A Silicon Valley engineer described the lengths he goes to to protect his own family from the effects of social media. He installed in his house an outlet timer connected to a router that cuts off access to the internet at a set time every day.

If the people who built these technologies are going to such great lengths to gain some freedom from them, it's clear we're in a real battle against our electronic devices and social media. One former Google employee has become an outspoken critic of the tech industry. "All of us are jacked into this system," says. "All of our minds can be hijacked," he told *The Guardian*. "Our choices are not as free as we think they are."

It's important to make sure your mind is given to God, and your choices are guided by the Holy Spirit.

Associated verses: 1 Corinthians 10:12; Romans 12:2 (KJV)

41. United Kingdom; Survey; Toilet; Exercising; Smartphones; Priorities

I have no idea how companies actually do this research, but a survey of two thousand adults in the United Kingdom found that they spend more time sitting on the toilet than they spend exercising. Three hours and nine minutes a week in the bathroom, and only 90 minutes a week exercising. One-fourth of the people surveyed exercised only 30 minutes or less.

Surprising, isn't it? And if you're trying to figure out how a person can spend 189 minutes a week sitting on a toilet, you need to remember that smartphones have changed almost everything, and they're driving up the amount of time people spend in the bathroom. Maybe it's time to put the phone down and put some walking shoes on.

Associated verses: 3 John 2; 1 Corinthians 6:19–20

42. Piano; Metronome; Rhythm; Music; Sabbath; Pace; Rest

In her book *Rhythms of Grace*, author Kerri Weems writes about taking piano lessons as a child and how she recalls the metronome marking out the rhythm of each piece of music. A metronome sets the pace, guiding the musician to play as the composer intended.

Weems writes: "Just as I once found it difficult to play the notes of my music to the beat of the metronome, we can find it difficult to let the rhythm of Sabbath rest set the pace for our lives. ... Unless God's rhythm of rest sets the baseline beat, we will miss the composer's intent for our lives. ... We have to let God's metronome of Sabbath rest set the baseline beat of our life's rhythm."

Associated verses: Mark 2:27; Exodus 20:8–11; Genesis 2:1–3

43. Honesty; Golf

How committed are you to honesty? What if being honest would cost you \$53,000, even though no one would have known anything if you didn't speak up?

Golfer Cameron Tringale called the PGA Tour office and asked to be disqualified from the 2014 PGA Championship. He said he felt he had submitted an incorrect scorecard. He said he missed a stroke while playing at the 11th hole, even though he was unsure if he had actually played at the ball.

"Realizing that there could be the slightest doubt that the swing over the ball should have been recorded as a stroke, I spoke with the Professional Golfers' Association of America and shared with them my conclusion that the stroke should have been recorded," he said. That means he may or may not have signed an incorrect scorecard. Not wanting to take any chances and not wanting to be dishonest, the then-26-year-old golfer asked to be disqualified from the tournament. Not only was it his best performance in a major tournament, but his "confession" cost him a healthy paycheck.

How committed are you to being honest?

Associated verses: Exodus 20:16; 2 Corinthians 8:21, NASB; Ephesians 4:25

44. North Korea; Faithfulness; Prisoner; War; Love

When Joseph Gantt was captured by North Korean forces in December of 1950, his wife went right on living as if Joseph were alive and would soon be home. Clara bought a home and hired a gardener, so that when Joseph came home he wouldn't have to do yard work and could simply "go fishing or do whatever he wanted to do." She didn't know until years later that her husband had died in 1951.

She had waited, her love hanging on. Her love never failed.

Associated verses: John 3:16 (KJV); 1 Corinthians 13:4-8; 1 Peter 4:8

45. Baseball; Contract; Bet; Waiting; Deal; Respond

Several years ago, a Major League Baseball player turned down a \$107 million contract extension with the Washington Nationals, believing his outstanding play would earn him much more money in free agency, just two years away.

That \$107 million could have bought more than 350 high-end Bentleys, 421 homes in Laurel, Maryland, or 5,000 years of tuition at Washington Adventist University. But he turned down the opportunity in order to bet on himself.

So how did it work out for Ian Desmond? You probably already know. His form went in the tank. A former Nationals manager described the contract he ended up signing as the worst contract for a player he had ever seen. Instead of a \$107 million contract extension with the Nationals, Desmond signed a one-year contract with the Texas Rangers for only \$8 million.

You can't afford to wait when God calls you. There's no better deal coming. There's nothing to be gained by keeping God waiting. When God calls, respond. If you don't, it could cost you everything.

Associated verses: Joshua 24:15; Psalm 25:4

46. Doctors; England; Australia; Surgeon; Tumor; Cancer; Perseverance; Faith; Persistence; Sin

A young woman told doctors again and again that something was wrong. They told her that she was young and healthy, so she was probably just suffering from stress.

Three years after she began talking to physicians, during which time she saw 10 different doctors in England and Australia, a surgeon removed a tumor from her abdomen that measured more than 8 inches long and weighed more than four pounds. It wasn't just stress. It was ovarian cancer.

She knew something was seriously wrong, and she didn't stop until she got her situation resolved. You want to be like that with sin. If something is troubling in your life, you want to get rid of it before it gets rid of you. It will take faith and persistence, but sin is something you really want removed from your life.

Associated verses: Colossians 3:5; Romans 6:23; Galatians 5:19–21

47. War; Bible; Survival; Vietnam

In an intense firefight during the Vietnam War, a soldier was shot in the chest, the force of the bullet knocking him backward onto the ground. His fellow soldiers thought he was dead. But instead of hitting him, the bullet had hit the Bible the man carried in his pocket. He survived—saved, literally, by the Word of God.

It's true that the Bible can save your life, and not just your life here on Earth. Keep it in your heart, and the Word of God will save you eternally.

Associated verses: 1 Peter 1:23 (KJV); 2 Timothy 3:16–17; Psalm 119:11

48. High School; School; Principal; Accident; Procrastination; Priorities

A former high school principal told the sad story of a teenager he spoke to about giving his heart to Jesus. The young man had great potential, but he wasn't at all serious about his faith in Christ. He told the teacher: "I'll give my heart to Jesus. I want to. But first, I'm going to have fun." Over the summer, that young man was killed in a tragic accident. He never did make a decision to follow Jesus, in spite of knowing that God loved him and that Jesus had died for him.

Associated verses: Psalm 95:8 (KJV); Acts 22:16; Deuteronomy 30:19

49. Church; Statue; San Diego; Hands; Vandals; Mission

An unusual statue stands outside a church in San Diego, about a quarter-mile west of the Interstate 15 freeway. It's a statue of Jesus, without hands. After vandals broke the hands off the statue years ago, it wasn't repaired. Instead, the church put up a sign that says, "I have no hands but yours," which was then incorporated into the base of the statue itself.

Born in 1866, poet Annie Johnson Flint wrote a poem called "The World Bible" that later became a Protestant church hymn. It says: "Christ has no hands but our hands to do His work today; He has no feet but our feet to lead men in His way; He has no tongue but our tongues to tell men how He died; He has no help but our help, to bring them to His side."

"I have no hands but yours," the statue says. God is looking to make a difference in this world. If you'll let Him, He'll do it through you.

Associated verses: 1 Corinthians 3:9 (KJV); Isaiah 58:6–8; Matthew 28:19–20

50. Aristotle; Greece; World War I; War; Titanic; Space Shuttle; Past; David; Solomon; Paul; Manasseh; Kennedy; Forgiveness; Future

The Greek philosopher Aristotle quoted the poet Agathon as having said something very much like, "Even God cannot change the past." It's true that what's done is done. Gavrilo Princip shot archduke Franz Ferdinand, and as a result, World War I erupted. What if he hadn't? What if the Titanic had slowed down and changed its course? Or if the warnings about the O-rings on the space shuttle Challenger had been heeded?

While Agathon was right that the past cannot be changed, God can do something about it. David sinned, terribly, and while the results of his transgressions were tragic, God forgave David for his past. Solomon, Paul, and King Manasseh were all forgiven by God.

So, what does your past look like? While God isn't going to change the fact that Mount Vesuvius erupted in A.D. 79 or that President Kennedy was assassinated, He is willing to forgive your past and give you a bright, eternal future.

Associated verses: Isaiah 43:25; Hebrews 8:12; Jeremiah 31:34



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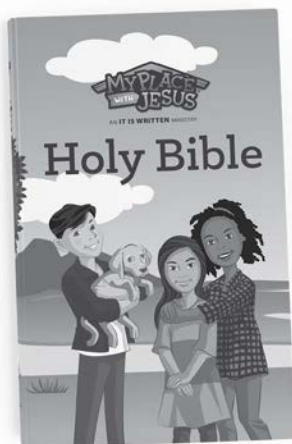
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Bible Guides BIBLE MARKING

Code Key

Code	Topic	First Text
B	#1 Bible	2 Tim 3:15-17
G	#2 God	Ex 34:6-7
C	#3 Creation	Gen 1:1
J	#4 Jesus	John 1:1-3
R	#5 Salvation	Isa 14:12-14
PD	#6 Personal Devotions	Jer 2:32b

#1 • Bible
 B1 • 2 Tim 3:15-17
 B2 • 2 Peter 1:21
 B3 • Jn 16:13
 B4 • Heb 4:12
 B5 • Ps 119:9
 B6 • Jn 5:39
 B7 • Ps 119:17-18
 B8 • Acts 17:11
 B9 • 2 Tim 2:15
 B10 • Ps 119:105
 B11 • Ps 119:130
 B12 • Jn 17:17
 B13 • Job 23:12
 B14 • Psalm 119:11
 B15 • Matt 4:4
 B16 • Isa 40:8
 B17 • Matt 24:35
 B • End

#2 • God
 G1 • Ex 34:6-7
 G2 • Neh 9:17
 G3 • 1 Tim 2:4

#5 • Salvation
 R1 • Isa 14:12-14
 R2 • Ezek 28:15
 R3 • Rev 12:7-9
 R4 • Gen 3:13
 R5 • Isa 59:1
 R6 • Rom 10:1
 R7 • Rom 10:1
 R8 • Act 13:46
 R9 • Jn 1:12
 R10 • Jn 1:12
 R11 • Ep 2:8
 R12 • 1 Jn 1:9
 R13 • John 3:16
 R14 • Acts 3:19
 R15 • Ezek 36:26
 R16 • Gal 2:20
 R17 • Phil 2:13
 R • End

#6 • Personal Devotions
 PD1 • Jer 2:32b
 PD2 • Isa 1:18
 PD3 • Ps 100:5

#8 • Signs
 SSC1 • Jn 14:3
 SSC2 • 2 Pet 3:3-4
 SSC3 • 2 Pet 3:9
 SSC4 • 2 Pet 3:10
 SSC5 • 1 Jn 3:2-3
 SSC6 • Matt 24:30-31
 SSC7 • Rev 3:21
 SSC • End

#9 • Baptism
 BP1 • Rom 3:23
 BP2 • Ezek 18:30
 BP3 • Mk 1:4
 BP4 • Mk 1:9-11

#12 • Angels
 A1 • Col 1:16
 A2 • Rev 5:11-12
 A3 • Heb 12:22
 A4 • Heb 1:14
 A5 • Ps 50:15
 A6 • Ps 91:11
 A7 • Matt 18:10
 A8 • Ps 34:7
 A9 • Ps 103:20
 A10 • Lk 15:10
 A11 • Dan 6:22
 A12 • Lk 2:10-11
 A13 • Matt 4:11
 A14 • Acts 12:11
 A15 • Heb 13:2
 A16 • Matt 25:3
 A17 • Matt 24:3
 A • End

#13 • Death
 D1 • Gen 2:7
 D2 • Job 33:4
 D3 • Ps 104:29
 D4 • Ecc 12:7

**22
topics!**

51. Neuroscience; Ignorance; Understanding; Science; Daniel; Revelation; Unknown; Uncertainty; Faith

An article published by *Stanford Medicine* said, “The greatest challenge in the field of neuroscience, according to two experts, is that we still don’t understand the basics.” But we don’t allow our ignorance to overshadow our understanding. Science presses forward, doing the best it can with what it knows.

The same must be true with the Bible. You don’t want to let what you don’t understand overshadow what you do. While you might not comprehend every mystery in Daniel or Revelation, you can understand “Love your neighbor as yourself” and “For God so loved the world.” Don’t let your uncertainty about difficult questions lead you away from faith in God.

Associated verses: Psalm 119:130; Proverbs 2:2–5; 2 Peter 3:16; Proverbs 3:13–18

52. Van Gogh; Art; Artist; Paintings; Alice Neel; High Prices; Success; Future; God At Work; Value; Insignificance; Challenges

On his way to becoming one of history’s greatest artists, Vincent Van Gogh sold just one of the 900 paintings he’d created. American artist Alice Neel sold little art during her lifetime and was on welfare assistance for part of her life, but 40 years after her death, her paintings sell for several million dollars.

High prices don’t necessarily define the success of an artist, but like Van Gogh, Neel wasn’t as celebrated in her lifetime as she now is postmortem. In the midst of difficulties, you can’t always see what the future holds or what work God is doing through your challenge to bring you to a better place. It might be that what you do now isn’t recognized until later. And it might be that what you think is insignificant will one day be seen as of immense value.

Associated verses: James 1:4; Philippians 1:6; 1 Corinthians 3:6–8

53. Running; Artist; Musician; Spiritual Gifts

It might be that as a child, you weren’t the fastest runner in your class. Maybe you were never going to be a great artist or a musical virtuoso. Sometimes you just don’t have “it.” But the special gifts God bestows are not given only to a select few. They’re available to everyone.

Associated verse: 1 Corinthians 12:7

54. Alabama; Monument; Boll Weevil; Beetle; Cotton; Pests; Peanuts; Diversification; Prosperity; Difficulties; God's Plan; Blessings

In Enterprise, Alabama, 25 miles or so west of Dothan, there's a monument to the boll weevil, a beetle that feeds on cotton buds. The pest devastated the cotton industry in Enterprise and across the American South around 1915, and yet Enterprise devoted a prominent monument to the little monsters! That's because when the cotton industry crashed, desperate farmers diversified, planting peanuts and other crops, and became extremely successful. By destroying the cotton industry, the boll weevil led Enterprise to a new level of prosperity.

You can see the point. In life we often encounter difficulties, but if you're paying attention, you'll see that in many cases God is leading you to blessings you wouldn't otherwise have realized.

Associated verses: James 1:2–3; Jeremiah 29:11–13; 2 Corinthians 4:8–9

55. Boston; Newspaper; Diet; Lifestyle Choices; Meat; Vegetables; Sugar; Fat; Diseases; Prevention; Sicknes; Illness; Cancer; Heart Disease; Stroke; Diabetes; Choices; Health

In 2016, *The Boston Globe* ran a story titled, “Doctors like me tell you to eat less meat. It's about time you start listening.” The subtitle read, “If the benefits of a better diet came in a pill, it would be hailed as a medical miracle.” The article went on to say, “For decades, as many as 80 percent of us have been eating the unhealthy Western diet centered on red and processed meats, refined sugars, and saturated fats.” It then stated, “The Western diet unfortunately keeps Americans at high risk for *diseases we might otherwise prevent*.”

Doctors say we could easily avoid a lot of sickness. Why would you want to get a disease you don't have to get? It's one thing when cancer hits you from out of the blue. That happens to a lot of people. They live a healthy life, but then the next thing they know, they're facing a serious situation.

Of course, that's not the most common scenario. As the doctor said, it's more often the case that we're exposing ourselves to harmful things, and over time they have a devastating effect. A disease such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, or many cancers can rear their ugly head, and frequently they're the inevitable result of choices we've made. It's not a problem caused by lack of knowledge for most people anymore. We know. Doctors like this one tell us again and again. Let the decisions you make today pave the way for a happier and healthier tomorrow.

Associated verses: 1 Corinthians 6:19; 1 Corinthians 10:31

56. Lifestyle Choices; Illness; Food; Ingredients; Internet; Mental Health; Spiritual Health; Entertainment; Surrender; Senses; Mind

When her 3-year-old son became ill, a woman decided to change her family's lifestyle. She told a news outlet: "I started wondering why our food was making him sick. And then I started asking questions, reading all the ingredients on packets, and Googling anything that I didn't understand." Then she said something that ought to make a person stop and think: "I realized that so much of what we eat isn't even proper food." And if you doubt that, just investigate what's in much of the food you eat, and you'll be convinced that what she said is true.

Now, think about what you put into your mind. How much of the content you consume online, without giving it any thought, is deleterious to your mental and spiritual health? How much of what you put into your mind is deleterious to your spiritual health? The content you consume online without giving it any thought? Much of that's just garbage. Most of what's called "entertainment" doesn't build you up, and if you're honest, it tears you down.

And then, consider what you're consuming spiritually. Is it Christ-like? Is it Christ-focused? Does it call you to a surrender to Christ? We ought to remind ourselves with some frequency that we're caught in a spiritual war in this world. There's an enemy who wants to separate you from faith in God. He works with your senses, and especially wants to get to your mind, and change it.

Just like you want to be careful about what you put into your body, be careful about what goes into your mind. Your spiritual health depends on it.

Associated verses: Romans 12:2; 1 John 2:15–17; Psalm 101:3

57. Karate; Poster; Hole; Hiding; Sins; Cover Up; Forgiveness; Grace

In his book *Regrets on an African River and Other Adventures*, pastor and mis-siologist Jeff Scoggins tells of the time when, as a child, he put his foot through the wall of his bedroom while practicing karate moves. He remedied the situation by putting a poster over the hole in the wall, and that worked pretty well until his family moved. He cleaned everything out of his bedroom except for that poster, and when his Dad took it down, the past misdeed was revealed.

Some things can't be covered up. The best thing to do with sin is confess it to God, and let Him take care of it. God forgives. We receive grace. There's no need to cover up anything.

Associated verses: Ephesians 1:7; Numbers 32:23; Romans 6:23; Ezekiel 33:11

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58. Prison; Coupons; Crime; Virginia; Internet; Lost; Perceptions; Neglect

You typically have to do something pretty serious to get yourself sentenced to a dozen years in prison. While you wouldn't normally associate coupons with high crime, in this story the two intersect.

A married couple in Virginia produced fake discount coupons and sold them online, raking in hundreds of thousands of dollars while costing retailers and manufacturers an estimated \$32 million. The husband and wife didn't look like hardened criminals, but crooks don't all fit a single profile.

It's the same with people who are lost. Not all lost people look like lost people. Some are perfectly nice, respectable people who simply choose to leave Jesus out of their lives. The devil doesn't care how he gets you, as long as he gets you.

Associated verses: Matthew 6:13 (KJV); Revelation 21:8; 2 Peter 2:4; Matthew 15:8

59. Cat; England; Run Away; Lost; Stray; Veterinarian; Voice; Bartimaeus; Peter; Calling

A cat went missing in Braintree, Essex, northeast of London, England. After eight months, it seemed unlikely it would ever return home. But a 40-year-old woman was on the phone with her vet, talking about her other cat, when she heard a cat at the vet's office meow in the background. The vet explained that the meowing cat was a stray that had been brought to the vet's office by a concerned citizen. Sure that she recognized the cat's meow, the woman described her missing cat, which matched the cat at the vet's office.

When she went to the vet's office, she asked to see the stray, and sure enough, it was Barnaby, the cat that had been AWOL for eight months. What are the chances? The woman recognized the sound of her cat's meow—over the phone!

Aren't you glad God recognizes your voice? He listens for you, and He is eager to hear you. Bartimaeus cried out to Jesus, and Jesus heard him. Peter called to Jesus as he was sinking into the Sea of Galilee, and Jesus heard him. God hears you, too!

Associated verses: 1 Peter 3:12 (KJV); Jeremiah 29:13; 1 John 1:9; Luke 15:11–32

60. Prison; Prisoners; Escape; Blueprints; Tunnel; Guard; Sleeping; Freedom

You'd be excused for wondering how six prisoners could escape from an Israeli prison. It wasn't as difficult as something like that should have been. Blueprints of the prison were available online, tunneling had been going on for a year without prison officials noticing, and three of the escapees had tried to tunnel out once before yet were still allowed to share a cell. When they emerged from their tunnel

directly underneath a watchtower, the guard at the post had fallen asleep and missed the whole thing.

We remember that Jesus came to this world to break us out of prison. Why would anyone want to stay locked up? Freedom is a special thing, and God offers it to you today.

Associated verses: Acts 12:6–7; John 10:10; 2 Peter 2:20

61. Recognition; Faces; Voices; God’s Voice; Distractions

Between 1% and 2% of people are “super recognizers.” They have an uncanny ability to recognize people they’ve seen before, even briefly. They just don’t forget a face.

While it’s good to recognize a face, it’s also important to recognize a voice. God wants to lead you, but what if you don’t recognize His voice? Imagine God speaking, and not being able to get through! That’s where many people find themselves, because either they put too much other “stuff” in their minds that crowds out the voice of God, or because they’re not reading the Bible and becoming acquainted with Him.

God will speak to your heart. You want to be a “super recognizer” and know the sound of His voice.

Associated verses: Isaiah 30:21; 1 Samuel 3:8; Genesis 6:22

62. Wordle; Internet; Game; Opportunity; Giving; Generosity; Unexpected

When Wordle became one of the most popular games on the internet, a man who had developed an app for a similar word game several years before unexpectedly made a nice sum of money. People swooped upon his app, thinking they were getting the popular new word game. Instead of keeping the windfall, Stephen Cravotta donated all of the proceeds to charity. He certainly didn’t have to, but that’s what he chose to do.

What an example to believers in Jesus. When you have the opportunity to give to God, take that opportunity.

Associated verses: 2 Corinthians 9:6–7; Acts 20:35; Luke 6:38; Proverbs 11:24–25

63. Canada; Surprise; Meteorite; Explosion; Escape; Salvation

A woman in Canada got a surprise when a meteorite crashed through the roof of her home. It was close to midnight, and she was in her bed inside her house in British Columbia, about 160 miles west of Calgary, Alberta, when she heard what sounded like an explosion. The meteorite crashed through her bedroom ceiling and landed between the pillows on her bed, missing her by just inches. A narrow escape!

The greatest escape is passing from lost to saved; it’s a gift given to you by Jesus.

Associated verses: Acts 9:25; John 5:24; Titus 3:5; Acts 4:12

64. Ireland; Death; Post Office; Pension; Deception; Authenticity; Genuine Christianity

Two men about 50 miles southwest of Dublin, Ireland, carried a dead body into a post office to claim the dead man's pension payment. They had asked for the money earlier but were told that the man himself needed to be present. Minutes later they returned with the dead man, who "appeared unwell, as his feet were dragging on the ground," one witness said. One of the men claimed that they didn't know the 66-year-old man (his uncle) was dead! When they were questioned at the post office about the man's dubious state, they said he was having a heart attack and dropped him on the ground.

The man in Ireland was dead, even though his nephew and another man claimed he was alive. According to the Bible, that's also true for some believers in Jesus. You want to do more than look the part. The good news is that you don't have to simply go through the motions. With Jesus in your heart, you can be alive and kicking.

Associated verses: Revelation 3:1; James 2:18–26; 1 Corinthians 2:1–5

65. Syllabus; Music; Hidden Message; Following Directions; Bible; Everlasting Life; Salvation

The lesson here is too obvious to miss. A professor at UT Chattanooga did as he always did and handed out the syllabus for his music seminar class; the students did what students typically do, and they ignored the syllabus entirely. What they didn't know is that their teacher had put into the syllabus directions that, if followed, would have led them to a locker containing a \$50 bill. Even though the teacher told them that they needed to read the syllabus, the \$50 was still there at the end of the semester, unclaimed, simply because no one bothered to read the syllabus.

Hasn't God done the same thing? He left us a document containing about three-quarters of a million words in 66 books, and He encouraged us to read it. Pretty straightforward. He called the Bible a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105). He told us that His word is sweet, that it's like bread—necessary food—and that it's living, powerful, and will accomplish what God says it will do.

After all of that, why would we ignore it? The Word of God will change you, transform you, and make a new person out of you.

We can understand students not reading a syllabus, and all they missed out on \$50. But by not reading the Word of God, you risk harming yourself and ultimately missing out on everlasting life. That's too high a price to pay.

Associated verses: 2 Timothy 3:16–17 (KJV); Psalm 119:105; Matthew 7:21; 2 Peter 1:5–11

66. Canada; Airplane; Fuel; Conversion; Bicycles; Runway; Preparation; Emergency; Challenges; Prayer

In July of 1983, an Air Canada passenger flight between Montreal and Edmonton ran out of fuel at 41,000 feet. Instead of 22,300 kilos of fuel, only 22,300 *pounds* of fuel had been loaded onto the plane—less than half as much as should have been—and the 69 people on board were living a nightmare.

But the pilot was also an experienced glider pilot, so he was able to get the Boeing 767 safely down to the ground. It got a little exciting, though. The former Royal Canadian Air Force base the pilot was expecting to find had been developed. Among the unanticipated hazards to avoid were a couple of boys riding bicycles, who got the surprise of their lives when they saw an enormous aircraft hurtling toward them. But instead of ending in disaster, Air Canada flight 143 landed with no one seriously injured, because the pilot was prepared in advance for the emergency.

Troubled times are coming to planet Earth, but Jesus said that those who watch and pray will “escape all these things that will come to pass.” If you stay close to Jesus and develop a robust prayer life, you’ll be prepared for challenging times ahead.

Associated verses: Luke 21:26,36; Mark 1:35; Luke 11:1–13

67. Perseverance; War; Vietnam War; Ring; Fearlessness; Finger; Purpose; God’s Plan; Gospel; Surrender; Baptism; Prayer; Persistence

Ed was a Vietnam War veteran. He had lived a very rough life and had no fear of God or man. While on duty, his wife sent him a large ring as a token of her love. He was wearing it when combat ensued. As he raised his rifle to fire, an enemy bullet struck the ring on his finger and deflected away from him. His hand was directly beside his face at that moment. Without the deflection, the bullet would have struck him in the head.

Ed lost his finger in the trauma, but his life was spared. “I knew that God was with me,” he said. “Following this close call, I reflected on my life’s purpose. I knew my past wasn’t something to be proud of, but I began to believe that God had a plan for me.”

Despite that encounter, Ed continued to live opposite God’s plan for several decades, until one day came that changed everything.

His wife, Ann, told him about an evangelistic series happening soon, but Ed adamantly refused to go. He finally agreed to drive Ann to the meetings, but she said that she would only attend if he went with her. Ed reluctantly agreed that he would attend.

The greeter welcomed them warmly on the first night: “We are so glad you are here!” Ed replied, “Well, I’m not glad to be here at all!” Night after night, he gave this response, though he found each meeting riveting. He sat in the pew, leaning forward with intense interest, eyes widened and hardly ever blinking.

Gradually, his heart began to soften, and he broke down in tears when the speaker visited his home. “I want to give my life to Jesus through baptism,” Ed said. “These meetings are the truth, and I have lived in opposition to God and His ways for too long.” Following prayer, Ed gave his life to Jesus. He was baptized soon afterward. His family was thrilled as their decades of prayers were answered, and Ed became a new man in Christ!

Prayer and persistence in prayer pay off for those we love. God hears our prayers for loved ones. In the most unexpected way, God will answer them when we may least expect it. Let us continue unwearily, as the persistent widow did with the judge who eventually granted her request. How much more will the God of heaven give good gifts to the children that He loves?

Associated verses: Galatians 6:9; Luke 18:4, 5; Jeremiah 29:11–13; Matthew 7:10–12

68. Segregation; South Carolina; Library; Books; MIT; NASA; Astronaut; Space Shuttle; Challenger; Initiative; Tenacity; Greatness; Youth

In 1959, police were called to a segregated library in Lake City, South Carolina, when a 9-year-old African American boy named Ronald McNair refused to leave without being allowed to check out his books. He eventually left with the books and went on to earn a PhD in physics from MIT, before becoming a NASA astronaut. He died tragically during the launch of the space shuttle Challenger in 1986.

Today, the library where Ronald was initially denied the right to check out books is part of the Dr. Ronald McNair Life History Center. Some didn’t want him to even read, but given the opportunity, he went on to become a great achiever.

Give your young people the opportunity to know Jesus, and He’ll bring out the greatness in them.

Associated verses: Luke 18:16; 1 Timothy 4:12; Ephesians 1:11

69. Ireland; Potatoes; Native Americans; Generosity; Trail of Tears; Kindness

During the 1840s, Ireland was devastated by a disease that wiped out about three-fourths of the nation's potato crop over a period of seven or eight years. A million people died, and another million left Ireland.

In 1847, after traversing the disastrous Trail of Tears and arriving in Oklahoma, the Choctaw people took up a collection and donated \$170—the equivalent of more than \$5,000 today—to support the impoverished Irish, the money going to the town of Middleton in County Cork.

The bond between the Choctaw and Ireland remains strong today, with the Irish government now providing scholarships for Choctaw students to study in Ireland. In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic was seriously affecting the Navajo Nation and the Hopi Reservation, the Irish government sent aid to assist both peoples. Thinking of how they had been helped by the Choctaw many years before, Irish leaders said they were “paying it forward” in helping the Native American peoples.

Acts of kindness aren't forgotten. Stories of the wise men bringing gifts to Jesus and of Mary Magdalene anointing Jesus with expensive perfume are still being told two thousand years later, and Jesus made clear that acts of kindness are recognized in heaven.

The people of Ireland continue to remember a selfless act of kindness performed 175 years ago, by a people who didn't have much to give. Whatever you have to offer, when you bless another, it's as though that act of kindness was directed to God Himself.

Associated verses: Matthew 25:40; Luke 6:38; Ephesians 4:1

70. McDonalds; Coffee; Lawsuit; Facts; Assumptions

Do you remember hearing about a selfish, crazy woman who sued McDonald's in 1994, because her coffee was too hot? She spilled her hot coffee and was burned and sued the fast-food chain for a pile of money.

Well, it turned out she was neither selfish nor crazy. The coffee was, in fact, extremely hot, and McDonald's had received a large number of complaints about it in the past. The 79-year-old suffered third-degree burns and needed skin grafts. It was serious. All she wanted was for McDonald's to pay her medical bills, but they wouldn't. And yet she was villainized.

It's easy to accuse someone unfairly, when you don't have all the facts. It's always best to get your facts straight, and even then, to share them carefully.

Associated verses: Exodus 23:1; 2 Corinthians 8:21; Proverbs 18:13

71. Police; Molasses; Disaster; Flood; Neglect; Warning Signs; Tragedy; Pressure; Christian Walk

On the afternoon of January 15, 1919, Patrolman Frank McMannus found himself shouting into the Police Call Box something he could hardly believe he was saying: “Send all rescue vehicles and personnel immediately. There’s a wave of molasses coming down Commercial Street.”

The day has been dubbed The Great Molasses Flood. A sticky, deadly wave flattened an entire Boston neighborhood within seconds. It struck without warning when a giant Purity Distilling Company storage tank containing more than 2.3 million gallons (12,000 tons) of molasses suddenly ruptured. The molasses tsunami rose at least 25 feet high—as tall as four Abraham Lincolns or four Patrick Mahomes—and destroyed everything in its path, killing 21 people and injuring 150 others. Elevated railway tracks buckled. Warehouses and firehouses were pushed around like pieces on a game board. Apartments were reduced to kindling.

What caused the tank to rupture? Well, several things, really. One was the quality of the tank itself. The steel was half as thick as it should have been for a tank of its size, even according to the lax standards of the day. It lacked manganese, which made it brittle. There were problems with the tank’s rivets. Basic safety tests were also neglected during construction of the tank, and warning signs—such as groaning noises from the tank each time it was filled—were ignored.

Catastrophe can occur when things aren’t built right. History is littered with stories of tragedy because structures were built out of inferior materials. In a world that is falling apart, how can we make sure that we’re not doing the same thing, spiritually? How can we build a sturdy spiritual life, a strong Christian home, and a dependable walk with God that will not groan, crack, or burst apart, even under the most intense pressure?

—Chris Buttery, *Pastor, Kentucky*

Associated verses: 2 Peter 3:3–4; 1 Peter 5:8; Galatians 1:4

72. Farmhouse; North Dakota; Expectations; Garbage; Treasure

A family purchased an old farmhouse in rural North Dakota that hadn’t been lived in for 10 years. The new owners bought not only a house, but a lot of junk that had been left behind by the previous owners. The dad had often told his sons about his attempts to find hidden treasure when he was growing up. His sons were now convinced that they were going to find hidden treasure on their new farmstead.

One of their first visits to the farm was for the purpose of cleaning up the house in preparation for moving in. Dad got to work emptying drawers into garbage bags, wanting to clear out the house as quickly as possible. He noticed that his boys were in another room, meticulously going through a drawer. They weren't making any progress on cleaning up the house, but it seemed as though they were having fun.

It wasn't long before the boys yelled, "DAD! WE FOUND TREASURE!" Of course, the dad was expecting that the boys had found some unusual but useless trinket. But one of them said, "No, Daddy, we really found treasure!" Sure enough, lying on a table was a stack of \$100 bills. They had found \$1,850 in cash!

It occurred to the dad a little later that he had spent the morning looking for garbage, and he had found garbage. The boys were looking for treasure, and they found treasure!

What are you looking for? When you come to the Bible, what are you expecting to find? In God's Word, you will find whatever you are looking for.

—Donavon Kack Jr, Pastor, Montana

Associated verses: Matthew 13:44; Proverbs 2:4–5

73. Wedding; Drinking; Misunderstanding; Embarrassment; Pastor; Ministry

A pastor conducted a wedding service for his neighbors, a couple that had no church affiliation. After the wedding he drove with his wife to the reception, where they stayed a short while before leaving. On their way home, they passed a couple who had left the wedding celebration just moments before. It seemed the husband had had too much to drink, because they had pulled off the road to switch drivers. The pastor and his wife smiled and waved while driving past.

Moments later, the pastor realized he had left his driver's license at home, so he pulled over to let his wife drive. As they were making the switch, the other couple drove by. They were laughing and gave an "understanding" wave as they passed. The pastor and his wife realized there was no way to explain what had really happened.

There will be times in life, some far more serious than this, when we will be misjudged in ways we could never have foreseen or avoided. When that happens, we can trust the outcome (and our reputations) with God.

—Dave Moench, Pastor, North Dakota

Associated verses: Galatians 1:10; 2 Timothy 2:15; Romans 2:1–29

74. School; Second Coming; Rescue; Bully; Fight; Faithfulness

A church leader spent his first four years of school at the same school as a number of his cousins. One of them was Bill, a big, muscle-bound guy. No one messed with Bill or would dare to mess with his younger relatives.

But when a new boy arrived at the school who didn't know about Bill, he started a fight with young Alex. It wasn't long before the new boy had the upper hand. He was big.

Even though Alex was doing his best to fend off the attack, the bigger boy was throwing jabs and uppercuts and power punches. The smaller boy thought things were going to end badly. But then, someone sent for Bill. They said, "Bill, someone is beating up on Alex!" From a distance, Alex could see Bill coming. He had always told him, "When you need me, I will be there."

Bill came running across the football field, yelling: "I am coming! HOLD ON, ALEX!" Just the knowledge that his cousin was on his way—the hope that Bill would get there before it was too late, gave Alex strength and courage to fight a little harder, to hang in there a little bit longer.

Bill came in and took care of business. Alex said, "He took care of my enemy; he mopped him up and dressed him down!"

In a similar way, you can picture Jesus speeding across the Milky Way, calling out: "I am coming! HOLD ON A LITTLE LONGER!"

In just a little while, He that shall come will come, and He will not tarry. Jesus says that when He gets there, the last enemy He will destroy is going to be Death, and that means He is going to take out some other enemies first!

The hope that Jesus is coming soon gives us strength and courage to fight a little harder. Stay faithful to endure a little longer, because our loving Savior is on His way!

—*Dr. G. Alexander Bryant, North American Division President, Maryland*

Associated verses: Hebrews 10:37; 1 Corinthians 15:26; Revelation 1:10

75. Signs of Jesus' Return; Accident; Paying Attention; Sleep

It was the end of the second shift, and Tom was ready to go home. He had been working hard all day, so when the bell rang at 11 o'clock, he was out the door. He quickly made his way to his car and started driving down the interstate on his way home. Because he was having a hard time staying awake, Tom called one of his buddies. They talked about the day and their plans for the weekend. After getting off the phone, Tom turned up the radio, blasting music through the speakers in his car, singing along and moving his body back and forth to the beat of the music. Tom was driving late at night, listening to music, singing out loud, "dancing" to the music, when all of a sudden.... Boom! Tom crashed through a barrier in the middle of the road. His car came to a halt in a ditch.

The force of the impact knocked Tom unconscious. Minutes later, flashing lights and wailing sirens announced that the police and paramedics had arrived on the scene. Fortunately, they were able to rescue Tom from the mangled car. He had cuts and bruises, but he was still alive.

A police officer gave Tom a sobriety test, certain he must have been drunk. The officer was surprised to discover that Tom was completely sober, with not an ounce of liquor in his blood. He asked Tom, “Why were you driving on a road that was closed?”

Tom was shocked. He looked at the officer and he said, “I didn’t know the road was closed.”

The officer couldn’t believe what he was hearing. He looked back at Tom and he said, “How could you not know? There were signs up for the last three miles, telling you that the road was coming to an end!”

It was now Tom’s turn to be flabbergasted. He just looked at the officer and said, “I never saw the signs.”

The officer responded: “There’s a reason you didn’t see the signs. It’s because you weren’t paying attention.”

—*David Klinedinst, Evangelism and Church Growth Director, Maryland*

Associated verses: Matthew 24:3 (KJV); Matthew 24:33

76. Space; Rocket; New Mexico; Virgin Galactic; Zero Gravity; Heaven; Second Coming

Several years ago, Virgin Galactic announced plans to give private individuals the opportunity to journey into space and see what astronauts see. From a spaceport in the New Mexico desert, passengers would be launched into the atmosphere at 2,500 mph—three times faster than the speed of sound. Before long they’d pass the Karman line, considered to be the boundary between Earth and space. “You’ll experience zero gravity,” promised the promotional materials. “You’ll be weightless! You’ll be able to float in mid-air. It will be the experience of a lifetime. Think of what your friends and family will say when you tell them about your epic adventure.”

Interested persons were urged to pay a \$1,000 deposit. Then, when a seat becomes available, they can pay the rest of the cost: \$250,000!

There’s a far better journey that won’t cost you anything at all. The Bible tells us that one day soon, Jesus Christ is going to burst through this atmosphere. He is going to come back to Earth to gather His people, and together we will journey to the kingdom of heaven.

—*David Klinedinst, Evangelism and Church Growth Director, Maryland*

Associated verses: John 14:1–3; Revelation 1:7; Matthew 24:44

77. Heaven; Beliefs; Inconsistency; Hope; Longing; Worldliness; Secularism; Eternity

Several years ago, the Barna Group conducted research exploring people's beliefs about heaven. The results showed that 46% of respondents described heaven as "a state of eternal existence in God's presence," while 30% said that heaven is "an actual place of rest and reward," 14% said heaven was only "symbolic" (that is, not a real place), 5% said there is no such thing as life after death, and another 5% said they are not sure. In other words, they didn't know what to believe.

But I want you to notice something. Based on the first two responses, 76% of the people surveyed believe that heaven exists. This might be a little surprising, given that we're constantly told that the world is secular in its thinking and, for the most part, has rejected the teachings of the Bible. Yet, 76% said they believe in heaven!

You know what that tells me? It tells me that deep inside the human heart is an innate longing for something better. Deep inside the human soul is the desire for something more than this world has to offer. It seems as if people want to believe in heaven and in eternity. That makes a lot of sense, because the Bible tells us that God has placed eternity in the heart of every person (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

—David Klinedinst, *Evangelism and Church Growth Director, Maryland*

Associated verses: Ecclesiastes 3:11; John 14:2; 2 Corinthians 5:2

78. Twins; Operation; Salvation

According to the University of Minnesota, conjoined twins occur once in every 200,000 live births. The babies are born joined together. They might be joined at the side or the chest and, on occasion, they may have two heads and share one body. Separating conjoined twins is a delicate and complicated procedure, which sometimes isn't possible.

Science has produced two theories that attempt to explain how conjoined twins occur: fission and fusion. Fission simply suggests that one embryo does not fully split into two, resulting in conjoined twins. The theory of fusion suggests that two embryos become one. It is the latter theory, the theory of fusion, that gives us hope in the face of Satan's deception and attacks on our religious liberty.

The theory of fusion as it relates to conjoined twins suggests that a fertilized egg completely separates into two. But because stem cells must attach themselves to that which is similar, the two that were once separated fuse back together, resulting in conjoined twins, like attaching to like.

When man sinned, it caused a separation between God and man. What was once one became two. However, instead of being two that were alike, man became a sinner and the Godhead remained sinless. In order to fuse the two back together, one had to become like the other.

Humanity could not do enough good deeds to bring itself back into harmony with God. No amount of money could be spent. No amount of obedience could be carried out. So what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh (Romans 8:3).

Hebrews 2:14 says, “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same.” God put on human flesh. He became identical to man and thus made it possible—by his life, death, burial and resurrection—for those who are born again to be reborn conjoined to Christ. He is forever joined with us in the flesh.

—Troy Brand, Pastor, Tennessee

Associated verses: Romans 8:3; Hebrews 2:14

79. Trials; Defense; Sin; Guilty; Advocate; Lawyer; Justification

There are times in jury trials when the burden of proof is on the defense instead of the prosecution. When clear-cut evidence shows that a person is guilty of a crime, the defense will sometimes make what is known as an affirmative defense.

An affirmative defense agrees that the conditions of the case are as the prosecution claims, but it offers a defense that bars or prevents the claim. For example, a defense attorney may make an affirmative defense of self-defense. The defense may also make an affirmative defense of insanity. This type of defense is sometimes known as a justification defense. Whatever the charge, the defense agrees with the claim, but the burden of proof to bar the claim rests with the defense, not with the prosecution.

Every one of us, all of humanity, stands accused of sin by Satan himself, the universal prosecuting attorney. His claims about us are true. We are indeed guilty, for the Bible declares that “there is none righteous, no not one” (Romans 3:10). The Bible declares that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23). Satan is right. We are all guilty.

I acknowledge that I am guilty, but I have an Advocate with the Father: Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for my sins. He’s my lawyer in this courtroom. And as my attorney, Jesus advises me to present an affirmative defense for myself.

He says to all mankind: “Yes, you are all guilty. Yes, you, like sheep, have gone astray. Yes, the thoughts and intents of your heart are only evil continually.”

What Satan claims about me is true. I cannot plead an insanity defense. I cannot plead self-defense. But I can plead His blood; I can plead a justification defense!”

—Troy Brand, Pastor, Tennessee

Associated verses: Romans 3:10, 3:23

80. Aging; Hair; Turning to Jesus; Reliance

I started graying in my early 20s and, at my daughter’s urging, started to color my hair in my 30s. I used “Touch of Gray” so it wouldn’t be so obvious. Years later, I decided to buy natural hair color, and once I applied it, my hair turned dark brown. It was bad, so I found the miracle solution online: hair color remover.”

“Great!” I thought, as I went to the hair supply store and purchased the product. Sure enough, the box said right in front that the product was “Guaranteed to remove hair color.”

I applied the product, and as I was waiting 20 minutes as instructed, I turned the box around to read the other side. To my horror, I saw the following warning: “This product will not return your hair to its natural color; it will leave an orange tint.”

WHAT? Too late! Panic ensued. I reapplied the brown color, but that made it worse. Believe it or not, I reapplied the color remover. By this time, my hair was neon orange.

When my wife saw it, after the “appropriate” laughter, she suggested I go to a hair salon for help. When I arrived and explained my situation, the expert responded: “If you had only come to me first, I could have helped you out. Now it’s too late.”

As I drove home, it occurred to me that we often do that with Jesus. We try everything we know first; then, when all else fails, we turn to Him. Fortunately for us, Jesus can and will fix our situation, even when we’ve made Him our last resort.

—Tony Anobile, Church Administrator, Texas

Associated verses: Matthew 11:28; Proverbs 3:5; Psalm 56:3–4

81. Pancakes; Sunrise; Darkness

One year at a camp meeting, early in the morning while it was still dark, Bill’s 5-year-old niece Kyra approached him. “Uncle Bill,” she said, “can you make me some pancakes?”

“Well,” Bill said, “it is 5 a.m. and too early for pancakes! Everyone is still asleep, and we don’t want to wake them up yet, do we?” This answer satisfied her, for a few minutes.

Before long, Kyra asked again. “Uncle Bill, will you make me some pancakes?”

Bill had an idea. “Kyra,” he said, “let’s wait until the sun comes up. Then we can make some pancakes.”

While Bill studied and his niece played, he noticed that she would periodically go to the window, raise the shade, and look to see if the sun was up yet.

And then, it happened! All of a sudden, she left the window and excitedly exclaimed: “Uncle Bill, Uncle Bill! The dark is all gone!”

A day is coming—and it is not too far off—when the dark will be “all gone!”

The darkness of pain and suffering will be all gone.

The darkness of financial troubles will be all gone.

The darkness of sin and immorality will be all gone.

The darkness of death and mourning and crying will be all gone, for the old order of things will have passed away.

Are you looking forward to that day, when “the dark is all gone”?

—*Bill Jarrett, California*

Associated verses: Revelation 21:5; Revelation 22:5

82. Nebraska; Squirrel; Unexpected Blessings; Providence

It was a pleasant fall day in Nebraska, and Bill was walking the two blocks home after classes at Union College. As he neared his house, he noticed a squirrel in the big walnut tree in the backyard. As the squirrel hung there on a low limb, Bill absent-mindedly picked up a walnut and lobbed it toward the innocent squirrel.

Much to Bill’s surprise, he hit the squirrel squarely in the side, knocking it off of the limb. That poor squirrel had no idea what had just happened! When he landed on the ground, he shook it off and went running to safety. Bill stood there, stunned at what had just happened. He couldn’t believe that he had accidentally hit that squirrel with his walnut!

As he stood there contemplating what had happened, he heard his name called. Oh dear, someone had seen him.

“Bill,” came the call again. He turned to see his neighbor, Mel, standing in the door of his garage by the alley. “Bill, come here,” Mel called again. As Bill walked over to see what Mel wanted, he was wondering what Mel would say. Was he upset about what he had done to that poor, innocent squirrel?

“Hi, Mel,” Bill said as he got closer.

“Say,” Mel said, “what did you do to that squirrel?”

Bill replied, “I just threw a walnut at him and never intended to hit him.”

“Well,” Mel said, “I was standing here with my 22 rifle, and I had that squirrel in my sights, ready to pull the trigger, when all of a sudden he just dropped to the ground!”

Sometimes things happen to us that we don’t understand. Sometimes we get hit and knocked down, just like that poor innocent squirrel. He didn’t deserve to get knocked out of that tree. But it saved his life!!

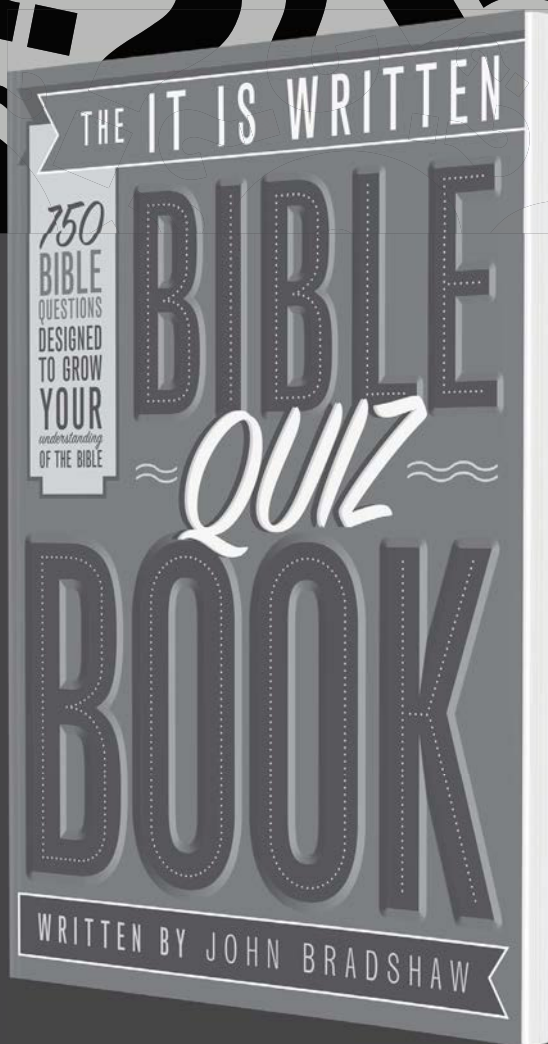
—*Bill Jarrett, California*

Associated verses: Isaiah 5:10; Romans 8:28; Proverbs 16:33

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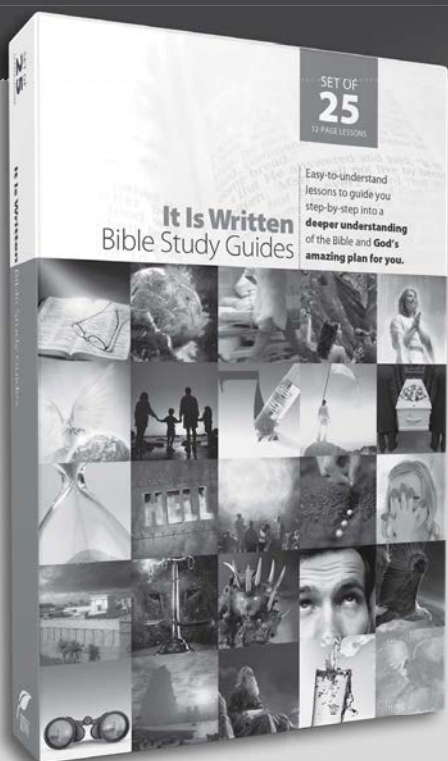


Sample Questions

Which king of Israel had the shortest reign? • In Mark 2, the paralyzed man was brought to Jesus by how many people? • What was the occupation of Cornelius (who sent for Paul)? • Who prophesied that a Star would come out of Jacob? • How long was Moses with God on Mount Sinai? • Which king attacked Jerusalem in the time of Daniel? • What did Judah do to Adonibezek? • How long did the people of Ephesus shout, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians”? • How old was Methuselah when he died?

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83. Soccer; Broken Window

“Watch me kick this soccer ball over the house,” the boy said to his little brother. “It’s okay. I’ve done it a lot. I can do it easily.”

The younger brother wasn’t so sure. His big brother could really kick a ball, but if something went wrong, it could be a disaster. “Do you really think you should be doing that?” he asked.

“Of course! Just watch.” He placed the ball on the ground and took a few steps back. While it was only a single-story house, it was a fairly large home and had a high roof. It would take a good kick to get the ball right over the top.

The big brother stepped in and kicked the ball. Hard. It went fast, but it didn’t go up. Like a rocket, the ball surged toward the house. The older boy knew things had gone awry and hoped the damage wouldn’t be bad, but it was. The ball didn’t just hit the house. It hit the kitchen window. Glass exploded into the house. Shards of glass went everywhere. Both boys knew this was going to require some delicate explaining, as their parents were due home at any moment.

Fortunately, the damage was no worse than a broken window. Even believers do reckless things without considering the potential consequences. Often, the Holy Spirit will say, “Do you really think you should be doing that?” When we press forward anyway, the results can be disastrous.

Associated verses: Isaiah 30:21; Galatians 6:7

84. Archaeologist; Stonehenge; Discoveries; Misconceptions; Perceptions

Archaeologists were thrilled. They’d found a Scottish version of Stonehenge on a farm near Aberdeen, in the country’s northeast. It seemed surprising it had remained hidden for so long, but they were happy to find the small circle of 10 stones.

Later they learned that the little stone circle had been built only 30 years before by a man who once owned the land. Does that make you wonder how many other “discoveries” or claims might be worth reconsidering? A lot of people are surprised when they find that some of what they believe about the Bible isn’t actually true.

—Tony Kimbley, Pastor, Tennessee

Associated verses: Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 2:15; Revelation 21:8

85. Donations; Tithe; Charity; Giving; Faithfulness

A BBC headline asked, “Would you give 10% of your salary to charity?” The article spoke of people who felt they had more than enough money and had begun systematically donating money to charity. One man started donating 1% and then increased it until he was giving 10% of his income to charity. The story spoke of some

who were giving even more than 10%. We've heard about this before, in the Bible. It was God who suggested His people honor Him by bringing the tithe, a tenth of their increase, to be used for the work of ministry. And today, thousands of years later, even secular people are discovering that giving adds meaning to their life.

Associated verses: Malachi 3:10; 2 Corinthians 9:7

86. Monterey; Aquarium; Mammoth; Nature; Unknown; Creation

In 2019, researchers from Monterey Bay Aquarium were searching for new deep-sea species off the coast of California, in about 10,000 feet of water, when one of the team noticed something unusual on the ocean floor. A tusk!

Two years later, a team of researchers recovered the tusk, which was from a young, female mammoth. It was the sort of thing you'd normally find deep underground or in the permafrost of the Arctic Circle. It was interesting that the scientists involved said, "There's a lot we don't know." That's nature. There's a lot we don't know. But we do know nature's God. Nature speaks of a great Creator. Considering creation's mysteries reveals more of the heart of God.

Associated verses: Nehemiah 9:6; Job 38:4–7

87. Rockefeller; Wealth; Rich; Responsibilities; Faithfulness; Giving

It's often said that John D. Rockefeller was the richest man who ever lived. He wasn't. Around 1915 he had a net worth of \$1.4 billion, the equivalent of around \$35 billion now, which means that he wouldn't even make the top 35 today.

Sometimes people feel envious of the rich. Others say, "If I had that much money, I would..." before rattling off a list of the great things they would do for the Lord if they were extremely rich. But would great riches make people more generous? There's no need to wait to find out.

The question really is, What are you doing with what God has given you? You can be faithful to God with whatever you have. If you're not giving to God now, the likelihood is that you wouldn't give to God even if you had as much money as John D. Rockefeller.

Associated verses: Luke 16:1–12

88. Yosemite; Sequoias; Winds; Temptation

In Yosemite National Park in January of 2021, a freak wind storm struck the Mariposa Grove, where 500 mature, giant sequoias grow. At least 15 of the massive trees crashed to the ground. The strong winds came, and the mighty giants couldn't stand.

The strong winds of temptation are going to come at you, but you don't have to fall. There is power in Christ and His Word to keep you standing strong!

Associated verses: 1 Corinthians 10:13; Jude 24–25

89. Challenger; Space Shuttle; Teacher; Reagan; Tragedy; Ignoring Warnings; Achilles Heel; Cherished Sins; Surrender

It was January 28, 1986, when the Space Shuttle Challenger broke apart in the sky above Cape Canaveral in Florida. Seven astronauts were heading into space on what was to be the Challenger's tenth mission. Among them was Christa McAuliffe, a 37-year-old social studies teacher at Concord High School in New Hampshire. Her presence on the space shuttle meant that school children from all over the country were watching coverage of the launch. The seven astronauts—black and white, male and female—perished.

President Ronald Reagan had been scheduled to deliver the State of the Union address that night, but it was postponed for the first time in history. Instead, President Reagan spoke to America about the tragedy. Many said the four-minute speech was one of his best ever. "The future doesn't belong to the fainthearted; it belongs to the brave," he said. "The Challenger crew was pulling us into the future, and we'll continue to follow them." Then he said, quoting from a poem, "We will never forget them, nor the last time we saw them, this morning, as they prepared for their journey and waved goodbye and 'slipped the surly bonds of earth' to 'touch the face of God.'"

It was later discovered that the Challenger broke up only 73 seconds after lift-off, due to a faulty O-ring. Something just a quarter of an inch in diameter. It was unusually cold that day, and the O-rings weren't able to function correctly in the cold. They needed warmer temperatures. Engineers had warned about this, but the warnings were ignored. A vehicle weighing 4.5 million pounds was undone by a tiny rubber O-ring.

The Challenger had a fatal flaw—not unlike many people, who have a spiritual Achilles heel in their makeup. Sometimes it's the small things that make the difference, the little sins cherished, the footholds that eventually become strongholds. It's important to surrender it all to Jesus, to hang on to nothing that does spiritual damage.

Associated verses: Song of Solomon 2:15; Matthew 12:31; James 4:7

90. Goodyear; Tires; Success; Trying Again; Quitting

In 1844, in the northeastern United States, after working through major obstacles including jail time and financial ruin, Charles Goodyear finally figured out how to make rubber truly viable as an industrial material. In doing so, he altered the world.

If anyone embodied the credo, "If at first, you don't succeed, try, try again," it was Goodyear, who refused to quit when things got tough. He went broke again and again but was determined to get it right. He stuck to his guns, and before too long he found success, the success we benefit from today.

It's easy to want to quit, even on God. Christianity is simple: believe in Jesus, and you'll be saved. But it's also complex, because people and thoughts and emotions are complex. Wherever you're at, don't quit. Don't give up on God. He will never give up on you.

Associated verse: Galatians 6:9, NASB

91. London; Art; Paintings; Van Gogh; Rembrandt; Michelangelo; Time; Sabbath; Appreciation; Priorities

If you've ever visited one of the great art galleries of the world, such as the National Gallery in London, you'll know that what you really need when you visit is time. Take the National Gallery, for example. Housed within half a million square feet are 2,300 paintings, some of which date back to the 13th century. On display are paintings by Cezanne and Vermeer and Dürer and DaVinci and Van Gogh and Rembrandt and Monet and Michelangelo and Rubens. And more. You don't have to be an art aficionado to appreciate magnificent artworks, but you do have to have time! Rushing through a gallery like that is a crime against culture!

There are times when time is really important. And God knows that, which is why He gave us the Sabbath. He says in Exodus 20:8–11 (KJV), “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God.”

The Sabbath. Time out with God. Rushing your relationship with God just doesn't cut it.

Associated verses: Exodus 20:8–10 (KJV)

92. Sushi; Infections; Fish; Mercury; Health; Disease

I don't want to spoil anybody's fun, but an article published in the United Kingdom says that the rise in the popularity of sushi could fuel an increase in deadly parasitic worm infections. Raw fish can contain little worms that burrow into the lining of a person's gut. Numerous cases have been documented. They used to be rare, because until sushi took off, people typically cooked their fish, which killed the worms. Eating worms, dead or alive, doesn't sound like fun to me, and neither does the warning that eating raw fish could up your mercury intake, which is another serious threat to your health. It's important to remember that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, a place where God dwells.

Associated verses: 1 Corinthians 6:19; 3 John 1:2; Exodus 15:26

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93. **Pepsi-Cola; Lawsuit; Kidding; Airplane; Islam; Words**

Back in the mid-1990s, a young man sued Pepsi-Cola over a promotion the company ran. It stated that Pepsi labels could be redeemed for Pepsi merchandise, and those labels could be purchased for 10 cents each. The promotion also said that a person could win a Harrier Jump Jet (a British military attack aircraft) by mailing in 7 million labels.

John Leonard figured out that if he bought the labels for 10 cents each, it would cost “only” \$700,000 to win a fighter jet, so he spoke with investors and mailed Pepsi 15 labels and a check for \$700,000. Pepsi hadn’t expected anyone to take them up on their offer, which they claimed was made in jest, but Mr. Leonard did. His lawsuit ultimately wasn’t successful, but it does bring into focus the question of truth versus “I was just kidding.”

Kidding around can lead to unfortunate consequences. In 2015, two men stormed the offices of a French satirical magazine and shot 23 people, killing 12. The magazine had run a cartoon lampooning Islam’s prophet, Muhammed. “Just kidding” didn’t go over well. YOU might be kidding, but there’s a good chance that not everyone is going to enjoy the joke.

The average person speaks thousands of words per day, so it’s not always easy to control what we say. That joke was just begging to be told. You were just. so. angry. and couldn’t keep a lid on your temper. “That person deserved to be criticized.” It’s always best to speak carefully chosen words, filtered through the Holy Spirit.

Associated verses: Proverbs 21:23; Ephesians 4:29; Psalm 19:14

94. **Stocks; Investments; Regrets; Value; Appraisal; Priceless; Bible**

Every so often you hear someone say: “I had an opportunity to buy a certain stock years ago, but I didn’t take it. If only I had...” It’s not always easy to see the value of something. Like the woman in France getting ready to sell her home. The auctioneer she brought in to appraise her belongings noticed a painting that turned out to be from the 13th century and sold for \$27 million. She had no idea.

What if you knew you had an absolutely priceless document in your home? You do. It’s the Bible, and what it contains is very literally the difference between eternal life and eternal death.

Associated verses: Psalm 119:162; 2 Timothy 3:1–17

95. Abduction; China; Maps; Memory; Reunion

A 4-year-old boy who was abducted from his home in China and then trafficked (sold to another family) kept his memories of his home village alive by drawing maps. He would draw them every day. He remembered a bamboo forest, a pond, mountains, and other details from his childhood. More than 30 years after being cruelly snatched from his home, Li Jingwei was reunited with his mother and siblings. What a reunion!

There'll be an even more amazing reunion on the day when Jesus returns. Family members will be reconnected, and every child of God will be finally and forever reunited with God Himself.

Associated verses: Titus 2:13; John 14:3

96. Cell Phone; Sports; Distractions; Unexpected; Food; Faith; Intentionality; Children

While his older sister was playing for her sports team, a 4-year-old boy played on his father's cell phone. Dad had given it to him to keep him distracted during the game. So when a food delivery service turned up to Dad's place of work with \$1,200 worth of food, something was clearly up!

The 4-year-old had told his father that he had ordered himself a birthday cake, but his dad didn't take him seriously. But \$1,200 worth of cake and gelato was delivered to the fire station where Dad worked. The store ultimately refunded the man's money, and you can be sure that dad won't be giving his phone to his young son any time soon!

Children are capable of figuring out some things for themselves, but they don't just "work out" faith in God. It takes intentionality to reach the heart of a child with the gospel, to teach a child to be a disciple of Jesus.

Associated verses: Isaiah 54:13; Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4; Psalm 127:3–5

97. Cat; Dog; Pets; Food; Preparation; Heaven; Ox; Donkey

If you've ever owned a cat or dog, then you know that pets know exactly where the food comes from. When it's time to eat, they'll hang around and let you know all about it. Isaiah 1:3 says, "The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; But Israel does not know, my people do not consider."

Animals get it. They know who the master is, and they'll act accordingly. But God's people don't always get it. God wants to bless His people and prepare us for heaven. He wants only the very best for us, yet so many people keep God out of their lives. Maybe we can learn from oxen and donkeys.

Associated verse: Isaiah 1:3

98. Massachusetts; Dürer, Art; Painting; Perception; Value

As he visited an estate sale, a man in Massachusetts saw an old sketch of a mother and child and liked it enough to pay the \$30 asking price. But when he inspected the drawing more closely a few years later, he decided to let art experts take a look. It is now believed that the mother and child were drawn by the German Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer, in the 16th century. An art gallery in London says it is expecting the drawing to sell for \$50 million. So one day it's worth \$30 and the next \$50 million; the difference is simply perceived value. It's the same picture as it was before it was discovered to be a Dürer, but now it's thought to be worth a fortune, and therefore it is.

What are you worth? Jesus died for you. That makes you valuable!

(The artwork had been in the collection of a Massachusetts architect whose family believed it was a 20th-century reproduction. When the buyer purchased the drawing, one of the man's daughters said, "Oh, so you want the Dürer." According to theartnewspaper.com: "Jean-Paul's ancestors had run the successful antique furniture and decorative art gallery Maison Carlhian in Paris, for a time in association with the highly successful dealer Joseph Duveen. Jean-Paul studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris and was a cultured man with a huge personal library. As an architect, he worked on several museum buildings, including two for the Smithsonian Institution. With such a background, it seems incredible that Jean-Paul apparently failed to realize what was contained in the fine antique frame.")

Associated verses: Isaiah 53:6; Matthew 10:31

99. Spiritual Focus; Discipline; Farmer; Journey; Dog

In the mid-1800s, a farmer hitched his horse to a wagon and began the three-mile journey into town on a hot, sunny day, with his dog following along behind. By the time they made it to the general store, the dog was exhausted and quickly collapsed in the shade of the building, lying on its back with all four legs sticking straight up into the air. Its breath was quick, and he was panting wildly with weariness.

As the farmer gathered the few things he needed, he noticed that the merchant was glaring at him. Setting his items down on the counter, the farmer inquired why the shop owner seemed upset. The man replied: "How could you let that poor dog of yours make the exhausting trip into town with you on such a hot day? Look at him; he looks like he has traveled for hundreds of miles!"

The farmer glanced over at the dog and smiled. "You know, I only live about three miles from here," the farmer replied. "That dog could have had an easy little walk in the shade of my wagon if he'd wanted, but I don't think he stayed on the road once! He chased every rabbit, explored every distant tree, and ran down every hole he

could find until we got here, and now he is licked!” The farmer loaded the supplies in the wagon, picked up the dog, placed him inside, and made the journey home.

Just like the dog, we often do the same thing. Jesus has given us a clear and straight path for eternal life, but we are so often distracted and leave the road for every little rabbit trail, and then we wonder why we are so exhausted in the Christian life. Jesus said, “Come to Me . . . , and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Let’s remember to follow the Lamb wherever He goes, for when we are walking with Him, we know that we will always reach our destination with joy and much less difficulty.

Associated verses: Hebrews 12:11; Proverbs 12:1

100. Faith and Works; Famine; Russia; Rations; Bread; Knife; Tradition; Provision; Faith

A terrible famine affected Russia many years ago, following the Russian Revolution. The only real food, black bread, was rationed out to the people weekly. Families would cut off one slice for each family member for supper and then put away the rest. It became a tradition for women to then sharpen the knife directly afterward, symbolizing to everyone that there would be enough food for the next meal, and she would be ready.

One day, a Christian family was struggling beyond the norm. The father had just died, and the mother cut up the last loaf of bread. The Christian mother said, “Children, we must ask God to send us bread,” so her children and she all knelt, and they prayed that God would provide food for them.

After the prayer, one of the children looked up at the mother and asked, “Mother, do you think God will send us more bread?” The mother smiled and replied, “Of course He will, my dear.”

The child asked again, “But will he really?” She assured him that He would.

The child then inquired, “Mother, if God will answer our prayers, why didn’t you sharpen the knife, as we always have before?” The mother accepted the rebuke. She knew that prayer was commanded, but she had not shown her faith by her works.

When we seek the Lord in prayer, let us not forget the duty that lies near us. Works do not save us, but our works can create a witness that brings salvation to others!

Associated verses: James 2:17–18; Hebrews 11:6

101. Declaration of Independence; United States; Thomas Jefferson; Samuel Adams; Benjamin Franklin; Boldness; Influence; John Hancock; Commitment

On July 2, 1776, the Continental Congress accepted the first draft of the Declaration of Independence, declaring separation from the British government. When we think of the men who signed this famous document, we probably remember names such as John and Samuel Adams, Thomas Jefferson, or the compelling character Benjamin Franklin.

Another man famous for signing this document was John Hancock. When you look at the signed Declaration, John's signature seems to fly off the page and command your attention. It is not only dead center on the document, but it is three times the size of anyone else's signature.

Although the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence were not perfect individuals, they were men of great courage. They all knew their act of signing the Declaration would be viewed as treason by the British government. They risked death if caught, or if the revolution failed. Most of the men in that hall were wealthy.

As the document was prepared and waiting, a long pause ensued as the men prepared to sign. They were contemplating the risk involved, and the seriousness of the decision left the room quiet and uneasy. After several minutes, John Hancock courageously bolted out of his chair and walked up to the desk with the piece of parchment. He took the pen out of its ink well and in large, bold letters, John signed with an attitude of confidence. After he had finished signing, he is quoted saying, "There, I guess King George will be able to read that without his spectacles." This act broke the tension, and the other men quickly followed.

Of the 56 signers, most died penniless, including John Hancock himself. Many of the men in that room lost their older sons, wives, and children to the terrible war that the declaration began. Hancock wanted all to know that he was wholly committed to the cause of freedom. He not only declared it, but he joined it with the decision of his conscience and the action of his life.

It only takes one step of courage to influence a person (or even an empire) toward a common good. When we live for Jesus, the same is true. We can influence our neighbor or a nation for Him by simple faith and action, which can move the hand of God to impact the world.

Associated verses: Psalm 138:3; Proverbs 28:1 (KJV); Acts 28:31

102. Humility; Booker T. Washington; Tuskegee Institute; Alabama; Meekness; Character

A truly humble person is hard to find, yet God delights to honor such selfless individuals. Booker T. Washington, the renowned African American educator, was an outstanding example of this. The story is told that shortly after he took over the presidency of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, he was walking in an exclusive section of town when a wealthy woman stopped him. Not knowing the famous Mr. Washington by sight, she told him she needed some wood chopped. Because he had no pressing business at that moment, Professor Washington smiled, rolled up his sleeves, and proceeded to do the humble chore she had requested. He carried the logs into the house and stacked them by the fireplace after he finished. A little girl recognized him and later revealed his identity to the lady.

The next morning, the embarrassed woman went to see Professor Washington in his office at the Institute and apologized profusely. “It is perfectly all right, Madam,” he replied. “Occasionally, I enjoy a little manual labor. Besides, it’s always a delight to do something for a friend.” She shook his hand warmly and assured him that his meek and gracious attitude had endeared him and his work to her heart. Not long afterward, she showed her admiration by persuading some wealthy acquaintances to join her in donating thousands of dollars to the Tuskegee Institute.

The act that can seem demeaning to one is cheered by the host of heaven. God’s view of greatness is quite the opposite of those on Earth. Character is built as we seek the lowly path of self-denial and humility that defined the Savior’s life.

Associated verses: James 4:10; Proverbs 22:4; Proverbs 11:2

103. Edinburgh; Professor; Remorse; Forgiveness; Humility; Conversion; Making Wrongs Right

Many years ago, Christian professor Stuart Blackie of the University of Edinburgh listened to his students as they presented oral readings. When one young man rose to begin his recitation, he held his book in the wrong hand. The professor thundered, “Take your book in your right hand, and be seated!” At this harsh rebuke, the student held up his right arm. He didn’t have a right hand!

The other students shifted uneasily in their chairs. For a moment, the professor hesitated. He then made his way to the student, put his arm around him, and with tears streaming from his eyes, said: “I never knew about it. Please, will you forgive me?” His humble apology made a lasting impact on that young man. This story was told in a large gathering of believers sometime later. At the close of the meeting, a man came forward, turned to the crowd, and raised his right arm. It ended at the

wrist. He said, “I was that student. Professor Blackie led me to Christ, but he could never have done it if he had not made the wrong right.”

Associated verses: Proverbs 1:23; Matthew 5:23–24

104. Transforming Grace; Accident; Blindness; Transformation; Baptism

A blind man named Bill once gave a testimony that in his younger years, his life and choices were far from Christ. He’d had no interest in any concept of God. Following a tragic car accident, he was left blind.

The newfound struggles from the blindness softened Bill’s heart, and he received an invitation card in the mail for a Bible study course. He accepted the invitation and learned about the loving-kindness of Jesus. During an altar call at the church, Bill gave his life to Jesus. He was a transformed person.

At his baptism, he shared how much Jesus meant to him, more than life. The captivating statement that stole the congregation’s heart and brought them to tears was when Bill said, “I had to become blind before I could really see.”

Can you see? Are your eyes open, as Bill’s were, though he was blind? Today, Jesus desires to apply the eyesalve of the Holy Spirit to open the door of a new life of His grace and peace.

Associated verses: Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 5:17

105. BONUS ILLUSTRATION: Soviet Union; Pastor; Prison; Labor Camp; Bible; Faithfulness; Sabbath; Sincerity

During a time of persecution in the Soviet regime, a Christian pastor was placed in prison for his faith. He worked in a hard labor camp for many years but still refused to work on Sunday.

Each week, he would go into the yard and read a Bible that someone had secured for him. While reading under a tree one Sunday, a handsome, well-dressed man he had never seen stood before him. The man asked, “Why do you transgress the commandment of the Lord?” The pastor replied, “I have always sought to keep God’s commandments!” The man invited him to turn to a series of Bible passages, beginning with Exodus 20:8–11 and ending with Revelation 22:14. The pastor was stunned at what the Bible really said concerning the Sabbath!

When he looked up to express his thanks, the man was gone and never seen again. The pastor was confident that he had conversed with an angel. Immediately, he began keeping the Sabbath instead of Sunday. He then worked on Sunday but

refused to work on Saturday. After much questioning, the prison warden deemed him delusional but harmless to society and ordered his release. The pastor immediately went to a local Sabbath-keeping church and was baptized, rejoicing in the truth that His best friend Jesus had shared with him.

Associated verses: John 8:32; Exodus 20:8–11

Index of Topics

A

Abduction 18, 61
 Accident 21, 32, 48, 66
 Achilles Heel 58
 Advocate 51
 Africa 17, 20
 Age 27
 Aging 52
 Air Force 13
 Airplane 13, 26, 43, 60
 Alabama 38, 65
 Alcoholism 29
 Alice Neel 37
 Allergies 22
 Alligator 13
 Appraisal 60
 Appreciation 59
 Aquarium 57
 Archaeologist 56
 Aristotle 33
 Arrest 24
 Art 37, 59, 62
 Artist 10, 37
 Assumptions 45
 Astronaut 44
 Australia 22, 24, 32
 Authenticity 17, 42

B

Baptism 22, 43, 66
 Barrier 12
 Bartimaeus 40
 Baseball 31
 Beaches 24
 Beetle 38
 Behavior 18
 Being Good 18
 Beliefs 50
 Benefits 11
 Benjamin Franklin 64

Bet 31
 Bible 13, 21, 32, 42, 60, 66
 Bicycle 13, 22
 Bicycles 43
 Blessings 11, 38
 Blindness 66
 Blueprints 40
 Boldness 64
 Boll Weevil 38
 Booker T. Washington 65
 Books 44
 Boston 38
 Bread 63
 Britain 18
 Broken Window 56
 Bully 48

C

Calling 40
 Campfires 17
 Canada 21, 41, 43
 Cancer 23, 32, 38
 Canyon 9
 Careful 27
 Caring 20
 Cat 40, 61
 Cell Phone 61
 Challenger 44, 58
 Challenges 37, 43
 Change 10
 Character 9, 65
 Charity 56
 Chef 25
 Cherished Sins 58
 Children 19, 24, 61
 China 18, 61
 Choice 30
 Choices 38
 Christian Walk 46
 Church 33
 Circumstances 23

Clothing 23
 Cobras 18
 Coffee 45
 Colors 23
 Comeback 19
 Commitment 64
 Concentration Camp 28
 Consequences 18
 Contract 31
 Conversion 43, 65
 Cotton 38
 Coupons 40
 Cover Up 39
 Creation 10, 57
 Crime 40
 Cross 12

D

Dam 11
 Daniel 37
 Darkness 52
 David 33
 Deal 31
 Deals 10
 Death 10, 20, 29, 42
 Deception 42
 Declaration of Independence 64
 Defense 51
 Deliverance 28
 Deportation 28
 Diabetes 38
 Diet 38
 Difficulties 38
 Diplomat 28
 Disaster 21, 26, 46
 Discipline 62
 Discomfort 22
 Discoveries 56
 Disease 59
 Diseases 38
 Distractions 41, 61
 Diversification 38
 Doctors 32
 Dog 61, 62
 Donation 8
 Donations 56
 Donkey 61

Drinking 47
 Drought 9
 Duplication 28
 Dürer 62

E

Edinburgh 65
 Embarrassment 47
 Emergency 11, 43
 Emotions 9
 England 32, 40
 Entertainment 39
 Escape 40, 41
 Essential 25
 Eternal Life 10
 Eternity 50
 Everlasting Life 12, 42
 Exercising 30
 Expectations 46
 Expensive 7
 Experiment 23
 Explosion 41

F

Facebook 27
 Faces 41
 Facts 45
 Failure 11
 Faith 9, 22, 23, 29, 32, 37, 61, 63
 Faith and Works 63
 Faithfulness 18, 31, 48, 56, 57, 66
 Falsehood 27
 Family 24
 Famine 63
 Farmer 62
 Farmhouse 46
 Fat 38
 Fearlessness 43
 Feelings 23
 Fight 48
 Finger 43
 Fire 17, 21
 Firefighter 26
 Fish 59
 Flood 46
 Florida 13, 23, 27

Following Directions 42
 Food 7, 10, 25, 39, 61
 Foolish 27
 Forgiveness 22, 33, 39, 65
 France 20, 29
 Freedom 30, 40
 Frequent flier miles 10
 Fuel 43
 Fugitive 24
 Fulfillment 7
 Future 33, 37

G

Game 41
 Garbage 46
 Generosity 41, 45
 Genuine Christianity 42
 Germany 28
 Gift 8
 Giving 41, 56, 57
 Giving Up 21
 God 19
 God At Work 37
 God's law 12
 God's Love 18
 God's Plan 38, 43
 God's Presence 27
 God's Voice 41
 Gold 7
 Gold Medal 19
 Golf 21, 31
 Goodyear 58
 Gospel 43
 Grace 11, 39
 Greatness 44
 Greece 33
 Growth 10
 Guard 40
 Guidance 27
 Guilt 24
 Guilty 51

H

Hair 52
 Hands 33
 Hawaii 13

Hazards 13
 Health 38, 59
 Heart 9
 Heart Disease 38
 Heaven 49, 50, 61
 Help 28
 Hidden Message 42
 Hiding 24, 39
 High Prices 37
 High School 32
 Hijack 30
 History 27
 Hole 39
 Honesty 31
 Hope 21, 29, 50
 Human Trafficking 18
 Humility 65
 Hungary 28

I

Idol 29
 Ignorance 37
 Ignore 23
 Ignoring Warnings 58
 Illness 38, 39
 Imitation 17
 Impossibilities 18
 Inconsistency 50
 India 18
 Infections 59
 Influence 64
 Ingredients 39
 Initiative 44
 Injury 13
 Insignificance 37
 Intentionality 61
 Internet 30, 39, 40, 41
 Investments 60
 Ireland 42, 45
 Islam 60

J

Japan 13
 Jews 28
 John Hancock 64
 Journey 62

Justification 51

K

Karate 39

Kennedy 33

Kidding 60

Kindness 45

Knife 63

L

Labor Camp 66

Lawsuit 45, 60

Lawyer 51

Leaks 12

Library 44

Lifestyle Choices 38, 39

Lighting 23

Lion 7, 20

Little Things 26

Liver Failure 29

London 29, 59

Longing 50

Loss 9, 12

Lost 26, 40

Lottery 12

Love 7, 31

Love of a Father 18

M

Making Wrongs Right 65

Mammoth 57

Manasseh 33

Manhole 26

Maps 61

Massachusetts 62

McDonalds 45

Meat 38

Meekness 65

Memory 27, 61

Mental Health 39

Menus 11, 12

Mercury 59

Mercy 11

Meteorite 41

Metronome 30

Michelangelo 10, 59

Michelin 24, 25

Mind 27, 30, 39

Ministry 47

Miracle 26

Mirrors 23

Misconceptions 21, 56

Mission 8, 33

Misunderstanding 47

MIT 44

Molasses 46

Money 12

Monkeys 17

Monterey 57

Monument 38

Music 30, 42

Musician 37

N

NASA 44

Native Americans 45

Nature 57

Nebraska 53

Neglect 40, 46

Neuroscience 37

New Mexico 49

News 20

Newspaper 38

New York 27

New York City 29

Nobel Prize 10

North Dakota 46

North Korea 31

Nose 22

O

Obedience 12

Olympic Game 19

Operation 50

Opportunities 13

Opportunity 41

Ox 61

P

Pace 30

Pain 22

Pain Points 12

Painting 62
 Paintings 37, 59
 Pancakes 52
 Past 22, 33
 Pastor 47, 66
 Paul 33
 Paying Attention 48
 Peanuts 38
 Pen 26
 Pension 42
 Pepsi-Cola 60
 Perception 11, 12, 62
 Perceptions 23, 40, 56
 Perseverance 32, 43
 Persistence 32, 43
 Pests 38
 Peter 40
 Pets 61
 Philosopher 29
 Photography 23
 Piano 30
 Picture 19
 Pilot 13, 26
 Plane Crash 19
 Pointlessness 10
 Police 46
 Popularity 29
 Poster 39
 Post Office 42
 Potatoes 45
 Prayer 43
 Preparation 43, 61
 President 13
 Pressure 24, 25, 46
 Prevention 38
 Priceless 60
 Principal 32
 Priorities 7, 24, 25, 30, 32, 59
 Prison 40, 66
 Prisoner 31
 Prisoners 40
 Procrastination 32
 Professor 65
 Prosperity 38
 Protection 30
 Providence 53
 Provision 63

Psychology 11
 Purpose 10, 43

Q

Quitting 58

R

Rain 11
 Raphael 10
 Rations 63
 Reagan 58
 Reality 12
 Recognition 41
 Refining 10
 Regrets 60
 Reliance 52
 Relief 22
 Religion 10
 Rembrandt 59
 Remorse 65
 Rescue 13, 26, 48
 Resilience 11, 29
 Respond 31
 Responsibilities 57
 Rest 30
 Restaurant 24, 25
 Restaurants 11
 Reunion 61
 Revelation 37
 Rhythm 30
 Rich 8, 57
 Ring 43
 Rockefeller 57
 Rocket 49
 Run Away 40
 Running 24, 37
 Runway 43
 Russia 63

S

Sabbath 30, 59, 66
 Sacrifice 12
 Safari 17
 Safe Houses 28
 Salvation 8, 10, 12, 26, 28, 41, 42, 50
 Samuel Adams 64

San Diego 33
 School 32, 48
 Science 37
 Seatbelts 13
 Second Chance 13
 Second Coming 48, 49
 Secularism 50
 Segregation 44
 Senses 39
 Sequoias 57
 Service 7
 Settlement 27
 Sewer 26
 Sickness 38
 Signs of Jesus' Return 48
 Sin 32, 51
 Sincerity 66
 Sins 22, 39
 Sleep 48
 Sleeping 40
 Smartphones 30
 Snakes 18
 Soccer 56
 Social Media 30
 Solomon 33
 South Carolina 44
 Space 49
 Space Shuttle 33, 44, 58
 Spiritual Focus 62
 Spiritual Gifts 37
 Spiritual Health 39
 Sports 9, 61
 Squirrel 53
 Starting Over 22
 Statue 33
 Stocks 60
 Stonehenge 56
 Storms 26
 Stray 40
 Strength 7, 11, 29
 Stress 9
 Stroke 38
 Success 25, 37, 58
 Sugar 38
 Sunrise 52
 Super Bowl 9
 Surgeon 32

Surprise 41
 Surrender 13, 24, 39, 43, 58
 Survey 30
 Survival 32
 Sushi 59
 Switzerland 28
 Syllabus 42

T

Taking Action 20
 Talent 29
 Teacher 58
 Television 29
 Temptation 57
 Tenacity 44
 Tests 12
 Theater 27
 Thomas Jefferson 64
 Tiddlywinks 22
 Time 29, 59
 Tires 58
 Titanic 33
 Tithe 56
 Toilet 30
 Tornado 27
 Tradition 63
 Tragedy 46, 58
 Trail of Tears 45
 Train 21
 Transformation 10, 66
 Transforming Grace 66
 Treasure 46
 Trials 9, 12, 51
 Trouble 13
 Trust 21
 Truth 23
 Trying Again 58
 Tumor 32
 Tunnel 40
 Turbulence 13
 Turning to Jesus 52
 Tuskegee Institute 65

U

Uncertainty 37
 Understanding 37

Undeserving 8
Unexpected 41, 61
Unexpected Blessings 53
United Kingdom 30
United States 64
Universe 10
Unknown 37, 57
Unwise 27

Z

Zero Gravity 49

V

Vacation 27
Value 8, 37, 60, 62
Value of People 20
Vandals 33
Van Gogh 37, 59
Vegetables 38
Veterinarian 40
Victory 7
Vietnam 32
Vietnam War 43
Virgin Galactic 49
Virginia 40
Voice 40
Voices 41

W

Waiting 31
War 31, 32, 33, 43
Warning Signs 46
Water 9
Wealth 57
Wedding 47
Winds 57
Wisconsin 26
Within 29
Wordle 41
Words 11, 60
Worldliness 50
World War 2 28
World War I 33

Y

Yosemite 57
Youth 44

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