

Meditations
on FAVORITE SCRIPTURES



DEVOTIONS FOR A YEAR

Curtis A. Jahn
Compiling Editor

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Preface

Christian people have always recognized the value of spending some devotional time with the Lord every day in prayer and with his Word. For fifty years the popular devotional magazine *Meditations* has brought daily devotions to its readers. Through the Scripture verses, devotional thoughts, and prayers of *Meditations*, God's people have been spiritually nourished in their Christian faith.

This commemorative volume brings together 366 devotions, one for each day of the year, from the half-century of *Meditations*. Each devotion offers the comfort and guidance of God's Holy Word, centering in the gospel promises of Jesus Christ.

The title of this book, *Meditations on Favorite Scriptures*, reflects the primary way the devotions were selected. Christian readers will recognize many of their favorite Bible verses at the beginning of the devotions. Scripture passages that were originally in the King James Version have been put into the New International Version. The language of the prayers has been updated into contemporary English, and hymn verses have been quoted as they appear in *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*, wherever possible.

May God bless you, the reader of this book, as he has blessed so many readers of *Meditations* for fifty years!

"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

1
January

God's love—reflected in his gift

Birthdays, Christmas, and anniversaries are just some of the special occasions when gifts are given by relatives and friends. Gifts are often signs of love. Gifts may come in many different shapes and sizes. Some may be of great value while others may have cost the giver very little. Or the giver may have made gifts by hand at a great expense of time and effort.

God gave us the greatest gift of all, the gift of his own dear Son. He did it to fulfill the greatest need we have as human beings, the need for a Savior from sin. This gift was given to us by our heavenly Father to fulfill a promise he had made to our first parents, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden. At that time he had told Satan, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Genesis 3:15).

This gift was the result of God's love for sinful humanity. No one, from Adam and Eve to this present day, deserves such a gift. Yet God in his love knew that this was the only way to save a sinful and lost world. This gift was one of a kind, never to be repeated and impossible to duplicate.

No gift is more personal than the gift of God's Son. He fits the needs of everyone—babies, young children, teenagers, adults, and senior citizens. All of us have broken God's law in our own evil ways. Yet "the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

The gifts we as humans give soon break, wear out, get used up, or are discarded in favor of other things. Yet God's gift to us is ageless, endless, and always useful. Only God in his love could—and did—supply us with all that we need to be saved from sin and hell.

As a result of God's gift of his Son, we ponder more deeply and appreciate more fully God's love. In giving us this gift, he has shown us what love is all about.

God loved the world so that he gave
His only Son the lost to save
That all who would in him believe
Should everlasting life receive. (CW 391:1)



***Dear Father, thank you for the perfect gift of your dear Son.
May his sacrifice continue to be the center of my faith and my
hope and my joy. Amen.***

"God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." (John 3:17)

God's love—reflected in salvation

Have you ever been lost? It can be a terrifying experience. Ask any crying child lost in a shopping mall. Ask a confused hunter who has lost his sense of direction in a roadless forest. Ask the motorist who can't figure out where he is or which street or highway to take to get to his destination.

When God looked at this world, he saw a world lost in sin. God saw that every person on this earth had violated his law, which declared, "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). God saw that everyone had gone his or her own way and had strayed from the path of perfect righteousness.

God could have ordered the whole world to appear in court before his Son and could have had the Son declare the world condemned to eternal punishment in hell. But God's love intervened and sought salvation rather than judgment. Our loving God accomplished this salvation by sending his Son into this world, not as its judge but as its Savior.

This act of rescuing the world from sin was not easy. It required God's Son to live a perfect life in our place. It required that God place the sins of the whole world on his Son and punish him for "the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). It required that the innocent Lamb of God be nailed to a cross, where he would endure all the pain and suffering that God had reserved for sinful humanity.

Jesus' suffering and death rescued every man, woman, and child from the eternal fires of hell. The life of the Son of Man offered on Calvary's cross accomplished a rescue like no other in the history of the world. Many day-to-day rescues save the lives of the lost, the trapped, and the injured. But only the rescue mission of the Son of God saved souls lost in sin and destined for eternal death in hell.

God's mission was a mission of love. It was planned in love by our Father, who saw a world lost in sin. It was carried out in love by Christ, who gave his life for us.

Once you were lost in sin. But Jesus died for you. How does it feel to be rescued? How does it feel to be loved by God? Many are still lost in sin and unbelief. Go and share with them the joy of that salvation found in Jesus Christ.



Dear Jesus, thank you for rescuing me from sin and hell through your death on the cross. Amen.

"Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." (John 3:18)

3
January

God's love—accepted in faith

Suppose you need to get to the roof of your house or apartment building. You stretch a ladder from the ground to the roof. The roof is now accessible, assuming, of course, you trust that each rung on the ladder will hold your weight. If you do, you confidently climb the ladder one rung at a time until you reach the roof.

What was necessary? You had to believe in the ladder. This is similar to what Jesus told Nicodemus. Jesus explained that he had come to redeem man from sin by giving his life on the cross. It was vital that Nicodemus believe what Jesus said in order for him to be saved from sin and inherit eternal life.

The same is true for you and everyone else. The only way to escape God's condemnation of sin is to believe that Jesus is your Savior. This you do—by the power of the Holy Spirit. God inspired the apostle Paul to write, "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9). Your faith is a gift from your loving God, who wants you to be saved. He gives you the confidence to accept what Jesus told Nicodemus—that whoever believes in Jesus is not condemned.

Many in this world choose to remain unbelievers. They fail to put their trust and confidence in Jesus and his atoning work. They foolishly choose to trust in their own works or merits to save them from God's condemnation. How sad this is. They stand condemned to hell with no possibility of ever inheriting eternal life.

John the Baptist told his hearers, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life" (John 3:36). Paul and Silas informed the jailer at Philippi, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). Paul wrote to his fellow believers at Rome, "We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (Romans 3:28).

The Bible is clear. Whoever believes in Jesus is free from the condemnation of sin. Whoever does not believe remains condemned to eternal punishment in hell. Since forgiveness and faith are gifts from our loving God, we owe him no less than our eternal praise and thanks.



Dear God, thank you for your gift of faith by which I am able to receive the results of your Son's redeeming work. Amen.

"Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." (John 3:21)

God's love—reflected in Christian living

We receive much help from people during our lifetimes. Someone helps us with a flat tire. A neighbor cuts our grass while we are on vacation. A friend nearby helps us shovel out after the worst snowstorm of the winter. We are thankful for what these people do for us.

Sometimes we find ways other than with words to express our gratitude. We might return the favor without being asked. We might purchase a small gift to show our appreciation.

But what do we do in response to God's gracious and loving activity of saving us from sin and hell? Surely we give thanks to God for his unending love in Christ. We may also want to repay him for making us his own through faith in Christ Jesus. But let's face it. We could never repay our God for all that his love caused him to do for us.

But there is something we can do. We can offer our lives to him. That is what Jesus was saying to Nicodemus in the Scripture passage for today. He was telling Nicodemus and encouraging us to let our lights shine in the world around us.

God made us his own. And he gives us the strength and ability to live as his dear children. Therefore, as a redeemed child of God, you will desire to "let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Children enjoy pleasing their parents. As a child of your heavenly Father, you also want to lead a life that is pleasing to him and that brings him honor and glory. You seek no praise or glory for yourself. You want it all to go to him who did so much for you. We follow the encouragement Peter offered in his first epistle: "Declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (2:9).

As a Christian, continue to search for ways to reflect the love God has shown you in Christ. Read and study his Word. Listen to the instructions and encouragements the sacred writers give. Especially listen to how they encourage us to serve the Lord because of all he has done for us. Because no Christian lives a perfect life, there is always room for improvement in what you think, say, and do. By the grace of God, you have a lot of victorious living to do!



Dear God, shine on me with your love in Christ. Help me reflect the light of your love, especially on those who still live in the shadow of death. Amen.

God's hands determine my days

We are living in a society that no longer considers people taking life into their own hands as wrong. The cultists of death are all around us: abortionists, right-to-die advocates, gangs who murder in the streets. This is one result of the lie of evolution that tells us that man is god. If evolution is true, there is no higher author of life, no higher authority when it comes to life and death. The days of our lives and the times of our deaths become ours to control.

David knew better. He knew that life and death are not ours to control. They are in God's hands. God determines whether each of us recovers from an illness or remains sick a while longer. While he is not the author of sin, he determines how it touches our lives. His will determines if a car comes across a median and takes the life of a loved one or whether it falls harmlessly into a ditch. Because our times are in God's hands, even the sinful actions of others serve God's purposes for our eternal salvation.

All of our times are in God's hands—the good times, the bad times, the easy times, the hard times. God delivers us from our enemies each and every day according to his good purpose.

The way God deals with us is not unlike how a coach deals with his players. He determines the plays and who will run them. The coach's hands point to where the player is to go and push him or her in that direction. God's control, however, goes far beyond that of a coach. From 12:00 A.M. until 11:59:59 P.M., the second before midnight, our times are in God's hands.

What is more, the God who determines our days is a gracious God. This means that everything that happens to us works out for our eternal good. During each and every minute of our lives, God is serving us. He controls our lives so that we are moved to search his Word, pray for help, grow in a knowledge of his love, and develop Christian concern for the lives and souls of others.

Since God determines our days, we can be sure he and he alone has determined when we will die. When his work for us is completed, he will take us home. What a different view of life and death this is than that proposed by modern ministers of death!

With this in mind, we eagerly await that moment when we depart this life for the endless day of heaven, where we can spend every ounce of energy worshipping and praising God.



***O Lord, thank you for using the days of our lives to bless us.
Amen.***

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. (Luke 2:25)

Praise God for the consolation of Israel

Today Christians celebrate the festival of Epiphany. *Epiphany* means, literally, “to shine forth.” This is what God did when he let the glory of Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world shine forth among his people.

To help us celebrate Christ's epiphany, we turn to the “Song of Simeon” in the gospel of Luke.

It was “consolation” for which Simeon, a man of the city of Jerusalem, was waiting. With a believing heart, he knew that consolation would come through the Messiah. In the Messiah would come the comfort to fill Simeon's and all mankind's greatest need: a Savior from sin and all its horrible consequences.

Simeon is described as a righteous and devout man. This does not mean that he was any less a sinner than any other person. He was justified by faith, as are we and all who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin. Simeon's faith is evidenced in his “waiting.”

It was the Holy Spirit who had brought him to faith in the Savior by the same means the Holy Spirit still uses today—the Word of God. How his heart must have been thrilled at the words of the prophet Isaiah (51:3): “The LORD will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins.” By faith Simeon knew that God was also speaking to him through these words of the prophet: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins” (Isaiah 40:1,2).

The one who brought such consolation to Simeon and his fellow believers of old is the same Jesus Christ who comforts us through Word and sacrament. The Spirit is given to us also so that we too may have consolation in Christ's blood-bought forgiveness and the oil of gladness to soothe us in our troubles and afflictions. With the Holy Spirit upon us, let us bring our daily sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise to God for the consolation of Israel.



***In you alone, Dear Lord, we own
Sweet hope and consolation,
Our shield from foes, Our balm for woes,
Our great and sure salvation. Amen. (CW 447:1)***

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. (Luke 2:26)

Praise God for the Spirit's revelation

When people reach a ripe old age, many of them express a deep desire to see someone or something before they die. This was demonstrated recently in a conversation between several elderly people in a retirement home. The question was asked of all present, "What would you like to see before you die?" One lady replied, "I would like to see my grandchildren, but they live so far from here and I am too weak to travel." Another said, "I would like to see my son come back to church."

Both of these desires seem unlikely to be fulfilled; yet both, by God's grace, are possible.

Simeon, the man from Jerusalem, also had a desire to see something special before he died. It was really a desire that was common to all devout Jews. He looked for the consolation of Israel—the Savior—to come into the world. What was uncommon in Simeon's case was that God had specifically revealed to him that he would see the Messiah before he died. Exactly how the Holy Spirit revealed this to Simeon we are not told. But we are content to read that God had given him this promise.

Simeon was endowed with the Spirit and well versed in Holy Scripture. By it he had come to faith. In faith he looked forward to the Messiah's coming. The general time and place of Christ's birth had been foretold by the prophets. However, it would not have mattered one iota for his salvation's sake if Simeon had died in his faith without actually seeing the Christ Child with his own eyes. But our good and gracious God granted him this revelation so that we too might marvel at the wisdom, power, and goodness of God. Simeon was no great man in the eyes of the world—no candidate for Who's Who in Israel—yet God the Holy Spirit selected him for this honor.

To see the Lord's Christ with bodily eyes was indeed a great blessing. But even that was not as great as to see him with the eyes of faith. Later, many in Israel saw Jesus with their natural eyes and heard him speak the words of life with their own ears, yet it did them no good because they did not believe in him. To see the child Jesus as the Lord's Christ through the eyes of faith is still the greatest blessing of all. And the Holy Spirit continues to bestow this great blessing wherever God's Word is preached and read.



Dearest Lord Jesus, by your Word and the Spirit you have revealed yourself to be the Christ; grant us the gift of faith to believe it and the courage to proclaim it. Amen.