

The background is a vibrant green color. It features several large, overlapping, semi-transparent geometric shapes in a lighter shade of green. These shapes are composed of rectangles and trapezoids, some of which are arranged to resemble stylized gift boxes with ribbons. The shapes are scattered across the page, with some in the top right and bottom right corners, and others in the bottom left.

DAILY NOTES

**Philippians to
Revelation**

Daily Notes Philippians to Revelation

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These notes are a very simple aid to your daily reading as you make your way through the New Testament. They have been written to accompany a reading plan that takes in one chapter of the New Testament each day. You'll find a simple reflection on each day's chapter followed by a short prayer in response. It is hoped that this will fuel your own prayers as you spend time with the Lord.

A suggested daily time with the Lord might look like this:

- **Read.** In our time with God, it seems right to let him speak first. Whether it's a chapter or just one line, it's all his word.
- **Reflect.** We want to understand what we read, and then think about what it says about God, us, life, and so on.
- **Respond.** Prayer based on what God has said to you through his word means that your prayers are shaped biblically.
- **Request.** God is glorified by our requests as we humbly acknowledge his power and grace.

Daily Notes

Philippians to Revelation

Philippians 1 – To Live Is Christ

This warm and loving chapter ends by saying that the Christians at Philippi will suffer for Christ. But notice the build-up: (i) Paul is thankful about them and joyful. He prays not for preservation from persecution but for growth in righteousness of life. (ii) He points out that even though he's in prison, his situation has advanced the gospel as Christ is widely proclaimed. (iii) Whatever persecution comes is *ultimately* irrelevant since to live is Christ and even the worst-case outcome of persecution (death) brings us to Jesus. As partners in the gospel, he wants them to share in the living hope of Christ, even as they suffer persecution.

Lord God, you know we rarely actually see life from this perspective. We look forward to happier times when our troubles will be behind us, rather than seeking to live and witness for you in those troubles. O God, help me to know in my heart and bones what it is to say "to live is Christ" and help me make him known where I am.

Philippians 2 – To Live As Christ

Since we have union with Christ it is natural that Christians ought to have unity with one another, actively working together as one. We do that by adopting the self-emptying, other-person-orientation of life that Christ displayed in coming from heaven's glories to save us. Our salvation works outwards towards others; in fact, it's God working in us to grow his kingdom. We must, therefore, live as children of light. Timothy and Epaphroditus are held out as true examples whose genuine love and concern for others is beyond doubt, showing that such love is achievable as we live as Christ.

Lord Jesus, your self-emptying love brings you great glory and is the grounds of all my hope and joy for eternity. I confess my own self-centredness and lovelessness. Help me to work my salvation outwards, to love others with sincerity, and so shine for you in this dark generation.

Philippians 3 – Press on

As a devoutly religious man, Paul had once felt confident of his standing before God. But when he came to know Christ, all that self-confidence was shattered and worthless. Now all his hope and joy is “Christ Jesus my Lord.” Jesus is all he wants to know and all he hopes in. There’s a deep yearning for the bodily resurrection of the dead, to be with Christ forever. Not only is there no eternal life without Christ, Jesus is the focus and prize that makes eternal life so glorious. No-one will enter that on their own merits, but all will glorify Jesus forever. And *that* is worth pressing on for.

Lord Jesus, risen Son of God, Lord and Christ over all, it will be thrilling to see you as I stand in your new creation with a resurrection body. I love the fact that I will claim no merit of my own on that day but will only ever praise, thank, glorify and worship you forever. Lord, in these days of mine, help me to press on.

Philippians 4 – Rejoice in the Lord

The more we truly understand our eternal security in Christ, the more content we will be in all of life. So Paul urged those two women to end a dispute and urged the church to help them too. Don’t worry about issues, but rather take them to God in prayer and trust him to hear and act with love and wisdom. Don’t dwell on things that lead to earthly anxiety, but dwell on higher thoughts in the peace of God. Paul thanks the Philippians for a financial gift just delivered to him, while also making the point that he has learned true contentment. Eternally secure in Christ, he is no more content with wealth than anxious in poverty.

Gracious God, our lives are so filled with material things we barely know the anxiety of true poverty. Yet we find other things to worry about and dwell on, things that rob us of joy in you. Help me, then, to contemplate and meditate on things that bring me to thank and praise you. Help me always to bring any worries to you, trusting you wholly.

Colossians 1 – The Kingdom of the Son

The church at Colossae had fallen into some sort of doctrinal error (it's not clear to us exactly what) which Paul answers with glorious truth. Saved by faith, we respond to God's love and have hope for eternity. Paul says that that very hope then fuels a life of faith and love (v4-5). How right, then, that we live a life worthy of the Lord since we have been transferred to the kingdom of the Son he loves. And what a Son! Verses 15-20 describe Christ as supreme over Creation and the Church, having reconciled everything to God through the brutal cross. With an inheritance of hope secured by him, we walk by faith and love.

Gracious Father, who transferred us from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of the Son you love, thank you for the hope of glorious inheritance you grant by grace. Lord, help me to live a life worthy of such a saviour, a life of faith and love, pleasing to you, for your glory, and to the very great blessing of others.

Colossians 2 – Living in Christ

How can we become more godly and spiritual than we are today? How do we make Christian progress? For some, and certainly for those at Colossae, the answer lies in stricter and stricter lifestyle. Paul points out that that won't curb sinful desire, only sinful action (v23). Maturity and godliness come through continuing to live in Christ, rooted and built up in him (v7) and nourished by him (v19). He is the fulness of God and you are filled by him. The record of your sin has been nailed to the cross – you don't have to try to atone for your own sin. So your motivation for growth is Christ himself, living for him, in him, with thankfulness.

Living Lord Jesus, Son of God, fulness filling me, thank you for the completeness of my salvation. Thank you that my life and hope are grounded in your life and not in any sense of duty or law-keeping for me. In you, I am free to live as you please, and as you reorient my desires and pleasures towards godliness. Thank you, Lord.

Colossians 3 – Things Above

Our earthly conduct should be governed by our union with Christ summed up in this remarkable phrase: “Your life is hidden with Christ in God.” That is who, what, and where you are. Christian ethics are not a set of do’s and don’ts but rather a shedding of the old earthly nature and a growing conforming to our heavenly one. But notice that Paul uses active language: You have to be deliberate. Put sin to death and put on love, forgiveness, and other facets of Christ’s own character. And we do these things together, illustrated by our gathered singing as we literally breathe in and out as one body all together.

Lord Christ, with whom my life is hidden in God, it is a staggering privilege to contemplate my life already above with you. Help me to live that heavenly life now. Help me to recognise and fight temptations, to put sin to death, and to put on righteousness in my whole person.

Colossians 4 – Wrestling in Prayer

While we set our thoughts on things above, we then also live out our godliness at home and at work. It’s easy for the things we see with our eyes to dominate our minds, so Paul exhorts us to devote ourselves to prayer, whether planned or spontaneous, individual or gathered. Pray for gospel opportunities for ourselves and others and then live out your faith wisely among unbelieving people. Epaphras is an example of someone who “wrestles” in prayer for the maturity of other Christians. Wrestling is close, hand-to-hand, sweaty combat – hardly a comfortable armchair experience. We barely know what devotion to prayer really is.

Gracious God, you call us to prayer, and you enable us to come into your presence. My words, my voice – heard in heaven! Forgive my negligence in prayer. I neglect the gift of being with you. I neglect praying for opportunity to speak for you. I neglect praying for your people to grow in maturity. Lord, have mercy. Teach me to pray.

1 Thessalonians 1 – Ringing Out

We see in Acts 17 that Paul only spent three weeks or so in Thessalonica before being run out of town. So when he speaks of persecution, they know what that means. Yet this fledgling church has quickly become known across Greece for their faith, love and hope worked out in practical works and endurance. It can be tempting to wait for easier days for our evangelism, but not so for the Thessalonians. Having turned to God, “the word of the Lord rang out” from them all over the country. No wonder Paul gives thanks to God for them – they are God’s miracle and are being used by him to grow his kingdom.

Living God, the situation in Thessalonica seemed so unpromising and yet you caused the church to flourish in a way that brings glory to you alone. I pray that your word would ring out from me and our church – both for the glory and praise of your name and for the sake of so many who are hurt and confused at the world about us.

1 Thessalonians 2 – Dear to Us

There are a few themes to notice in this chapter. It begins and ends noting opposition and persecution which actually binds and identifies gospel churches together. Another theme is how the gospel is from God, which means (a) it may be spoken without gimmick or embellishment, and (b) when it is received the glory is God’s alone, both for hearer and messenger. Perhaps the dominant theme is Paul’s own love for the church. They aren’t some kind of “gospel project.” Paul and his colleagues shared both the gospel of God and their own lives with the church, tenderly caring and nurturing like loving parents. Do we share our lives with our church?

Lord God, we do often think of evangelism in broad terms, not seeing people as individuals as you see them. Help me to truly love and care for the unbelieving people in my life, and to exhibit the same caring, sharing tenderness among your people.

1 Thessalonians 3 – Faith and Love

For Paul's own safety, he had fled Thessalonica and gone to Athens (Acts 17). Would the young church survive persecution? Paul sent Timothy back to find out and the report he brought back thrilled Paul. It was news of their "faith and love" grounded in hope in Christ (1 Thessalonians 1:3). Paul's earnest desire is to see them again to grow their faith (v10) and love (v12). We can't get more *saving* faith, but as troubles come in life we do grow in day-to-day faith, trusting in the Lord more and more for help and strength. And we can all clearly grow in love for one another. Such growth leads us to Christ (as we can't grow apart from him) and to increasing holiness of life.

Lord Jesus, I wonder if a report of our church – or of me – would tell of "faith and love" or have some other emphasis. Help us to be what you would have us be. Help me to grow in faith and love, in both comfortable days and difficult ones. May the Spirit be pleased to work increasing holiness of life in me, to your pleasure and will.

1 Thessalonians 4 – Holiness, Love, Hope

People often wonder what God's will is for their lives. At the least, it is given in verse 3: Sanctification (holiness). God has sanctified us by the Spirit's indwelling and our union with Christ, and get we are to grow in outward holiness every day. Add to this the compulsion to love one another in visible ways, we see the Christian life to be one of active progress. Some in Thessalonica seem to have been utterly unprepared to see Christians die since Christ is alive and we live in him. Paul acknowledges that we do grieve, but we do so with hope that those who die in Christ will return and we will all live together in him. *That* is encouraging.

Living Lord Jesus, to live for you and in you is true life. Help me, Lord, to grow in holiness and love for your people. Help me to live in the light of your return and to see everything – joys and griefs – in that eternal context, and to encourage others with that hope too.

1 Thessalonians 5 – Encourage One Another

It's interesting that such a young church would have Christ's return as a major theme – a demonstration, perhaps, of the emphasis of Paul's preaching and of how struck they were at Christ's resurrection as the first fruits from among the dead. Paul points out to us how Christ's return affects us now: Since we will be with Christ on that day we are to live as children of light today. He goes on to describe how we do that together: Speaking warnings, comfort and encouragement as people need it; living in patience and forgiveness with everyone; clinging to God in prayer and thanksgiving; staying away from every kind of evil. In this way, we prepare for Christ's return.

Living Saviour, you have told us not to concern ourselves with dates and times and the good wisdom of this becomes ever clearer as the years pass. Help me, then, to live a life of love and contented prayerfulness, clinging to you and hating sin, ever ready to face you with a blameless heart and life.

2 Thessalonians 1 – Worthy of His Calling

Just as Paul noted in 1 Thessalonians, the church's faith and love continue to grow and flourish. And yet, so does their experience of being afflicted in persecution. Paul puts that in a surprising context: God's righteous judgment. When Christ returns, those who persecuted God's people and opposed the gospel of Christ will be self-evident and justly afflicted with punishment. Meanwhile, Christians will marvel and thrill at Christ, even being glorified with him. All this prompts prayer – not to avoid persecution, but rather to glorify Christ now by living a life worthy of him.

Lord Jesus, your return will be breathtaking. I can't wait to be among those who marvel at your glory. Forgive my tendency to compromise and avoid standing out for you. Give me boldness and grace, growing in love and faith, walking worthy of you, bringing you glory even if it costs me in the here and now.

2 Thessalonians 2 – Man of Lawlessness

In Chapter 1, Paul gave hope that persecution of Christians would end and be judged at Christ's return. How awful, then, that someone should tell the church that Jesus had already returned! No, says Paul, you'll know when he does. First, the "man of lawlessness" will be released and dupe many, even claiming divinity himself. But who is he? We simply don't know so speculation is of little value. But it's clear we'll recognise those times. Society will become ever more wicked and even the church will be largely compromised and spineless. All the more reason to pray and give thanks for true believers now, praying to Christ for hope, encouragement, and strength.

Lord Jesus, Peter wrote about how some of Paul's letters are hard to understand and surely the Spirit has wisely only revealed to us what we need to know today. Keep us close, Lord. May the Spirit of truth convict and clarify. Keep me and our church in good hope, warm encouragement, and bold effective strength – to your honour and glory.

2 Thessalonians 3 – Discipline

No-one is so competent or spiritual in themselves that they don't need prayer and even Paul asked for it. He knew that strength and perseverance are of the Lord. He also wrote about some people who were idle busybodies in the church. With no welfare system, idlers could only survive by exploiting the generosity and love of others. With time on their hands, they were disruptive in the church – the very opposite of peaceful or loving. That is so un-Christian, Paul commands church discipline; those people are to be removed from membership. As ever, repentance and restoration is the goal. The church must honour the Lord of Peace.

Lord Jesus, in our culture of pleasure and self-centred happiness, we often choose ease over work even for you. Help me to balance rest and work in a way that is wise yet responsive to the urgency of the gospel task. May your word spread rapidly, faster than fire or gossip.

1 Timothy 1 – To Save Sinners

Timothy was, it seems, the pastor at Ephesus. Paul wrote to him about having the right focus in ministry and how to establish a gospel-centred church. There are too many people who want to be church leaders, pastors and vicars who don't focus on the gospel of Christ but get drawn into side-topics and hobbyhorses, while still others mis-handle the law of God. But the law is for lawbreakers (v9) to restrain evil and apply punishment. Better, the law points out that we are sinners. Better still, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and if he could save Paul then he could save anyone. This good news in Christ is to be the bedrock and proclamation of any true church.

Lord Christ, your revealed goodness and holiness as shown in your law demonstrates the sin in my heart and mind and desires. The Spirit graciously opened my eyes to see you and the forgiveness of sin you bring. Help me, Lord, not to get drawn into unhelpful side issues but only to point people to you with a testimony that honours you alone.

1 Timothy 2 – What God Wants

It's easy for us to get drawn towards the modern controversy over the roles of men and women in the church in this chapter. Yet there are two calls to prayer for us to heed (v1 & v8) and the focus of those prayers is the gospel proclamation. Pray for governments around the world, for regimes that will permit open proclamation of Christ without fear of imprisonment, torture, or execution. God has given just one mediator for all humanity so all humanity must have opportunity to hear. This is because God our Saviour wants everyone to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

God our Saviour, thank you for sending Christ Jesus into the world to save sinners. I pray for freedom of speech and religion here and abroad, especially in those countries most closed to the gospel. Strengthen and encourage your people in such places, and give increased success to organisations looking to do mission works there.

1 Timothy 3 – Pillar and Foundation

The New Testament describes two roles in church leadership: Overseers (also known as elders) and deacons. An overseer has authority and accountability for the welfare of those they lead. A deacon is, literally, a “servant.” For each, Paul lists requirements that are mostly character traits rather than skills, though both are required to have organisational and leadership ability. Overseers (elders, pastors) are also to be able to teach. All this matters because the church matters. We have a crucial role in the world. As Nelson’s column displays Nelson to the world, the church is the pillar displaying God’s truth: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; God wants everyone to be saved.

Lord Jesus, please bless, strengthen, encourage and protect the leaders in our church. Help the whole church to listen and do what is taught from your truth. Keep us as a sure, godly, worthy pillar and foundation, displaying your gospel, so that many would be saved.

1 Timothy 4 – Train Yourself in Godliness

When is a church not a church? When it is characterised by rules and abstinence rather than faith, hope, love and the nourishment of Christ revealed in his word. Timothy, as pastor, is to train *himself* in godliness first, feeding daily on the word of God in communion with Christ. He tastes heaven himself as he does so. In that, he becomes an authentic teacher and a living example for the whole church to follow, since we are all to grow in holiness, faith, love, and purity. More, we are all to grow daily closer to Jesus, reflecting and meditating on him, trusting and knowing him. That has promise both for this life and the next.

Lord Jesus, thank you for this written word that nourishes me as it reveals you. Keep everyone in our church in true communion with yourself, and keep us from empty legalism as a dead parody of living holiness. Gracious God, I pray for the Spirit’s help to train regularly for godliness, to your glory and honour.

1 Timothy 5 – Devoted and Supported

Two groups of people who are dependent on the church for income are mentioned: Widows and employed teachers/elders. In each case, the church is to be generous but wise, careful not to be taken advantage of. Widows (and widowers) can struggle for money in our society and are even more likely to be starved of company. The church can certainly give time, love, and community. Church leaders have the double honour of both a decent pay and a recognition of their accountability to the Lord. Spurious accusations are to be dismissed, but true failings publicly dealt with for the Lord's own honour.

Lord Jesus, your hands-on care for your church is evident in so many ways in Scripture and I'm encouraged by it. Lord, guard your church leaders and keep them close to you. And help me to take my place as a loving, fellowship-minded member of your body, the church, especially for those who are weak, lonely, or vulnerable in any way.

1 Timothy 6 – Godliness

It is no more sinful to be rich than to be poor, but riches can be a snare to us. We tend to store it up and draw security from it if we can. We convince ourselves we need it for our phones, petrol, internet, or TV. We find it hard to imagine giving such things up because we're more locked in to this material world than we think. How can we truly grasp that godliness with contentment is great gain? By wrestling every day against ungodly desire, by pursuing godliness, and by taking hold of eternal life. How? By keeping hold of Christ. And then we will be generous; it's good to do good.

Generous God, you have provided me with riches in excess of anything many people in this world can dream of. Thank you. Such things are nothing still compared with the glories of heaven with you. Thank you! Help me to take hold of that eternal life in Christ and to live today with a truly eternal perspective. Lord God, I need help with this.

2 Timothy 1 – Spirit of Power

It seems that young Pastor Tim is somewhat lacking in boldness for the gospel – something we can all relate to. Paul *could* simply demand that Timothy step up and coerce him into action, but he chooses to be much more encouraging. Firstly, we're reminded that we don't do things alone. God has given us a Spirit of power, love, and sound judgement. Second, our work for God is in the context of his eternal plan of salvation in Christ, so our actions are in God's plan both for us and for the people we speak to. So we entrust to God the very things he commands us to do. He will guard his purposes in us. So we hold on to him and to his promises.

God our Saviour, your eternal plan of salvation for sinners like me is so vast and complex you are glorified in every aspect of it. Thank you that by grace you have included me in it. Help me to see that the things you would have me do today are really your plans being worked out, and may I please know the power of the Holy Spirit in me to do them.

2 Timothy 2 – Be Useful

Timothy is encouraged to be strong in the grace that is in Christ and to train other leaders up. That takes time and patience, diligence and skill, with eyes firmly fixed on the long-term goal. Hence the examples of a soldier, athlete, and farmer. More, it's our union with Christ that enables us all to achieve things for God; we live with him and by him. So we're to make every effort to be ready for whatever work the Lord calls us and enables us to do. And readiness is more about godliness of character and manner than ability or skill. How wonderful to be useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.

Faithful God, you have your complex and wonderful plans and purposes and it's amazing that you accomplish them through people like me. Help me to be a useful instrument in your service as I go about my daily life, expressing godliness and holiness in everything.

2 Timothy 3 – Go Equipped

The opening verses describe a world we recognise immediately. That's the environment into which both Timothy and us are to speak the gospel of Christ. But no amount of argumentation or logic will change what people *love*: Self, money, pleasure, etc. Worse, there are counterfeit religions leading people away from the truth in Christ (ancient tradition had Jannes and Jambres as the names of Pharaoh's magicians in Exodus). A godly life runs counter to all this and will be opposed to some degree. Do we go unequipped? No, we have the word of the living God. Imbued with his power applied by the Holy Spirit, his words change people.

Speaking God, thank you that you have spoken to us and caused your words of power to be written down and made available in English. Thank you that your words, spiritually applied, are changing my desires towards godliness. Help me to use the equipment of your word to speak truth to others.

2 Timothy 4 – Preach the Word

The solemnity with which Paul charges Timothy to “preach the word” could hardly be stronger. Paul is soon to die, and his godly example will be lost, but the word of God remains – fixed, strong, and powerful. Whatever fads and cultural trends come and go, the word is to be preached. We all need teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness from God's own words so it's necessary for us all to hear the word too. Notice two things: (a) Paul worked with others in ministry and depended on them as we all must; (b) even in old age he wanted his scrolls and parchments as Christ is revealed to us in the word.

Glorious God, your glory in Christ is revealed to us in your word, as are both my utter sinfulness before you and your gracious invitation to salvation and redemption. Help me, then, to make the most of your word as it's preached on Sundays and as I read it day by day. Help me to see more of your glory in Christ.

Titus 1 – God’s Household

Titus was to appoint elders in every town in Crete. The character of an elder is paramount since he is “an overseer of God’s household” and therefore accountable to God for the protection and discipleship of those in his care. The character of an overseer/elder must reflect the character of God, leading the whole church into righteousness and truth. More, his own character must be seen in his own good works in full integrity of faith and action, thereby also leading the church into good works. Sadly, there are some who claim to know God but then deny him by their works.

Lord Jesus, your church is precious to you. You will beautify her in holiness and the sanctifying work of the Spirit is already powerfully under way in us. Gracious Lord, give to us church leaders who are true to you and your word, filled with the Spirit and faith, and abounding in good works. Grow us all in faith, love, and good works that point others to you.

Titus 2 – Eager to Do Good Works

Titus is to teach everyone according to age, gender, and ability, recognising that we’re all different. And again, the teaching is much about character: Self-control, respect, love, submission, kindness. But there is a clear goal in mind – that we be eager to do good works. Titus himself is to be an example for others to follow. But what motivates us to be “eager” to do good works, rather than simply obliged? Two things: Jesus has redeemed us from sinful desires and lusts so that we can deny them, and we strain forward to the holiness of life that will be ours on his return.

O God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, you have redeemed us from sin and evil desires so that we can live lives pleasing to you. Lord, I’m nowhere near being the finished article. Help me to grow in you, in godly character, and in an eagerness to do good works in anticipation of your return.

Titus 3 – The Kindness of God our Saviour

We're reminded that we are not what we once were. In union with Christ, our desires have changed from wickedness to godliness. This *must* be displayed in how we live. Godliness in good works is a natural overflow of God's own goodness and kindness to us. Verses 4-7 hold a trustworthy saying and a succinct description of the gospel of Christ – rooted in the kindness of God towards us and worked out in lavish, abundant blessing and hope. Having experienced God's goodness, it's natural for us who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit to devote ourselves to good works in Jesus' name. We thus proclaim him to the world and in this we hope for fruit (v14).

God of kindness and abundant goodness and generosity, thank you for what you have done for me in Christ and for the lavish treasure of the Holy Spirit in me. Help me today to reflect your kindness in good works to others. Help me to plan good works in my life as I seek to live for you.

Philemon – Consistent Christianity

Some of the people mentioned in this letter are also mentioned in Colossians. Onesimus probably delivered both letters from Paul at the same time – one to the church and one to Philemon. It seems Onesimus had been Philemon's slave, but he'd been useless (v11) and then stolen and run away (v18). As we are forgiven by God, so we are to forgive. That means absorbing the cost of the offence and working for complete reconciliation. It's easy to put on a face to convince others, but it can be hard to forgive in private. Paul tells Philemon to "welcome" Onesimus as if he were Paul – warm and hospitable, loving and friendly. Our faith in private is to be as real as it seems to be in public.

Faithful God, who never leaves me nor forsakes me, and who knows my heart and mind better than I know myself, you are gracious indeed to forgive me so completely and to welcome me as a much-loved child. Help me to forgive as I have been forgiven and to be yours in private as I'm perceived to be in public.

Hebrews 1 – The Son of God

Some people brought up as Jews had become Christians and were being persecuted and tempted to go back to Judaism. Hebrews is a letter showing how all the Old Testament was just a shadow of things to come; Christ is the substance. He is the Son of God, higher than all the angels by nature. God is eternal, all-knowing, all-powerful, independent of his Creation, and much else besides. The son is the “exact expression of his nature” and must, therefore, be all these things too – equal in divinity with the Father. For any Christian, tired of their pilgrimage through life, suffering persecution, tempted to give up, we look to the Son of God and say, “I know him.”

Holy Son of God, you are declared to be glorious in your divinity, the radiance of the Father. Eternally independent of your Creation, yet you care for us enough to enter into it to save us when we so pathetically rebel against you. Forgive my small thoughts of you. Thank you for saving me that I might know you.

Hebrews 2 – Many Brothers and Sisters

Since the Son of God himself has come to save us, confirmed by God the Father in acts of the Holy Spirit, it would be folly to ignore or withdraw from such a great salvation. In case that seems too remote for us, the writer reminds us that this great Son made himself lower than the angels, even to becoming human, in order to save human beings. Only as human can he truly represent us to God, and only as a human could he take the punishment our sins deserve: death. This leaves us with no fear of death. But more, as a human Jesus is now not ashamed to call *us* brothers and sisters.

Son of God, Son of Man, your incarnation into humanity is too amazing for me to fully grasp yet I still thrill in it. You gave yourself to death to take my punishment and now represent me in glory. Forgive me for having such low thoughts and help me to live today in the light of the eternity you bring.

Hebrews 3 – Watch Out

It's easy to imagine God angry with unbelieving people and nations, but the warning here is rooted in God's anger at his own people. He had redeemed Israel from Egypt and brought them into covenant relationship with promised blessing for obedience, yet they grumbled and complained against him. In his righteous anger, God withheld his grace though still fed and cared for them in the desert. We are to watch out, lest our unbelief leads us to look backwards, to grumble, to complain against God as if he didn't care or control. In the end, the remedy is to encourage one another daily so that we might all joyfully participate in Christ.

Gracious Father, thank you for including me in the household of your people through Jesus, your glorious Son. Living God, help me to be honest in prayer, both in thanksgiving and lament, and yet faithful too – never doubting your goodness or wisdom or love. And help me to be an encourager to others who may be struggling in their faith.

Hebrews 4 – Promised Rest

Having been rescued from Egypt and brought into a precious covenant relationship with God, the people of Israel lacked faith to enter the Promised Land and so disobeyed God's command. They neither entered Canaan *nor* God's rest (and even when they did enter Canaan 40 years later they still did not enter his rest (v8)). God's rest is his own Sabbath rest of Genesis 2 – a rest from the work of Creation. How do we enter that rest? By faith in God (v2-3) in obedience to his gospel (v11). His word alone defines obedience (v11-12), and also reveals the promise of that rest in Christ (v1).

Gracious God, so many hear your living gospel yet fall short of obeying your call to repentance and faith. Thank you for the Spirit's work in me, showing me both my sin and your salvation revealed in your word. Thank you even for the faith to believe. Thank you for the hope of rest with you – rest from toil, pain, grief, and curse.

Hebrews 5 – High Priest

The Old Testament high priest was a remarkable and unique role. Once per year, on the Day of Atonement, he would enter the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle (later, in the temple), right into the presence of God over the Ark of the Covenant. His role was to represent the entire community before God. He'd offer sacrifices for his own sin and the sin of the nation. Only a human can represent humanity. So Jesus, the eternal Son of God, became human and is now our high priest representing us before God. He understands our griefs, pains, and temptations because he is human. He will help you in time of need.

Lord Jesus, great and holy high priest who represents me and all your people before the Father's throne, thank you for your humanity. Thank you for your gentleness and sympathy. Thank you for your promise of grace and help in time of need. You are greatly to be praised for your gracious incarnation, exalting humanity itself in your own body.

Hebrews 6 – The Soul's Anchor

It's a sad reality that some people who seem to burn so brightly for Christ for a while peter out and drift away from the faith altogether. Having tasted the goodness of the gospel, they walk away. We all stumble and have seasons of weakness, but some actively walk away. This offence to Christ is great and there can be no hope. The writer urges you to persevere, bearing fruit that displays active faith providing you with great assurance. Yet the basis of your assurance is always grounded in the promises of God, not in your works. And the promise is salvation to all who are in Christ – who is already our firm anchor in heaven itself.

Living God, if my salvation depended on me then I'm sure I'd lose it. Thank you that I rest in your promises alone. Help me to live in a life of such godliness that I will know the certainty of your promises. Help me to live in constant awareness of my union with Christ, knowing that his is the life lived in me.

Hebrews 7 – King and Priest Forever

Having mentioned Melchizedek a few times the writer now spells out why he is such an important figure. In Genesis 14, Abraham was blessed by Melchizedek who was king of Salem (Jerusalem) and also the priest. That combination of king and priest is unique in the Old Testament, and he was clearly greater than Abraham. The only other reference to him is in Psalm 110 where God's Son is promised an eternal priesthood in the order of Melchizedek, meaning eternally king and priest. Jesus, the Son of God, is therefore superior to Abraham, being king and priest forever, exalted above the heavens, eternally unchanging, saviour of all. His own sacrifice has accomplished full salvation for us.

Lord Jesus, you are the King of Righteousness, King of Peace, our great high priest exalted above the heavens. Your sacrifice has atoned for all my sin, and in your infinite glory you still hear my prayers, still bring me grace and help, still care for me. Gracious Lord, help me to honour you with my life through a sacrifice of praise.

Hebrews 8 – A New Covenant

The Old Testament system of sacrifice, priesthood and tabernacle were a kind of shadow or scale model of the heavenly reality. Since Christ is the high priest in that heavenly reality, he has made the old covenant obsolete and ushered in the new covenant promised through the prophet Jeremiah. The old covenant was for national Israel where only some had faith, and fellowship with God was mediated through priests. The law was external and imposed. Now, in Christ, all who have faith are under the new covenant, all knowing the Lord and seeking to obey him with hearts renewed by union with Christ.

Gracious and intimate God, though you are incomparable in unimaginable transcendence, yet you call me to know you. Thank you for the Spirit's sanctifying work, changing my desires so that I long to live a life worthy of you, pleasing to you. Help me, then, to live life as a new covenant believer in Christ.

Hebrews 9 – Cleansed Consciences

The writer reminds us of the how the Old Testament tabernacle was set up and how only the high priest entered God's presence in the Most Holy Place once per year. Sacrifices enabled physical cleansing but could never cleanse a person's conscience. But Christ has entered heaven itself to be our great high priest forever. The sacrifice was himself, shedding his blood and giving his life to atone for our sins. As his sinless conscience was pure, so he is a whole-person atonement and substitute for us. His blood has secured and sealed the new covenant once for all, and all who trust in him will one day enter that heavenly presence with him. The Old Testament system helps us anticipate Jesus.

Lord Jesus, Great High Priest, you who have entered heaven and opened a way for your people, thank you that my salvation is so complete. Thank you that this covenant you bring us is secured with your blood. There is nothing for me to do but praise and thanksgiving, along with eager expectation of what is to come.

Hebrews 10 – Encourage Each Other

The writer summarises what he has said so far – that Jesus is a better sacrifice and a better sacrifice of a better covenant than the old one. How does the writer apply it to us? By calling us to perseverance and endurance, and to continuing to gather together to encourage each other and to provoke one another to love and good works. Christ is the new open door by which we enter God's presence; we are eternally forgiven and cleansed by him. We will all feel discouragement at times, or even despair. Anyone can be tempted to give up the race. But we gather to encourage one another to persevere to the end.

Holy Father, by your immeasurable grace you call me into your presence in prayer. Christ, your Son, is my advocate and high priest. The Spirit testifies within me, mediating Christ to me even as I am in you. What an extraordinary and supernatural thing prayer is! Help me to persevere in Christ, and to provoke your church into love and good works.

Hebrews 11 – By Faith

Hebrews was written to Christians under persecution. They were tempted to go back to their old Jewish ways to avoid persecution. But where guilt, remorse and regret look backwards, faith and hope and love look forwards. Hebrews 11 is sometimes called the “hall of faith” as it lists heroes of the Old Testament who took a step of faith and persevered for God. It’s an encouraging list for us. First, notice that the people listed were far from perfect and often full of doubt and uncertainty. Second, note that some were blessed in this life while others suffered. Third, they all did what they did by faith – and that is approved by God not least as it brings him great glory and honour.

Heavenly Father, I don't know everything you have planned for me in this life. I do know that I'm weak and often slow to act by faith. Help me to look forward to what is promised in Christ, seeing my life, work, possessions, gifts, time and energy in an eternal context. Help me to live by faith daily, stepping up and out for you.

Hebrews 12 – Run With Perseverance

All those Old Testament “heroes” of faith (Heb 11) were really looking forward and acting by faith in God. We are to be like them, running with endurance, eyes fixed on Jesus (our prize), unhindered by sin. There may be struggling and suffering – a sign of fatherly discipline. Such disciplining isn't punishment; it's training. An athlete disciplines his body to run a race, and our own suffering can be regarded as training as we learn to keep focussed on Jesus, living at peace with everyone, hopeful and joyful at being in God's kingdom, anticipating a glorious future with him. Faith, hope, and love are forward-oriented – and Christ is the prize!

Loving Father, by grace you have called me to know you in Christ. The road seems long and tiring at times, but you continue to be gracious to me every day. I pray for the Holy Spirit to keep me instinctively coming to you in Christ in every moment of need, and to help me keep today's struggles in true eternal perspective as I continue to approach you.

Hebrews 13 – Practical Perseverance

With all the rich teaching spelt out, the writer ends his letter with a chapter on practical perseverance. If faith looks forward, it is to do so every day in real life. Firstly, that means perseverance in holiness of life and love to others. Secondly, we are to persevere in truth in the unchanging Christ. Thirdly, persevere in Christ himself, putting him first in everything even if it leads to being disgraced or cut off by others. Lastly, persevere in praise and witness, expressed through doing good (as God defines goodness) and praying for others. The blessing in v20-21 reminds us that it's Christ himself who enables us to persevere.

Lord Jesus, you are the great prize of my life, the goal towards which I strain. This life requires perseverance, Lord, and I thank you that you know it. Help me today and every day to persevere in holiness, truth, and you, in praise and witness, in love to others in your name, pleasing to you and pointing others to hope in you.

James 1 – The Crown of Life

James is a “general letter” in that it's not to a specific church but to all Christians everywhere. He begins by saying that we should consider trials to be joy because they produce endurance. Does that sound hard? Yes, it is. But we can pray for wisdom at such times and the Lord will give it. And all who endure to the end receive the crown of life from God himself. Bad things happen and hard days come, but God will never tempt you to sin (as that would be a sin itself) and he does not want you to sin, but rather to persevere in him. God is good, and everything that is good is from him. The rest of the letter is about living such faithful perseverance out in daily life.

Good and gracious God, Father of all Creation and all that is good, thank you for your hand on my life. Give me that promised wisdom to see all the challenges in my life well, and help me to persevere in you in the big days, the mundane times, and in everything I face today.

James 2 – Faith Works in Love

The end of James 1 emphasises the need to put Bible truth into practice and v26-27 has the three themes James will unpack in the rest of the letter: Mind your tongue, love the vulnerable, pursue holiness. So James 2 speaks against showing favouritism and disadvantaging the poor. We need reminding of it as it reflects how we dress, speak, and welcome people at church. Loving your neighbour is a theologically rich and highly practical command. If you have faith in Christ then you are alive in him and he in you, so it's inconceivable that you completely fail to do good works. If you're saved by faith, the evidence will be seen in good works.

Lord Jesus, I thank you for your gift of faith and the ongoing sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. I can see that I am not what I once was or what I would have become without you. Forgive my ongoing lack of love, and my inherent biases and favouritism – even in charity and evangelism. Help me to love as you love, that others would experience your love through me.

James 3 – The Tongue is a Fire

Words are powerful. God even created everything by his voice, saying “let there be light” etc. Politics thrives on words, as do business and teaching. But that very power is its danger. All of us say things we shouldn't and don't always appreciate the forest fires we start. In our day, such issues extend to messenger apps, email, and social media. “Not many should become teachers,” says James, yet everyone is so free with advice! But in Chapter 2 James said that faith produces good works, and good words are clearly part of that. Those saved by faith should speak words of blessing, not curse.

Holy God and Father, your word is truth. You have had these things written for our good. Forgive me my unkind words, both spoken and typed. Help me to be wise, kind, thoughtful, and a blessing to others when I communicate. Help me to speak up when I ought, and to hold my tongue when I should. In short, make me like Jesus.

James 4 – Wisdom and Peace

Chapter 3 ended by reminding us that wisdom from heaven is godly and full of peace. So if Christians are at war with one another, is that wisdom from above? James says it's adultery, flirting with the world in pride instead of humility, giving in to temptation and the devil's schemes. All is not lost: Repent and draw near to God in prayer, in humility, in holiness of life – which is how we resist the devil. So we are to be very wary of speaking against believers; it's much better to build them up. Better, in fact, to have the Lord direct us every day in every way.

Lord Jesus, in whom are all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom, please give me that wisdom from above and a humility of heart. Forgive me when I have been unkind in word and action against your people; help me to keep close to you in peace with all your loved ones.

James 5 – Perseverance

The opening verses of James 5 are words of condemnation on unjust, ungracious employers. It's based on law such as Deuteronomy 24 which is designed to protect the poor; godliness has no favouritism. In the meantime, Christians who suffer under others are to persevere, knowing the Lord will put all things right and bring blessing. We are also to be diligent in prayer – in joy, in sorrow, in sickness, in love. In particular, we are to pray for one another. That is so much more constructive than finding fault and judging one another. Holiness of life is seen in James's letter to be very relationship oriented.

Gracious Father, it is a lovely and encouraging thing to read and be encouraged to pray for one another. Forgive me that my prayers for your people are so often brief and superficial when you yourself care so deeply about us. May my prayers be pleasing to you, by the help of the Holy Spirit working in me.

1 Peter 1 – Faith and Hope

By faith in Christ, we have been born again into a new family with God as our Father. In Christ we are now heirs of a glorious salvation of blessed holiness and joy. Our blessing is so great that the ancient prophets anticipated it and even angels long to glimpse it, but it has been revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. If that is our glorious inherited future of blessed holiness and joy, how should we live now? In holiness, joy, and a profound love for one another. We have been redeemed from our old way of life and we're to anticipate our future reality in how we live for Christ now.

Holy Father, the hope you have put in my heart by granting me faith in your Son is beyond my imagination, and beyond language to express it even if I could grasp it. I pray for the Holy Spirit to work in me a life of Christlike godliness and love, that my hope would be evident and expressed to everyone.

1 Peter 2 – Strangers and Exiles

Peter describes for us our collective identity, purpose and conduct as God's people. We are citizens of heaven, chosen by God to be a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's possession (as Israel were called to be in Exodus 19). Strangers and exiles here, our purpose is to remain and proclaim the greatness of God as light shines in darkness. Yet we are to do so winsomely, submitting to rulers and authorities where we are despite our heavenly citizenship. We do this by doing good to all, by obeying the law, and respecting authority structures in place (even if they are unfair). Christ himself is our ultimate example of this.

Great Shepherd and Overseer of my soul, I thank you for your grace and care to me. You have called me to a heavenly citizenship, to be an heir of glory. Help me to live here in a way that is pleasing to you and clearly proclaims you to those around me. When I find submission difficult, help me to recall your gracious example.

1 Peter 3 – Devoted to What is Good

As citizens of heaven, husbands and wives are to relate to one another in a consciously spiritual way – in holiness, love, and honour. This is especially true when one spouse is an unbeliever, in the hope that they might be persuaded by a godly life. In every aspect of life, Christians are to do good. With Christ as Lord, we serve him and do good – even when that ‘good’ clashes with the values of our society and culture. Then it becomes an opportunity to explain our hope in Christ (something we must always be ready to do). We do good even in suffering, united to Christ in death to the old life and raised to life in him, as pictured in baptism.

Good Father, our society calls good evil and evil good. Thank you for your grace to me that reveals to me my sin before you – as you alone are truly good and holy. Help me to live a life of goodness to the blessing of others and the honour of your name. Help me to know the daily reality of Christ as Lord in my heart.

1 Peter 4 – Bear the Name Christian

When we become Christian our desires and pleasures change. We no longer enjoy the old life which means we no longer fit with our old friends the way we once did. In our culture, this strains or splits friendships. Elsewhere in the world, it can end close family ties. But now our heart is for God, our gifts are to him and his people as we work to the glory of God. In all this, we might attract opposition and suffering simply for being a Christian. But there is no shame in standing before God and owning his name, so we’re prepared to suffer as we do his will, doing what he says is good.

Lord God, you called me out of sin into your kingdom of light, life, and righteousness. You gave me a new heart and new desires, serving you as I love and serve your people. Thank you that I stand before you in Christ, bearing his name. Help me to stand before people likewise with boldness for you.

1 Peter 5 – God Cares About You

There is a kind of leader who wants to issue commands for others to follow, to be seen to be in charge. But Peter has learnt servant-leadership from Christ himself. Leaders are to be worthy of being followed more than obeyed – and that actually takes humility. Unsurprisingly, we are to be humble before God which means, among other things, casting our anxieties on him – since to do so yields self-sufficiency and acknowledges God-dependency. God cares about you. You matter to him. He knows your situation even better than you do. And he will restore, strengthen, establish and support you.

God of all grace, thank you for your daily tender mercy and care. Thank you that you care for me whatever my circumstances. Teach me humility and dependence before you, to live a life of prayer and holiness even in the midst of normal week-to-week activity. May I even be an example for others to follow.

2 Peter 1 – Great and Precious Promises

We are promised something amazing here. Christ, by divine power, has given us all we need for life and godliness. As we take him up on his very great and precious promises we can share in the divine nature. That doesn't mean we become divine, but we become more like him in nature, growing in goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, brotherly affection and love – in short, becoming like Christ. That's good because to be like him is our destiny – so we are to be more like him every day. We trust these promises because they aren't Peter's, they're Christ's.

Lord Jesus, by grace you have destined me to be conformed to your likeness. I ask for the divine assistance of the Holy Spirit to supplement my faith with these characteristics in increasing measure, ever becoming more and more like you now for all to see.

2 Peter 2 – Pigs, Dogs, and False Teachers

Some false teachers are sincere but erroneous, while others are malicious and deliberately deceptive for gain. Either way, they are identified by two things: First, they will have abandoned both Christ and his gospel as described in the Scriptures. Second, unhooked from God's morality they will promote or endorse sinful desire and practice – even going as far as to say that they are good and holy ways of life. Here's the danger: Such people are wicked and bound for hell, and anyone who follows their teaching will follow them to hell too. The benchmark for us is not manmade; we turn to the God-given words of the Bible to see truth in Christ.

Lord God, there are many false teachers and false gospels in the world. No wonder Jesus described salvation as a narrow path. Father, I would never have found that path but for your work in me by the gracious movement of the Spirit in me leading me to Jesus. Teach me wonderful things from your word, that I might remain true to you by grace.

2 Peter 3 – A Thousand Years

For children, Summer holidays seem to go on for a very long time. As we get older, years seem to pass by more quickly. For the eternal God, who exists beyond time and space, days and years and millennia are all the same – all held in his perfect knowledge, goodness and wisdom. So when will Jesus return? At just the right time. He won't be early or late, whether it's today or 100,000 years from now. In the meantime, we have two things to do: First, live holy lives in anticipation of his reign, ready for his return. Second: Tell others about him, since it is the patience of God giving sinners time to repent that holds back his return.

Holy God, the day Christ visits the earth to make all things new will be astonishing and beyond my imagination, and yet by your grace it will be sheer delight for all your people. Help me, Lord, to live a life ready for that day, ever more like Christ in holy preparation. Help me also to make good gospel use of the time you have given me.

1 John 1 – God is Light

John wrote this letter to Christians to give us indicators of a true profession of saving faith, reassurance of eternal life. So he begins by reminding us that he is a witness of all that happened and teaches only what God has revealed in Christ. As you believe in this truth, you have fellowship with God and, therefore, with all God's people. Now God is light – perfect in holiness, knowledge, understanding. It is his nature to be so. Anyone in fellowship with him is to “walk in the light as he is in the light” – that is, by nature, not by external coercion. Of course we sin, (stepping into darkness), but as we're children of God that grieves us. But God is faithful and just to forgive us all as we confess to him.

Holy and righteous Father, it is naturally inconceivable that a finite, unrighteous, unworthy sinner like me could dream of fellowship with you. You are light itself, perfect in glorious holiness. What grace, then, for your Son to become like us, that we might have union with him, our very natures changed and sanctified. Thank you for such grace.

1 John 2 – Love One Another

John has a writing style that weaves his themes together into an overall picture. He writes to give you assurance (5:13) especially in the light of false teaching (2:26). All believers are to “walk in the light” – to live as Christ intends, in holiness. By necessity, they must love one another, or else they're not in the light. We must test ourselves closely. Also, though we love the world in wanting to see people saved (as John 3:16), we don't love its values or anti-God ideologies. John speaks of anti-Christ's (anything against or instead of Christ), but the Spirit testifies truth to us: The Triune God has saved us and called us into union with himself.

Loving Father, thank you for your eternal, abiding love to me. Lord Jesus, thank you for your love and your command to love. Holy Spirit, thank you for opening my eyes to the truth you have written, and giving me this eternal life in the Son and in the Father. Help me to walk in the light, and especially to love all your children without exception.

1 John 3 – Children of God

All Christians are children of God. In the light of his infinite holy splendour and our finite sinfulness, this is a breathtaking change and an incredible display of divine love. And we're not done changing: The horizon of our vision of Jesus is the Bible, but when we actually see him we will be made like him in sinless purity and holiness. Consequently, we are to grow to be more like him now. We are more than adopted, we're born again. God's seed is in us (v9) and we are truly his children. We might stumble and sin as we walk in the light, but we will not – cannot – walk in darkness again. A key evidence of this is how we love other Christians, our true brothers and sisters in Christ.

Heavenly Father, I have scarcely begun to plumb the depths of meaning in my being adopted by you, of being born again and brought truly into being your child. What joy it will be to see the radiance of your glory in your Son – and to be made like him in perfect purity of heart and mind. Help me today to love and live in a manner worthy of you.

1 John 4 – God is Love

There are plenty of people who consider themselves 'spiritual' but who deny Christ as the incarnate Son of God. But true worship of God can only be through Christ as mediator. John's statement that God is love is profound, but what evidence does he give? Just one thing: God sent Christ to save us (v9-10). His love flows out from him, to us, through us. When you love another Christian, they experience God's love through your love. If you fail to love another Christian, God's love is not complete in the world (v12)! Such love assures us of our salvation as experience God in love. But love isn't a vague thing: Love is other-person-oriented, often sacrificial, action.

Loving Father, your love for me is plainly seen but too great for me to grasp. I ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to love truly in word and action, that your people would experience your love through me, and that others would see your love and want it for themselves.

1 John 5 – Three Witnesses

John wants you to have assurance of eternal life in Christ (v13). He provided three tests for you to apply subjectively: Do you worship the right Lord (Jesus, incarnate Son of God)? Do you have right love (for other Christians, coming from God's love to you)? Are you living a right life (in the light, holy to God)? John also gives three objective testimonies for you to believe truly: The water, the blood, and the Spirit. From Jesus' baptism on, his works and teaching confirmed his identity as God's Son. By his blood on the cross (and resurrection), his sacrifice is seen as atonement for your sin. By the Spirit in all Christians, it is clear that Christ is at work in you. Accept no substitute Christ, no false gospel, no idols.

Compassionate God, you understand how we are so often doubtful even of you. Thank you for these reminders of objective witness to Jesus' effective work. Forgive me my sin, Lord, and help me to grow in confidence and assurance. Help me to see the idols I lean on for help and to live for you in love and obedience.

2 John – Truth and Love

The "lady" John is writing to was a church, not a person. It was normal for travelling preachers to stay with church members in their homes (Acts 16:15, Philemon 22). John is commending the church for the love they have shown in such ways (v4) and urging them to continue. But such preachers will inevitably be linked with the hospitable church, so it's crucial that they are true to the gospel. Any false teachers are not to be welcomed or supported. Churches are to love one another in true gospel partnership, but a church or preacher that goes beyond the gospel of Christ into speculation or falsehood is to be shunned.

God of love and truth, unless you revealed your purposes to us in your word we would be hopeless and lost. You know how few people are true to you so please forgive me for not loving my brothers and sisters in other churches who are true to you as I ought. Lord, grant me wisdom to shun falsehood, and grace to love all who are yours in Christ.

3 John – Co-workers With The Truth

Like 2 John, the context of this letter is that of love and hospitality being shown to travelling preachers and teachers. John warmly encourages Gaius to keep doing what he's doing. Sadly, Diotrephes, a leader in the church who loves power and authority in leadership, has not accepted John's representatives (thereby rejecting John and the true gospel). Worse, Diotrephes is leading others into lovelessness and falsehood too. Poor character in Christian leadership leads to imbalanced and false teaching which leads to unloving, un-Christlike churches. We need to focus *equally* on truth and love, having gospel truth *and* gospel culture worked out among us.

Lord Jesus, eternal Son, you humbled yourself to serve us. You accomplished our salvation and gave us teaching and example in serving others. Give both me and our church leaders a heart to serve you, to love others, and to cling to your gospel. Help me to imitate your humble, loving, servant heart.

Jude – Mercy With Fear

Jude's little letter borrows much from 2 Peter and is packed with Old Testament and other references. He is warning against false teachers who turn grace into sensuality and even deny Christ as Lord. Such people are like waterless clouds and fruitless trees: They promise much and deliver nothing. But, like their Old Testament counterparts, their judgment is already sealed. Jude's desire, however, is not that we celebrate their condemnation but rather that we contend for the faith (v3) and have mercy on those being led astray by false teaching – being careful not to be led astray ourselves (v20-23). By prayer, faith and love, stay close to Christ and he will keep you to the end.

God of truth, there is so much false teaching around today. It must grieve your heart. I ask for the Spirit's help to be true to your truth, strong in faith, rich in the love of Christ. Help me to be gracious and merciful to those going astray, wisely and winsomely pointing people to you.

Revelation 1 – “Don’t be Afraid”

Sometimes you see images or paintings that are really a huge mosaic of many tiny images building up into one greater picture. Revelation is such a picture painted with the palette of the Old Testament. That means the Old Testament is our key to understanding the book. The image we get is glorious: God is sovereignly in control of the universe with Christ as head of the church and executor of divine judgment. Christ walks among his churches in active involvement. Of all the alarming and terrifying images we see in Revelation, there is none so awe-inspiring as Christ himself. Yet, tender and gracious to his own, he says, “Don’t be afraid.”

Great God and Sovereign Lord of all, thank you for the spectacular and majestic revelation of yourself given to us in this book. Thank you for the assurance of your perfect governance. Thank you for Christ’s active work in his churches – in our church. Thank you for his tender touch, his sure hand, his gracious word: “Don’t be afraid.”

Revelation 2 – “I know”

Chapters 2 and 3 contain seven letters from Jesus to seven real local churches ordered geographically in a loop starting at Ephesus. Each letter begins with a description of Jesus taken from Chapter 1, and each one ends with promises expanded and clarified later in Revelation. The message to these churches is the heart of the whole book: You’re secure in Christ, so keep witnessing, expect Satanic opposition, and be ready for Christ’s return. Since Christ walks among his churches it’s no surprise that he knows the strengths and weaknesses of each one. He lovingly commends those faithful to him, and also lovingly calls wayward believers to repent and return to him.

Lord Jesus, we might well wonder what you would write to our church. It is humbling and reassuring to know you are involved and active among us. Give me strength to do my part in your church, to remain true to you – free from entangling sins, and witnessing to your goodness and love.

Revelation 3 – “I love”

Much is at stake in every local church. We display the power of the gospel through loving relationships and changed lives. In doing so, we proclaim that Christ is risen, ascended, and reigning. It is no surprise that Christ will then come to struggling, hurting churches (that remain true to him) with utter gentleness, tender care, and kind promises. To those churches that have lost their dependency on Christ (whether consciously or not), he has strong words of rebuke and warning. But this, too, is kindness: “As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be zealous and repent.” His honour matters to him, and so do you.

Living Saviour and Lord, apart from you I can do nothing. Please forgive my attempts at holiness, witness, patience, peace, and a thousand other things I have tried without coming to you first. Lord, forgive my sinful heart and my sins. Help me to know you, to find strength in you, to do your work only through union with you, to the honour of your name.

Revelation 4 – God is on His Throne

Revelation paints a vivid picture of the reality in which we live. Foundational to it all is this: God is on his throne. He rules sovereignly and indisputably. The image of the throne room is coloured with biblical allusions that speak of God’s holiness, perfection, covenant promises, and mercy. Heavenly beings representing all Creation bow before his splendour and majesty. To be in his presence is to be overwhelmed by his magnificence, consumed by the sight and sound of glory. And this is the God who hears you when you pray, who cares for you, loves you, and is so offended by your sin.

Holy God, how can I begin to ascribe honour and glory in any measure to match the greatness of your worthiness and glory? When those before you, in your presence, are so overwhelmed, who am I to add to their praise? Lord God, show me more of your glory, that I might know and praise you better – and to keep me from sin.

Revelation 5 – The Lion, the Lamb

The scroll in God's hand is his plan for humanity. Only Christ is worthy to open that scroll because it's his death, resurrection and ascension that opened the present era of time that we're in. In fact, Revelation 5 is an account of Christ's ascension and approach to the Ancient of Days foretold in Daniel 7. He is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the promised Messiah King to rule forever. And he is also the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world by his death, raised to live and reign forever. Christ is praised and worshipped and adored in heaven in no small part for what he has done for us, and his role as saviour remains a core part of his heavenly identity.

Lord Jesus Christ, you are worthy of all the honour and praise and worship of all Creation. You are worthy in your own nature, and only further glorified in what you have done for us, your people. Forgive me my inadequate vision of you and help me to join in the chorus of praise that delights in knowing you.

Revelation 6 – Open the Seals

As the first four seals are opened, the four horsemen ride out into the world bringing conquest, war, social injustice, and death. This is not some future event but rather a description of the way things will be for all humanity until Christ comes again. Turn on the news, look at a history book – the riders are out. The fifth seal brings an image of believers in heaven asking how long until the world is put right, and the sixth makes it clear that judgment on the world will indeed come. With a sinful world in such self-destruction and heading for judgment from God, it's only right that the chapter ends with the devastating question, "Who is able to stand?"

Living God, your word is a true picture of the world we live in. Terrible things happen to good and evil people alike. Thank you for the glimpse of those who are with you, in security, and help me to point people to you for hope and meaning in this broken world.

Revelation 7 – The Lamb, the Shepherd

Chapter 6 ended with the question, “Who can stand” in a desperate, broken world? Chapter 7 answers: All who are sealed by God will stand before him in praise and worship. Numbers in Revelation are symbolic. The 144,000 people sealed by God for protection from the world’s pain represents a huge but known number. God knows his own and none shall be missed out. Immediately then we get a vision of the same people but to John’s eyes it’s a vast multitude from all over the earth (lovely if we feel few in number!). Theirs is bliss and peace in the presence of the Lamb of God, who shepherds them to still waters forever.

Lord Jesus, great Good Shepherd, you who know your sheep by name and will count us all in, thank you that all my hope and peace and security is you. This world is so twisted and broken it would be easy to despair of it, but you alone bring peace and hope by the gift of faith and life. Give me strength and guidance every day, Lord, and help me stand.

Revelation 8 – The Trumpets

The seventh seal gives a brief picture of final judgment, of which we’ll read more later in Revelation. Then we come to the trumpets. Like a sporting moment replayed from different angles, the seven trumpets cover the same time as the seals – the time from Christ’s ascension to his return. They’re all simultaneous, not sequential. Why trumpets? They are like the trumpets blown for seven days round Jericho (in Joshua 6), giving time to hear the warning of judgment and to turn to God. The events associated with the first four trumpets are graphic and awful, and they also have allusions to the plagues on Egypt (Exodus 7-11). Much pain in the world is actually a heaven-sent call to turn to God.

Gracious and patient God, your perfect justice demands judgment. Thank you that in Christ you graciously provide a substitute, a sacrifice atoning for my sin. Lord, in a world of plague, war, disease and death, help me to point to Christ for hope and life, that many would praise your grace and patience, your goodness and righteousness.

Revelation 9 – They Did Not Repent

The imagery associated with the fifth and sixth trumpets is terrifying once again. All across the world, people will suffer and groan. But this pain is limited to those who have not been marked as belonging to God. Unbelievers are without hope or purpose, living short feeble lives, and that is a pain that Christians are free from. But notice that these woes are clearly sent from heaven to earth. Their purpose is to highlight the distinction between those who are Christ's and those who aren't in order to prompt unbelievers to turn in repentance and faith. Again, there are echoes of the plagues of Egypt, calling unbelievers to turn to God. But the outcome is heartbreaking: "They did not repent."

Living God, thank you for the mark of the Holy Spirit on me, the faith and hope you have given me that helps me see beyond the mess and pain of this world. Lord, have mercy and send your Spirit again that many would turn to you and cry out for life and hope, praising you. Help me to make my distinction clear, that others would see you in me and turn.

Revelation 10 – The Lion's Roar

A mighty angel is described in terms usually associated with God himself (e.g. wrapped in cloud, with a rainbow). His voice is like a roaring lion, like the Lion of the Tribe of Judah! He is the Angel of the Lord, representing God himself on the earth. John, like Ezekiel before him, is given a little scroll. It's open because it's to be read and made public to everyone in the world. We're still in the seven trumpets – general hardships sent into the world to call people to repent and turn to God. People refuse to repent, so the church is to take the little scroll of the gospel of Jesus Christ out to all nations. Sealed from the judgment on the earth, we are to proclaim hope as we repeat the Lion's roar.

Lord Jesus, your gospel is powerful to save and is our only hope. Forgive me, Lord, that the Lion's roar is not heard loudly or urgently through me. Thank you for the sweetness of the gospel to me and help me to make you known to all around me – in words, conduct, character, and prayer.

Revelation 11 – Witnesses

It's a basic Bible principle that truth is to be acknowledged by the testimony of at least two witnesses. The two here are figurative, reminding us of Elijah and Moses (v6), or the Law and the Prophets. The olive trees and lampstands are an image from Zechariah, how the Spirit pours from heaven to God's people and beyond. The 1,260 days (3½ years) is the time between Jesus' ascension and return (a figurative number). What does it all mean, in the context of the trumpets? The church is to witness to God, proclaiming his word, empowered by the Holy Spirit, even though most people will reject it and refuse to repent. There's no let-up – we're all to witness until Christ comes again.

Holy Spirit of God, you are to be thanked and praised for giving us the Bible. Thank you for moving me to see the truth of the Bible, for convicting me of sin, and for leading me to Jesus. Lord God, forgive me for my inadequate witness, and help me to take my part in your church as an effective witness for you. Help me to witness to someone today.

Revelation 12 – The Defeated Dragon

Chapters 12 and 13 prepare us to understand Satan's hatred of the church and his manipulation of the world we're in. The woman's sun, moon and stars point us to Israel's tribes (Genesis 37), and she represents the people of God on earth. She 'bore' the Son, the Messiah, and his ascension was victory over Satan, the Dragon. Satan spews lies to crush the woman (the church) but she is protected from him. Now, Satan roams the earth in vicious, vivid hatred of all God's people. The seals tell us we're safe in Christ, the trumpets that we're to witness. But all the while, Satan hates you.

Lord Jesus, you are to be praised for your glorious victory over Satan. Thank you for this glimpse of your people over time, and how we are central to your plan and precious to your heart. Lord, help me and protect me from spiritual harm. Keep me from the evil one and lead me in righteous paths.

Revelation 13 – The Two Beasts

The beast from the sea is a composite of animals that appear as symbols representing kingdoms in Daniel 7. The beast from the sea is simply an image of all kingdoms, powers, and authorities in the world. Under the Dragon's sway, the beast is very much opposed to God's people leading to persecution and ungodly laws all over the world today. The second beast promotes compelling lies and deceptions through the first beast. It represents ungodly ideologies, cultures, worldviews, values, and wicked systems of influence leading people astray. The Dragon and the beasts parody the Father, Son, and Spirit in their blasphemy. All this explains why abuse of power and lies upon lies characterise our society today.

Heavenly Father, the images given to us here are alarming and somewhat overwhelming. Thank you that this whole series of visions began with you on your throne. Thank you, Jesus, that you have already secured victory over the Dragon. Lord, help me to live for you in this world that is so opposed to you. Help me to grow in holiness and witness.

Revelation 14 – Engage

The Dragon and the beasts are the first three of a series of seven visions completed in Chapter 14. In vision 4 (v1-5), Christ's people are marked with the Father's name, secure and complete in Christ. Vision 5 (v6-13) is a gospel call to the world to worship him alone, warning that this world is doomed to judgment. Visions 6 (v14-16) and 7 (v17-20) picture a final harvest of humanity where God's people are gathered, and all the rest suffer God's wrath. Despite the terrifying, pervasive power of Satan over the world's authorities and values (the two beasts), we know that Christ has already won, the end is known, God's people are secure in Christ. So we don't shrink back from witnessing. We engage.

Lord Christ, your victory over Satan is supremely victorious and utterly conclusive. Yet that Dragon prowls and works against you and your people. Help me boldly to engage and make known your eternal gospel, pointing others to worship you alone. Lord, have mercy; redeem many.

Revelation 15 – Bowls of Wrath

Bad things happen in this fallen world (the seals); some bad things are calls to repentance (the trumpets) and some are the Dragon's delight (with his beasts). Some, however, are judgments from God, bowls of wrath poured out into the world. Seven angels, seven bowls, pouring out already on this world (all these images overlap in time). These terrors come from the heavenly temple, judgments from God from his own holy morality. People redefine right and wrong on earth, but God's judgment is based on his own perfect, unchanging goodness. And still, his people are secure in Christ and are to keep witnessing into a hostile, unbelieving, duped world.

Holy God, your judgments are right because you are holy, and true because you are just and all-knowing. They are also terrifying to contemplate, while all the more leads me to praise and thank you for Jesus who bore all my sin, taking the full bowl of wrath I had filled with my sin. Lord, I'm so sorry. Please forgive me.

Revelation 16 – The Bowls Pour Out

As with the earlier cycles of visions, all these bowls of wrath pour out on humanity throughout our age (from Christ's ascension until his return). Again we see the imagery of the plagues of Egypt, but these bowls are about judgement, not calls to repentance. The bowls pour on those who are not Christ's since we are secure in him. Christians, then, are to continue witnessing and persevering in Christ, clothed in his righteousness (v15) so that, on that day, while many are swept away in judgment, it should be plainly understood why we aren't. Be ready.

Righteous Father, your justice is unquestionable because you are holy, good, and all-knowing. This world of rebellion displays your bowls of wrath. And yet, Lord, please: Have mercy. Help me to persevere in witness and faith, that some may yet turn to you for grace.

Revelation 17 – The Great Prostitute

As we come towards the end of Revelation, God's people are called the bride of Christ, the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem. This vision of the prostitute Babylon in the wilderness is the exact opposite: A complex image of a complex, twisted world. The many-headed beast represents kingdoms and authorities over the people of the world (the beast over the sea, v15). The prostitute is the world's set of values, ideologies and philosophies, controlling and dividing, attracting and repulsing the nations, loved and hated and fought over continually. But the world's self-destructiveness is God-ordained (v17) so that as his people we must not be astonished or overwhelmed by what we see.

Sovereign God, if you were not the Supreme Lord that you are, seated in majesty and power over your Creation, it would be right to be overwhelmed and distraught at the state of this evil world. Thank you that you are governing with goodness and wisdom, and help me navigate this life under your guidance and love, ever looking ahead to Jesus.

Revelation 18 – Babylon the Great Has Fallen

Chapter 17 painted a vivid picture of the world we're in – Babylon, the city opposed to God. We are exiles here, citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, living for God in a God-hostile world. Chapter 18 speaks of the doom of Babylon and how the people of the world will mourn its loss (rather than praising God even then). The chapter is littered with Old Testament language that pronounced God's judgment on Babylon, Egypt, Tyre, and Sidon to make one important point: God has judged the nations before and their downfall was accomplished. This prophecy on the whole world is secure: God has said it will be so. Christians are in the world but are to 'come out' and be separate from it (v4).

Holy God, Lord and Righteous Judge of all, you have been gracious to me, opening my eyes to your judgment. Thank you that Jesus has taken the full cup of your wrath against me. I pray for the Spirit's help truly to live in this world but demonstrably not of it. Lord, keep me from evil.

Revelation 19 – King of kings

When this world of Babylon falls, we will see Jesus and worship him like never before. That he has a name we don't know (v12) indicates that we will know him like new. We will praise him as we praise God for righteously judging the world and remembering his own people. We will delight in him as he beautifies us to become his truly pure bride, finally wholly perfected in righteousness. And we will marvel at him as he rides out in battle to take on Satan and his beasts and followers, crushing them in an utterly one-sided battle that's over almost as it's begun. "Blessed are those invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb." More than we know.

Lord Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords, you are truly beyond my imagination or comprehension. Thank you for these images of days to come that whet my appetite for seeing you. Lord, as I despair at the evil in the world around, I thank you that you have given such assurance of justice. But Lord, in your anger, remember mercy and grow your church.

Revelation 20 – Satan's End

This particular thousand-year statement is unique to this chapter in the Bible yet has caused much division between believers. But however it is understood, this chapter has beautiful and encouraging truth. First, we know that one day Satan, death, and curse will be cast into a lake of fire forever. No more temptation; no more accusation. Second, despite all our shame at all our sin being known and recorded against us, as Christians the only book that matters is the book of life, where our names are recorded by faith in Christ. The written charges against us have been nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14).

Lord God, the victory over Satan is not in doubt. You will punish him and destroy temptation and death forever. Thank you that he cannot wipe my name from your book – that no-one can. Help me to live with that eternal security, giving peace of heart and mind as I face things day by day.

Revelation 21 – All Things New

The story arc of the whole Bible is how God will dwell on the earth with his people. Since the Fall in Genesis 3, the plan of redemption has been leading to Revelation 21. God's people throughout history will be brought together as one beautiful bride ready to be with Jesus forever. Worldly Babylon will be gone; the heavenly Jerusalem will be on earth – the city, the bride, the people of God as one. The layout of the city echoes the Israelite camp in the wilderness (Numbers 2) with God dwelling on the earth in their midst. But Revelation 21 is the fulfilment, when God will dwell among us and we will be holy and blessed. We will walk by the light of the radiance of his glory, God's face shining on us forever.

Tender Saviour, the prospect of you wiping tears from my eyes fills me with awesome wonder and rich anticipation. No more pain, death or grief. No more faith or hope even! We will see you and know you as never before. Lord, thank you that this is your work; help me to persevere through pain, death and grief with faith and hope every day. This day.

Revelation 22 – No More Curse

Verses 1 to 5 of Revelation 22 are the culmination of the Bible and of God's plan and purposes for humanity in this present age. Adam's fall undone: No more curse. No more temptation, sin, death, grief, toil, injustice, inequality, hate or tears. We will walk with God. We'll see his face shining on us and bask in his blessing forever. And because that's by his grace alone, we'll praise and thank and glorify him always. It's a good thing we don't know when this will happen. The possibility that it might be any time gives us strength and hope for every day, while also urging us on in daily witness and holiness. Come, Lord Jesus!

Lord Jesus, Saviour and Mediator, High Priest and King, you have given us a glimpse of your glory in these pages of your word, even as you are the radiance of the Father's glory. These pages are truly the horizon of our vision of you, so I thank you for the prospect that I will yet see your face and walk with you forever. Help me, O God, to keep going.

