

August 13 — Written for Keeps

READ

Jeremiah 31:15-40, 49:34-51:14

Jeremiah 31:33-34, *“I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”*

THINK

Sometimes we mull things over on the rotisserie of our brains until they're burnt to a crisp. Whether it's regret or self-loathing, we can get stuck in a time loop of negative thoughts that bring us down to the pit of despair. And it can be hard to reach out for God's forgiveness when we're down in the pit. But that's contrary to what God desires for us. He wants to infiltrate our lives with Scripture, His Living Word, and pour out His love upon us. He wants us to remember His words that heal our souls and nourish the Spirit within us.

But there's more! If we spend time in the Bible daily, it becomes a part of us. God writes His protective and righteous laws on our hearts so that His wisdom will overflow into our conversations and relationships. When we connect with God's power, He's able to speak through us to others who may not yet know Him. And the more we seek Christ, the more we become vessels of truth for the Holy Spirit. Our healing becomes a pathway to healing for others!

Allow God's Word to penetrate every portion of your being. Make Him "known" through your words and actions. Do so, and be blessed by His overwhelming goodness that ushers in pure peace and soul satisfaction.

PRAY

Lord, Thank You for writing Your Word on my heart. Help me remember Your Words throughout my days. Heal my troubled heart and cleanse me from all unrighteousness. Use me as Your vessel of love so that others will know that You are God, the ultimate giver of grace. Amen.

August 14 — Rumor Has It...

READ

Jeremiah 51:15-58, 52:1-3, 37:1-10

2 Chronicles 36:10-14

2 Kings 24:10-20

1 Chronicles 3:10-16

Jeremiah 51:46, *“Do not lose heart or be afraid when rumors are heard in the land; one rumor comes this year, another the next, rumors of violence in the land and of ruler against ruler.”*

THINK

“Did you hear?”

“You know what they say is happening right now...”

Rumors are like verbal clickbait. Since antiquity, they have circulated, stirring up confusion and anxiety — wheels that, for all their spinning, get us no closer to the truth.

Back in biblical times, rumors of war and political instability were a real source of fear. There was no easy fact-checking or cross-referencing. A disproportionate amount of stock could easily be put into these claims of questionable accuracy simply because there were few other options.

But just as God told the Israelites back then, He is telling us today that there is another option: trusting in Him. He is the ultimate authority on truth — He is omniscient and omnipotent; He knows exactly what is happening on every square inch of the planet at all times, for all of time, and He has told us in His Word not to fear.

Whatever you may hear, whatever rumors of violence and war and sickness and strife proliferate (or even sticking around too long to involve idle neighborhood gossip), we are called to surrender our anxieties to Him and be bearers of truth. He is, has been, and always will be victor over all the corruption and death in this world — while we can prepare and keep safe to the best of our ability, there always comes the point when we have to give it to God, and there are no better hands than His to safeguard our spirits and lives. So, don't worry over the latest news flaps or about what others predict will happen. More than rumor has it — that God is in control! Therefore, take a deep breath and rest in that truth!

PRAY

God, You know the worries and rumors I have struggled with. Help me surrender them all to You and to trust Your Word over all else. Thank You for Your dependability and Your promise of salvation. In Jesus 'name, Amen!

August 15 — Listen Carefully

READ

Jeremiah 37:11-38:28

Ezekiel 1:1-3:15

Ezekiel 1:28-2:2, *“All around him was a glowing halo, like a rainbow shining in the clouds on a rainy day. This is what the glory of the Lord looked like to me. When I saw it, I fell face down on the ground, and I heard someone’s voice speaking to me. ‘Stand up, son of man,’ said the voice. ‘I want to speak with you. The Spirit came into me as He spoke, and He set me on my feet. I listened carefully to His words.’”*

THINK

There are moments in life when we know something BIG is happening. We quickly sit up to pay more close attention. We know that it’s a moment to be fully engaged both mentally and physically so that we don’t miss a thing.

God’s call on Ezekiel’s life was one of those monumental moments. Fully cognizant of this reality, Ezekiel was so overcome by God’s presence that he fell facedown to the ground. But as God’s Spirit stood him up, we see him being prepped to receive an important message — one that began with a God addressing him as “son of man.” Why didn’t God call him by his name? Of course, he was the son of *a* man! Although odd and almost distant-sounding, God referred to Ezekiel as this to remind him that he’d been set apart to declare a life-altering message to Israel — a difficult and daunting task that would definitely be ill-received. Yet, this assured Ezekiel that it was his God-given responsibility to carry out.

As Christ-followers, we, too, have been set apart and tasked with a responsibility that isn’t always easy. But just as God instructed Ezekiel, He wants us to show and share His love with the world. We may not directly receive majorly consequential prophetic messages in visions or dreams, but if we have experienced life-change through Jesus Christ, it’s too important not to share! We inhabit a dark world that needs the light only He can bring — and we don’t have to be Bible scholars to infiltrate the darkness! All we need is our own story; we must tell what Jesus has done in our lives with intentionality!

So, today, be in awe of His presence and praise Him on bended knee. Then, stand up and listen carefully as He speaks into your heart. You might just be preparing for a monumental moment, a chance to bring Christ’s light in someone’s darkness as you share the magnificence of His love and desire for connectivity with each and every one of us on planet earth!

PRAY

Heavenly Father, Thank You for calling me out of the darkness into Your eternal light. I am in awe of You. I am listening carefully right now as You speak into my heart. Help me to share the life-changing message of Christ with someone today. Amen.

August 16 — Trapped!

READ

Ezekiel 3:16-4:17

Jeremiah 27:1-28:17, 51:59-64

Ezekiel 4:8, *"I will tie you up with ropes so you won't be able to turn from side to side until the days of your siege have been completed.."*

THINK

Have you ever felt trapped — locked in position, unable to move or turn? What a bad feeling! Not only is it scary and uncomfortable, but it's also hard not to panic as you think through your next steps. Do you experience the same feelings when you are trapped in a pattern of sin?

In today's reading, we see Ezekiel obeying God's instructions as he acts out a prophecy for all of Israel. God's people had been extremely disobedient in keeping the Old Testament laws and would soon experience the consequences of their actions and the "imprisonment" that always comes.

When you are stuck in a cycle of sin, it's easy to feel trapped. Maybe you hang out with people who cause you to make bad decisions. Maybe you tend to usurp the authority figures in your life. Maybe you consistently blow up when someone pushes your buttons. Whatever "it" may be, breaking free can be hard.

That's the bad news. But, here's the good news: God loves you! In fact, He loves you so much that He wants to set you free. That's why He sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross to forgive your sins and break you free from its hold on you. But it doesn't stop there — such freedom ushers in true joy!

God wants so much more for you! Disobedience often starts with fun and a false sense of freedom — but it's never worth the consequences you'll pay later. Escaping such a trap isn't easy, so what can you do? Just start taking steps. Get involved in church so you can surround yourself with people who will encourage you and regularly learn the truth of what God has in store for you in His Word.

The choice is yours! So are you going to stay trapped, or will you break loose and choose to live a life of authenticity, joy, and absolute freedom?

PRAY

Dear God, Thank You for Your love. Help me to live a life of obedience to You instead of choosing to stay trapped in sin. I want to experience what You have in store for me! Amen.

August 17 — What's the Verdict?

READ

Ezekiel 5:1-9:11

Ezekiel 7:2-4, *"Son of man, this is what the Sovereign Lord says to the land of Israel: The end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land! The end is now upon you, and I will unleash My anger against you. I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices. I will not look on you with pity; I will not spare you. I will surely repay you for your conduct and for the detestable practices among you. Then you will know that I am the Lord."*

THINK

A criminal sits before a judge and is sentenced to life in prison for the crimes he committed. He broke the law and receives his sentence. For the judge to be a good judge, he must administer justice. There must be a consequence for the crime.

We don't like to talk about it, but God is a just God; it is a part of His character. We must choose to submit to His authority in our lives, turn from our sin, and recognize our need for salvation through Jesus Christ. Or, like Israel, we can choose our own path and decide to face Judgement Day based on our own merits.

God has made known the endgame. Every person will face eternity — either with Him in heaven, a place of absolute perfection, or totally separated from Him, in isolation and unending despair. Either way, every knee will bow before Him, and every tongue will confess Him as Lord before reaching one of two final destinations. It's scary to think about, but the choice is up to us — and His way is always the best way.

God's justice is great, but His grace is even greater! You can enjoy your life on a whole new level — packed with purpose, loaded with unfailing love, full of freedom, and abounding in the assurance that you've been rendered a "Not Guilty" verdict through Christ!

PRAY

Lord, You are a *just* and *gracious* God. Sin requires a payment — this shows Your justice. Through Jesus Christ, You paid my debt and demonstrated Your grace. I choose to follow You as the Lord of my life, and I turn from my sins. Thank You, Lord, for saving me! Let my actions today reflect You, and let my mouth be bold to share with others. Amen.

August 18 — You're Getting Warmer!

READ

Ezekiel 10:1-13:23

Ezekiel 11:19-20, *"I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws. They will be My people, and I will be their God."*

THINK

Are you familiar with the song "Cold as Ice" by Foreigner? If so, sing along with the following lyrics. If not, read them — and, later, do yourself a favor by checking out the song online... It's a classic!

*"You're as cold as ice
You're willing to sacrifice our love
You never take advice
Some day you'll pay the price, I know."*

Well, as classic as this song might be, God's been singing these lyrics for thousands of years — and it's true! This is the message Ezekiel was sharing in today's reading. But, then, amid his harsh criticism of the people's stubborn, unrepentant, stone-cold heart condition, he shared the promise that God desires to break through the harsh exterior, remove the sin-built callouses, and drive out the sub-zero conditions with the warm blaze of His love and grace!

But here's the thing! It's a "both/and" scenario: God does His part as long as we do ours. We have to be willing to act by making any necessary changes. And God provides what our human determination and finite thinking lack — the supernatural power to transform us through His Spirit living within us! However, if we pridefully ignore the need for change, waffling between living for God and ourselves, our hearts will always be "as cold as ice!"

No one likes the discomfort and downright misery that comes from freezing temperatures. It just makes everything more difficult and can wreak a lot of havoc. But, no matter the temperature outside, we can crank up the thermostats in our hearts as we work in tandem with the Holy Spirit's guidance to be who God wants us to be — warm-hearted and loved! His very own!

PRAY

Lord, I come before You with a willing heart. Do Your work in me and transform me into who You've intended me to be. By the power of Your Spirit within me, I seek to do my part and make

any changes necessary. I praise Your name and give thanks as I bask in the warmth of Your love and grace. Amen.

August 19 — Sour Grapes and Useless Wood

READ

Ezekiel 14:1-16:63

Ezekiel 15:2-3, *“Son of man, how is the wood of a vine different from that of a branch from any of the trees in the forest? Is wood ever taken from it to make anything useful? Do they make pegs from it to hang things on?”*”

THINK

Have you ever wondered why God compares the Israelites to a grapevine?

It is an analogy that appears multiple times throughout the Bible, and for a good reason; it provides a physical representation of a spiritual reality. The wood itself is nothing special, ill-suited for even making pegs. Likewise, the Israelites were not God’s chosen people because they were better or more holy than everyone else. It had nothing to do with any inherent qualities they possessed, but everything to do with God’s sovereign arrangement. And as the vine is for the production of fruit, so the Israelites were meant to display God’s “fruit” to the world.

This portion of Ezekiel is part of a warning to an Israel that had gained an overinflated view of their own importance. God cares about us, yes, but we are not to exalt ourselves or put ourselves on the throne of our own lives; it’s a slippery slope destined for doom. Pride goes before destruction because it always cascades into greater sin.

It’s important to remember that God is the orchestrator of success. He, not us, does the work of life transformation as He molds us into His people. We are saved by grace, made to let life flow and produce the fruit of His righteousness. Apart from Him, we bear nothing good — we’re merely sour grapes and useless wood.

So, be fruitful and flourish as you grow toward the “Son,” giving thanks for all that He has and will accomplish through you!

PRAY

Dear Lord, Humble me today. Remind me that, apart from You, I’m merely “useless wood.” Cause me to want more of You and less of me as I seek to bear Your fruit. Amen.