



# Cornton Baptist Church

Demonstrating God's love in action  
in the community of Cornton

# Through the Bible

Exodus  
Nehemiah  
2Chronicles Luke  
Acts 2Timothy 2Peter  
Zephaniah  
Ecclesiastes  
1Timothy Joshua  
Psalms James  
Isaiah  
Titus  
Daniel  
Hebrews  
Zechariah  
1Samuel 2Corinthians  
Malachi  
Philemon  
Job  
1Kings  
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Jonah  
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Romans  
1Chronicles  
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Mark  
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Nahum  
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Joel  
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Hosea  
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Obadiah  
Esther  
Proverbs

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*You were wearied by all your ways, but you would not say 'it is hopeless.'*  
(v.10)

I remember hearing about tests done with laboratory wharf rats. These are the rats that live under the piers along the waterfront. One group of rats was placed in a large container of water, in the dark, with no place to stand on, they had to keep swimming. They all drowned within fifteen minutes. The second group was placed in a similar container, yet every ten minutes the lab technician would open the container, take the rats out, stroke them a few seconds, and put them back in the water. They didn't have time to rest, they just got a little encouragement. These rats went on swimming for over 12 hours (or something like that...).

What I'm curious about is how the experiment ended. I wonder if they just kept up the routine until the rats all drowned. If that was the case, the rats had hope, but they had hope in the wrong thing. They had hope in something that wouldn't help them. Hope can be placed in the wrong thing.

Here in Isaiah 57 we read of some people who kept telling themselves there was hope, they kept "psyching" themselves up. They have placed their hope in idols rather than in the living God. And God warns them that a time is coming when they will cry out for help and their idols will be no use to them. He tells them that those who make God their refuge will be saved.

People and things will let you down in life. Even with the best intention in the world, no one can help you in every situation. If you are trusting in a friend to pull you through a tough time, expect that there will be times when you'll be disappointed. Jesus will never let you down. Put your hope in him.

**Pray:** thanking God for offering us real hope in life.

**Reflect:** do I put my trust in others or in God alone?

*You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.  
(v.4)*

Three sons left home, went out on their own and prospered. Getting back together, they discussed the gifts they were able to give their elderly mother. The first said, "I built a big house for our mother." The second said, "I sent her a Mercedes with a driver." The third smiled and said, "I've got you both beat. You remember how mom enjoyed reading the Bible? And you know she can't see very well. So I sent her a remarkable parrot that recites the entire Bible. It took elders in the church 12 years to teach him. He's one of a kind. Mama just has to name the chapter and verse, and the parrot recites it." Soon thereafter, mom sent out her letters of thanks: "Milton," she wrote one son, "The house you built is so huge. I live in only one room, but I have to clean the whole house." "Gerald," she wrote to another, "I am too old to travel. I stay most of the time at home, so I rarely use the Mercedes. And the driver is so rude!" "Dearest Donald," she wrote to her third son, "You have the good sense to know what your mother likes. The chicken was delicious."

Isaiah 58 speaks of something that was meant by God to be a valuable gift, but something that has been greatly abused. We read God's ideas about fasting. The people have been fasting and have been expecting God to answer them but he hasn't. They are confused by all this. But God says to them, you've got it all wrong. On days of fasting you should be helping the poor and oppressed, you should be sharing your food with the hungry, and you should be clothing the naked. Instead you exploit others and quarrel and fight.

Fasting and prayer is a time to seek God and be in communion with him. When we come out of that time there is a way to live and act. We are to live God's way and act with his love and compassion. And when that happens we receive the promises of his word (v.9-11).

**Pray:** asking God's help to act with love and compassion to others.

**Reflect:** when did I last fast and pray?

*For our offences are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us. Our offences are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities. (v.12)*

After a two-week criminal trial in a very high profile bank robbery case, the judge turns to the jury foreman and asks, “Has the jury reached a verdict in this case?” “Yes, we have, your honour,” The foreman responded. “Would you please pass it to me,” The judge declared, as he motioned for the bailiff to retrieve the verdict slip from the foreman and deliver it to him. After the judge reads the verdict himself, he delivers the verdict slip back to his bailiff to be returned to the foreman and instructs the foreman, “Please read your verdict to the court.” “We find the defendant Not Guilty of all four counts of bank robbery,” stated the foreman. The family and friends of the defendant jump for joy at the verdict and hug each other as they shout expressions of divine gratitude. The man’s attorney turns to his client and asks, “So, what do you think about that?” The defendant, with a bewildered look on his face, turns to his attorney and asks, “Well, does that mean I can keep the money, or do I have to give it back?”

We may be able to convince others we’re not guilty, but inside we know we are.

In the previous chapter the people have been asking why God has not heard their prayers during fasting times, and here God continues to answer that. The people are reminded that it is their sin that has stopped God hearing them. Sin is a stumbling block in our relationship with God and separates us from God. We might be able to hide our sins from other people but we cannot hide them from God nor even from ourselves. God knows and sees all things – he is omnipotent and omniscient. And we know our own sin too – it eats away inside us; it makes us feel guilty. The only way to resolve that is by confessing it before God and accepting the forgiveness he offers through Jesus Christ. Don’t wait until sin eats you up – confess it today.

**Pray:** thanking God for the forgiveness he offers in Jesus.

**Reflect:** what unconfessed sin is there in my life? Confess it now.

*Arise, shine for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. (v.1)*

I remember back to our first home as a married couple. It was a top floor flat with a floored loft space above it. After Andrew was born we decided we needed extra space so made plans to convert the loft into a master bedroom and out in a staircase up to it. The work took weeks. And every night we would return from work to an extremely dusty flat and for some time did not see much progress. We began to wonder if it would ever be finished. And then one day we walked in through the doors and a beautiful new staircase was in place and we were able to walk up the stairs and see the new bedroom. It looked great. A new day and a new time in our lives.

There is a sense of that new day dawning and the excitement that comes with it here in Isaiah 60. In the previous chapter God has spoken of sending a redeemer to save Israel from their sins. Now he has come and the darkness and gloom of sin is being lifted. God's light is breaking through. And God promises that on that day they will '*know that I, the LORD, am your Saviour, Your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.*' (v.16)

Many people go through life wondering and hoping that they are saved. Many people are plagued with doubts that they will one day make it to heaven. God doesn't want you wondering. He wants you to know. It all boils down to this. Eternal life is found in Jesus. It is your sins that will keep you from heaven. Only Jesus has paid the price that will take care of your sins. If you have asked Jesus to pay for you, if you have asked Jesus into your life, then you have eternal life. It's no longer a matter of whether you've been good enough. It's a matter of whether Jesus is good enough. It's a matter of whether you are trusting in Jesus to pay for your sins.

That new day has come, friend, you are saved. Now the call is for us rise and shine in this dark world. We have become the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). Let's make sure the world knows that Jesus is our Saviour and Redeemer.

**Pray:** thanking God for your salvation.

**Reflect:** am I shining for Jesus in this dark world?

*The LORD has anointed me...to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. (v.1, 3)*

There's a story of an eccentric old man who carried an oil can with him everywhere he went. If he passed through a squeaky door or a stiff gate, he applied oil to the hinges. His practice of lubricating made life easier for those who followed after him.

Nearly every day we encounter people whose lives creak and grate harshly with problems. In such situations we face two choices - either to aggravate their problems with a spirit of criticism or to lubricate their lives in the Spirit of Christ.

Some people we meet carry unbearable burdens and long for the oil of a sympathetic word. Others are defeated and feel like giving up. Just one drop of encouragement could restore their hope. Still others are mean and sin-hardened. Such people can become pliable toward the saving grace of Christ through regular applications of the oil of kindness.

When we receive Christ as our Saviour and Lord, the Holy Spirit indwells us and equips us to bless others. If we're prepared to pour out God's oil of helpfulness every day and everywhere, beginning at home, we'll minister Christ's beauty and the oil of joy to many hurting people.

Our role as Christians is to live like Jesus and shine for him in this world. Jesus used the preceding verses as he stood in Luke 4 and read from the scroll. He said he had come to help the poor, the broken-hearted, the captive and the prisoner. He had come to pour God's love and grace on all people. Let's reach out the hurting around us and minister God's grace with our loving words and actions.

**Pray:** asking God to help you pour out the oil of love and kindness on someone around you today.

**Reflect:** how do I treat people around me?

*For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. (v.1)*

I love intense, exciting and action packed television shows. The best I ever watched is the 24 series where we see one full day in the life of Jack Bauer, a government agent. Each series had 24 1 hour long episodes. When I first watched them the episode I was watching was so gritty and exciting that you just did not want it to end...but it did with those little beeps of time as the seconds counted down to the end of the hour. "To be continued..." I always felt gutted and let down at that point. I longed to see how it would end and how the tense situation would finish up. I'd tune in again the next week to catch the next episode. What is worse is watching it on DVD so that when you come to the end of the episode and feel frustrated at not knowing what comes next you just play the next episode and the next episode and hours pass!

Sometimes in our own lives we hit spots where we feel let down and where we think it is going to end badly. But life isn't finished. God isn't finished. He has more to do in our lives. We have to patiently wait.

Here is Isaiah 62 we are reminded that God isn't finished yet. He has more to do for the city of Jerusalem and the people of Israel. They may be in a dark place. When the Babylonians invade they may feel despair and may feel the place is desolate, but God reminds them that he is still in control and will restore Jerusalem once more.

Friends, we may find ourselves in some terrible situations – situations where we feel alone and in despair, but rest assured God is not finished yet. He will not stay silent until his work is done. And his work is not done until Christ returns in glory to take us to be with him forever. Keep going, and keep looking to God to guide you and comfort you.

**Pray:** thanking God that he never leaves you nor forsakes you.

**Reflect:** do I trust that God is working his plans out?

*I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. (v.3)*

During the final days at Denver's old Stapleton airport, a crowded United Airlines flight was cancelled. A single agent was rebooking a long line of inconvenienced travellers. Suddenly an angry passenger pushed his way to the desk. He slapped his ticket down on the counter and said, "I HAVE to be on this flight and it has to be first class." The agent replied, "I'm sorry, sir. I'll be happy to try to help you, but I've got to help these folks first, and I'm sure we'll be able to work something out." The passenger was unimpressed. He asked loudly, so that the passengers behind him could hear, "Do you have any idea who I am?" Without hesitating, the gate agent smiled and grabbed her public address microphone. "May I have your attention please?" she began, her voice bellowing throughout the terminal. "We have a passenger here at the gate WHO DOES NOT KNOW WHO HE IS. If anyone can help him find his identity, please come to the gate." With the folks behind him in line laughing hysterically, the man glared at the United agent, gritted his teeth and retreated as the people in the terminal applauded loudly. Although the flight was cancelled and people were late, they were no longer angry at United Airlines.

So often in life we get angry and upset. And we get angry at the wrong things. We allow our emotions to get carried away and we shout for little or no reason at all. Sometimes our anger makes us simply look foolish. God's anger is different. When God gets angry it is always for the right reason. And it is always on the account of sin.

Here the people have sinned against God. The people had known God's love and kindness, but had turned their back on Him. Then they began to know some tough times as they found themselves fighting with God. As they look back (v.11) they remember those good times and they ask for help. May we acknowledge our sin, confess it before God and ask for his help so that his anger will not burn against us.

**Pray:** asking God to forgive you for sins you have committed today.

**Reflect:** do I keep a short account with God? Do I daily confess my sin?



*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. (v.6)*

Two men were talking not long after they had become Christians. One was a poor man from a godless background; the other was from an affluent religious environment. After each man told of his conversion, the man with the religious background asked the other, “Why do you suppose you responded the first time you heard the gospel, while so many years passed before I did?”

The poor man answered, “That’s easy. Suppose someone came along and offered to give each of us a brand-new suit. I’d jump at the offer. My clothes are old and worn. But your closet is no doubt filled with the finest of suits. That’s the way it is with salvation. You were probably satisfied with all your goodness, so it took you a long time to see the need for God’s garment of righteousness offered to you through Christ. But I was deeply aware of my sinful condition, and I was eager to receive forgiveness and cleansing.”

All people desperately need to be saved. Isaiah said that ‘*all our righteous acts are like filthy rags*’ (v.6). Those who recognise their spiritual poverty and accept the priceless gift of salvation that comes through faith in Christ are given “new clothes” of righteousness. I still think though that for too many of us we still think we can get their on our own; we are not convinced we need new clothes. We try and earn our way into heaven with our good deeds, and our religious pursuits.

The Bible tells us that ‘*all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*’ (Romans 3:23) and that ‘*there is no one righteous not even one*’ (Romans 3:10). We are all unclean and all our best efforts are like filthy rags. Let’s turn to God and accept the forgiveness he offers through Jesus Christ. Let’s thank him for his wonderful grace, mercy and love.

**Pray:** thanking God for clothing you with righteousness through Jesus Christ.

**Reflect:** do I still think I can get to heaven on my own?

*Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.*  
(v.24)

A five-year-old said grace at family dinner one night. “Dear God, thank you for these pancakes...” When he concluded, his parents asked him why he thanked God for pancakes when they were having chicken. He smiled and said, “I thought I’d see if He was paying attention tonight.”

I think we sometimes go through life thinking that God doesn’t hear so what is the point in praying. Our prayer lives are poor and it’s almost as if we just put up a token prayer out of habit. The Bible tells us that God does hear and answer our prayers. We are encouraged throughout Scripture to take all of our concerns to God and to spend time praying. Jesus was often found in prayer during his earthly life. He was the prime example for us in regard to praying regularly to the Father. And we don’t need to worry if God is paying attention...he always is. Here in Isaiah 65 we read God saying ‘*before they call I will answer*’. He knows everything that is going on in our lives. He knows what we need before we even ask. Yet he encourages us to converse with him. He longs for us to be in relationship with him.

Of course, prayer is a 2 way activity for God often speaks to us as we pray, as he speaks to us through his word and through others people and circumstances. We expect God to hear and answer us but do we always listen to him. Many people have caller display in their phones. When a family member or friend calls they can quickly answer. If it is someone they don’t like or don’t want to speak to they can ignore it. And if it is a cold call from a company they can ignore it as well. The question is do we do the same with God. Back in verse 12 God says ‘*I called but you did not answer, I spoke but you did not listen.*’

Let’s be diligent in our prayer life...both taking everything to God in prayer and also listening for God speaking to us.

**Pray:** thanking God for the gift of prayer.

**Reflect:** do I take everything to God in prayer?

*And I, because of their actions and imaginations, am about to come and gather all nations and tongues, and they will come and see my glory. (v.18)*

A 4-year-old boy was asked to give thanks before Christmas dinner. The family members bowed their heads in expectation. He began his prayer, thanking God for all his friends, naming them one by one. Then he thanked God for Mommy, Daddy, brother, sister, Grandma, Grandpa, and all his aunts and uncles. Then he began to thank God for the food. He gave thanks for the turkey, the gravy, the roast potatoes, the cranberry sauce, the pies, the cakes, even the cream. Then he paused, and everyone waited - and waited. After a long silence, the young fellow looked up at his mother and asked, "If I thank God for the broccoli, won't he know that I'm lying?"

The answer of course is yes he will. God sees and knows all things. We cannot hide anything from God. Oh we may manage to hide some secret sin from those closest to us and from those in the workplace, but we cannot hide from God. As the Psalmist reminds us in Psalm 139 God knows everything about us – from what we think to what we say to where we are and why.

This final chapter of Isaiah reminds us of judgment and hope. God knows all of our actions and our thoughts and he will judge and punish humanity for that. All who have sinned and rebelled against God will be punished and die. Yet all who walk in his ways will be saved. Those who are '*humble and contrite in spirit*' (v.2) will enter heaven. To be contrite in spirit speaks of recognising our sinfulness and confessing it before God, seeking to turn from it and live for him.

One day soon God will usher in his kingdom rule with a new heaven and a new earth. Will you be there with him? God knows all things...turn to him now and confess your sin and receive the forgiveness he offers.

**Pray:** confessing your sin to God and asking for his forgiveness.

**Reflect:** do I try and hide my sin from God?

*“Ah, Sovereign Lord,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.” (v.6)*

Francis Schaeffer tells of the agonising decision he had to make: his parents wanted him to stay at home and become a mechanical engineer (and he had wanted to do as well), but he felt called by God to go and prepare for ministry. As his father awaited an answer, Francis went to the cellar to pray. He cried out to God for help and then in desperation took out a coin and said ‘Heads, I’ll go.’ It was heads. He pleaded, ‘God be patient with me, if it comes up tails this time I’ll go.’ It was tails. ‘Once more God, please let it be heads again.’ And it was. And he went and served God faithfully for many years.

God’s call on our lives can be difficult. Here at the start of Jeremiah’s prophecy we come across his call to serve God. Jeremiah hesitated as he looked at the work before him and the wickedness around him, and when he looked at the weakness within himself, Jeremiah was certain that he wasn’t the man for the job. He was struggling with God’s call because he looked at himself and saw that in and of himself he couldn’t do it. I can identify with that because for many years I felt the same. And yet Jeremiah was not having to do it on his own...God would do it through him. And we know that those God calls, God equips for the task.

Here God gives Jeremiah three wonderful assurances: God’s electing grace (God knew him from before he was formed in the womb and was calling him), God’s protecting presence (God was going to be with him wherever he went), and God’s powerful word (God would give him the words to share).

Listen to God. What is He calling you to do for Him? Does it sound too hard? That’s impossible! If God has a job for you, it’s not you who will be doing it - He will be working through you. That should take care of those feelings of inadequacy.

**Pray:** asking God to overcome your fears as you answer his call.

**Reflect:** what is God calling me to do this week?

*My people have committed two sins: they have forsaken me, the spring of living water and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water. (v.13)*

New love is exciting! We've all seen it in newly married couples. It doesn't matter if they're 20 or 70, love makes their faces beautiful and their feet bounce. It's not only true of marriages. We've seen people who lovingly wash and wax their new sports car - and then do it all over again.

Whether it's a new car or a new relationship, at first we respond with wholehearted devotion. But with the passing of time, excitement often fades. Unrealistic hopes can blind us to the flaws in the object of our affection. When we expect too much from a person or a possession, we set ourselves up for disappointment.

A car, a house, or a spouse may turn out to be less than ideal. But if our relationship with God cools, it's because our communication has broken down and disinterest has set in. It's then that intimacy is lost. It happened here with Israel and it can happen to us as well if we are not careful. God doesn't change. His love for us is unchanging. It's us that change.

Jeremiah charges the people with forsaking their first love. They were devoted to God but now they have forgotten him and are going through life alone. They are putting their trust in other things. The trouble is these other things will not satisfy forever. Oh they may give momentary pleasure but over time that will fade. The people are reminded that God is the living water but instead they have made their own cisterns to hold the water but it leaks out because it is broken.

Friends, if our relationship with God has grown cold its time to set it right. Think on God, his characteristics and nature, on the things he has done in your life in the past. Rekindle that love and devotion for God. Draw near to him in prayer and thanksgiving.

**Pray:** asking God to forgive you for putting your trust in other things.

**Reflect:** how is my relationship with God?

*In spite of all this, her unfaithful sister Judah did not return to me with all her heart, but only in pretence, declares the LORD. (v.10)*

Have you heard the story about a driver who put a note under the windshield wiper of a parked car? The note read, "I have just smashed into your car. The people who saw the accident are watching me. They think I'm writing down my name and address. I'm not."

This story reminds me of another bit of devious pretence. In Jeremiah 3, the people of Judah were described as willing to call God their Father and friend while still doing all the evil they could (v.4-5). They only pretended to return to the Lord; their hearts were far from Him.

Putting on a false front is a very old practice, but it hasn't gone out of fashion. I can't think of a problem I'm more concerned about in myself than a failure to respond from my heart to the Lord, who has made Himself so real and so knowable in Christ. It's easy to say, "Yes, yes, He is our Lord and Saviour. He has died for our sins and deserves our worship and service." But do we remember our commitment to Him when no one is around to observe how we live?

The call to follow Jesus is a fulltime call. It's not just for those moments when people are watching but also in those times when we are behind closed doors. What is it you are watching on your television? What sites do you look up on your computer? How do you treat your family when no one else is watching?

We may say the right things about God when it's in our best interest to do so. But what about our heart relationship with the Lord? Can we come before Him without shame? Looking good in the eyes of others is not enough. Let's stop pretending and start living as God's children.

**Pray:** asking God to forgive you for the sins committed behind closed doors.

**Reflect:** in what ways do I pretend to be a Christian?

*Your own conduct and actions have brought this upon you. This is your punishment. How bitter it is! How it pierces to the heart! (v.18)*

I don't think people who plant trees in their garden always give thought to how high they will grow. How many times have you watched a neighbour plant a tree and say it's only a small thing that will grow a few feet. Before long it is giving them shelter from the sun as they sit in the garden and then eventually the tree blocks all sunlight into the garden. The grass begins to thin and the soil becomes unproductive. A big task is then necessary to cut it down and get rid of it.

It's a bit like the weeds in my garden. If I pick them when they are just sprouting up they come out easy and cause no bother. If I leave them for a while, they grow bigger, taking goodness away from the good plants and vegetables that are growing and even strangling them and killing them. It then takes back breaking work to get rid of them.

That's the way it is with sin. At first, it may seem so harmless, even good. But, like a leafy tree when it is mature, sin shuts out the light. The children of Israel learned this lesson the hard way. Their own conduct brought judgment on them (v.7, 18). They found to their pain and regret that sin can start out looking so manageable and so safe - until it gets out of hand. Then it's a different story. Israel's predicament caused the prophet Jeremiah to cry out in anguish over his wayward people, *'Oh, my anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain. Oh the agony of my heart!'* (v.19)

Sin causes us problems and ultimately it will cause us to be separated from God forever – the punishment for sin is death (Romans 6:23). The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus – Jesus died to save us from our sin. Confess it to him now and receive the forgiveness he offers. See sin for what it is - a spreading menace that always ends in death (James 1:15). Deal with the “little” sin in your life now. Don't wait till it's full-grown.

**Pray:** asking God to reveal sin in your life and then confess it before him.

**Reflect:** do I let 'little' sins continue in my life without dealing with them?

*But what will you do in the end? (v.31)*

At the highest levels of government, military leaders carefully monitor events in their region and around the world. As they evaluate troop movements, missile placements, and possible responses, they try to answer the question, “Where is this going to lead us?”

Former American Vice President Dick Cheney released his memoir, *In My Time*, a couple of years ago. In it, he recounts how in June 2007, he had urged President Bush to authorise the bombing of a suspected Syrian nuclear reactor. The President polled the other advisors around the table: “Does anyone here agree with the vice president?” Not a single hand went up around the room. They were all considering where it might lead them.

About 600 BC, Jeremiah the prophet asked his countrymen to consider where their action was taking them. The biggest threat to their well-being, however, wasn’t an enemy army but their own spiritual and moral decay. People who professed to believe in God were sexually immoral, godless, and cruel (v.7-28).

Even more troubling was the people’s preference for religious leaders who said politically correct things rather than the truth (v.30-31). The prophet, knowing that their way of life would ultimately bring down God’s judgment, asked them to think realistically, ‘*What will you do in the end?*’ (v.31)

It was a good question then, and it’s a good question today. We need to evaluate carefully our relationship with God. Do we stop long enough in our busy lives to ask, “Where is my life headed?” We must measure our attitudes and actions by God’s Word if we want God’s blessing on our lives.

**Pray:** asking God to help us measure our lives aright.

**Reflect:** do I stop to consider if I am walking in God’s ways?



*From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. (v.13)*

Monkey trappers in North Africa have a clever method of catching their prey. A number of coconuts are filled with nuts (monkey treats) and firmly fastened to a branch of a tree. Each has a hole just large enough for the unwary monkey to stick his forepaw into it. When the hungry animal discovers this, he quickly grasps a handful of nuts, but the hole is too small for him to withdraw his clenched fist. And he doesn't have enough sense to open up his hand and let go in order to escape, so he is easily taken captive.

Too often we get these certain things in our lives that we just don't want to let go of. Yet it's these very things that keep us captive. If we'd just let go, we could be free.

And that is what Jeremiah is still warning the people of Israel about. Jeremiah ministered just prior to the Babylonian exile (627-580 B.C.). Like many other prophets, he urged the people to return to God's ways (v.16). But they refused to do so! Even though God had sent previous prophets (the 'watchmen' in v.17), the people persisted in their sin. Rather than destroy all false idols, the Israelites had adopted many perverse pagan practices. Rather than trust the Lord to protect them, the Israelites had entered into dangerous foreign alliances. They clung onto their sin.

The consequences of their sin were far-reaching. Instead of being a witness to the nations, we find that the nations were called upon to testify against Israel in the courtroom of God's justice and to hear His sentence against his people (v.18). This is indeed a sad point in the nation's history.

The warning to us is to let go of our sin, our greed and shame, and to turn back to God. Persisting in sin only leads us away from God. Let's cling to God for all we're worth and walk in his ways.

**Pray:** asking God to help us let go of sin and to resist temptation.

**Reflect:** do I cling tightly to sin in my life?

*This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel says: Reform your ways and your actions and I will let you live in this place. (v.3)*

Some people carry a rabbit's foot for good luck. Others hang a horseshoe over the door or look for a four-leaf clover. They rely on an inanimate object as a talisman against trouble to protect them from harm. This was also the mentality of many toward the temple in Jerusalem. They believed that the temple's presence in Jerusalem would shield the city from the enemy. Nebuchadnezzar might lay siege to Jerusalem but they did not believe he would succeed.

The most beautiful place of worship in Jeremiah's day was the temple in Jerusalem, which King Josiah had recently repaired and restored (2 Chronicles 34–35). The people were fixated on the magnificent building (v.4), and they foolishly thought that having the temple there meant that God would protect them from their enemies.

Instead, Jeremiah pointed out the sin in their lives (v.3, 9-10). God is not impressed by beautiful buildings constructed in His name if there is no inward beauty in the hearts of those who go there. He is not interested in an outward legalistic worship that is not matched by inward holiness. And it is wrong to think that God protects people just because of the religious things they do.

Just because we're reading the Bible, praying, and fellowshiping with other believers doesn't mean that God is somehow then obligated to do something for us. He cannot be manipulated. The purpose of those external activities is to develop our relationship with the Lord and to help us live differently than those in the world around us.

Is your trust in some outward action or are you trusting through in faith in Jesus? No amount of good works will help us...only Jesus' death on the cross can save us from our sin. Trust in him alone.

**Pray:** asking God to help us trust him completely.

**Reflect:** am I reading the Bible, praying and fellowshiping for the right reasons?

*Why then have these people turned away? Why does Jerusalem always turn away? They cling to deceit; they refuse to return. (v.5)*

A homeowner in Wisconsin said he heard a cat meowing on the front porch. When he opened the door, a big long-haired, gray male cat walked in, checked things out, began purring, and then jumped up on a chair as if he belonged there. Family members couldn't believe their eyes. But when they compared the cat to pictures taken years earlier, they could only conclude that it was their long-lost pet. Clem the cat had come home after 8 years of being who knows where.

What remarkable homing instincts God has given to some animals! On a spiritual level, why is it that the backslidden child of God seems to have less? Why do we in our rebellion show less sense than the animals? We've been designed by a loving Creator, who has given us every reason to want to come home. In His presence there is hope, love, lasting protection, and fullness of joy. Away from Him there is temporary pleasure, but eternal loss and despair.

Jeremiah reminded us that even the birds live according to the times and places and ways that the Lord has built into them (v.7). Only man seems determined to run to his own self-destruction. God says I have listened but no one is saying the right things. No one is repenting from their wickedness. No one seems to know my requirements says God.

And that is true in our day too. We seem to have forgotten all about God's ways. We have ready access to Bibles – it is still the best selling book in the world, and it is free on the internet – and yet we do not know what it says and do not live by it. Too often we read the Bible and think that what we have read is for someone else or it is simply a good saying. We do not take to heart the lessons contained within it and apply it to our lives. Jeremiah is warning the people that punishment is coming for sin, so the people should return to God. Let's read our Bibles and apply what we learn, that we might live in God's ways.

**Pray:** asking God to help us apply what we learn from the Bible.

**Reflect:** do I apply what I read in God's Word to my life?

*But let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight. (v.24)*

A group of chess enthusiasts had checked into a hotel and were standing in the lobby discussing their recent tournament victories. After about an hour, the manager came out of the office and asked them to disperse. “But why?” they asked, as they moved off. “Because,” he said, “I can’t stand chess nuts boasting in an open foyer.”

Boasting in the wrong things is a bad idea. Jeremiah encourages us here to boast in knowing God. How do we really get to know someone? Let me illustrate: Many years have passed since that wonderful day my wife and I were married, and I realise how little I knew her at that time. Only after living with her and growing together, through both the sweet and the bitter experiences of life, have I come to appreciate her for who and what she is. I know her better and love her more than ever before.

It takes a lifetime to get to know someone well. The same is true in getting to know God. In today’s Bible reading, Jeremiah said that if we are to “glory” or boast in anything, it should be that we know God (v.24). And Paul prayed that believers would ‘*live a life worthy of the Lord, and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God*’ (Colossians 1:10).

We cannot learn all there is to know about the Lord in a few weeks, months, or even years. It’s an ongoing process that involves reading and studying His Word, praying, and learning from other believers. Growing in our knowledge of Him can be as thrilling 50 years from now as it is today.

Begin spending time with the Lord now. Make Him a priority in your daily schedule. And He will make Himself known to you in new and exciting ways.

**Pray:** thanking God for the privilege of knowing him.

**Reflect:** how can I know God better?

*Do not learn the ways of the nations or be terrified by the signs in the sky, though the nations are terrified by them. (v.2)*

A surprising percentage of Britain's people look to the stars for daily guidance. The number of people who read their horoscope has dramatically increased. This growing interest in astrology may feel new, but the practice is quite ancient. The Babylonians loved astrology; they saw meteors, comets, and movement of the planets as omens of good or bad (v.2). But such practices are not appropriate for the people of God! The answers to life can't be found in the sky, but in the One who made the sky and everything in it!

Humans have a tendency to worship what can be seen. Perhaps that's why idolatry often occurs together with astrology. There's a bit of humour in today's passage, describing how ridiculous idol worship is. For one thing, a piece of wood is randomly selected and then carved and covered with silver and gold. But if the idol weren't held together with nails, it would fall over! For another thing, idols have to be carried everywhere. There are some accounts of worshippers taking one idol to the temple of another god or goddess for a "visit." These idols were completely powerless...they couldn't speak, walk, or even instruct (v.8). They had no power to hurt (as people feared), or to help (as people hoped).

No wonder Jeremiah broke forth in praise of the Lord God (v.6)! With all power over every nation, the King is worthy of all praise! He is mighty and wise, great and beyond compare, living and eternal! One reminder of the true God reveals the absurdity of idol worship.

Now it was pathetic that pagan nations clung to their idols, but there was absolutely no excuse for His chosen people to tolerate anything to do with idolatry, let alone embrace it. And yet do we not all have idols in our own lives? And do we not look for signs? Let's get back to basics. Let's fix our eyes on God and ask him to show us the way.

**Pray:** thanking God for guiding us through life.

**Reflect:** what idols do I worship? Where do I look for signs?

*But they did not listen or pay attention. (v.8)*

The theme of God's covenantal relationship with Israel, and Israel's violation of their end of the covenant, lies at the heart of the book of Jeremiah. God had graciously rescued Israel from the oppression of Egyptian slavery and formed a binding covenant. The terms were simple: *'Obey me...and you will be my people, and I will be your God'* (v.4). Unfortunately, God's people refused to uphold their end of the covenant: *'they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubbornness of their evil hearts'* (v.8). The people worshiped other gods; the covenant had been broken.

As a result God reminded them of the curses specified in the original covenant. The people's sin was so blatant that God gave them over to their false gods. When disaster would come, Israel could turn to them for help - help that would never arrive. The Lord even instructed Jeremiah not to pray for the people, underscoring God's judgment on their covenantal violation.

One might think that in response to divine rebuke and warning, the people would turn to God in repentance. Instead, the men of Anathoth, Jeremiah's hometown, plotted to kill the prophet who delivered God's message. In the end, God's last word highlights the hardness of their hearts and seals their judgment for covenant unfaithfulness.

When someone points out our failings and disobedience, we often become angry instead of heeding the admonition that can restore our relationship with God. That's what happened to Jeremiah. The Bible calls us to *'spur one another on to love and good deeds'* (Hebrews 10:19) and to challenge one another when we sin *'If your brother sins, rebuke him'* (Luke 17:3). Let's be good at looking out for one another and listening to one another's admonition that we might all keep living God's way and bringing glory to him.

**Pray:** thanking God for faithful friends.

**Reflect:** how do I react when others admonish me?

*Why does the way of the wicked prosper? (v.1)*

A woman was experiencing several complications from a serious illness. “As a nurse,” she said, “I know what to expect. Things will only get worse.” After listing the problems that would come as her disease progressed, she expressed her confidence that the Lord would be with her all the way. Then she quipped, “I just wish it wouldn’t take Him so long to take me to heaven.”

In Jeremiah 12, we find that the prophet was despondent. People are after him and the wicked seem to be prospering. And he asks the question ‘*why does the way of the wicked prosper?*’ How often have you asked this when you hear about some con artist making thousands of pounds off of other’s misfortune? Or wonder why people who openly reject the Lord seem to have everything go their way?

Instead of answering Jeremiah, God challenged his attitude. As Jeremiah is moaning about his situation, the Lord told him that what he was currently experiencing was like running with the infantry. But what lay ahead for him would be like trying to keep up with the cavalry (v.5).

Treachery on the part of his own countrymen, as well as famine, natural disasters, and invasion by ruthless enemies were in store for him and his people. But a ray of light penetrated the darkness of the scene. If the Israelites (and even the cruel pagan invaders) would repent and put their trust in God, they would be restored and be able to bask in the sunlight of God’s favour. Jeremiah was called to keep his eyes on God and focus on God’s goodness and mercy.

Is your health deteriorating? Are your family and work situations getting worse? Do you worry about natural disaster? If you are a believer, don’t be discouraged. The final outcome will be glorious for all who trust in God! Keep your focus on his goodness and mercy.

**Pray:** thanking God for his faithfulness, goodness and mercy.

**Reflect:** how easy is it to trust in God when things are tough?

*But if you do not listen I will weep in secret because of your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly, overflowing with tears, because the LORD'S flock will be taken captive. (v.17)*

The story is told of a church in a small town that got a new preacher. Everyone in the town was talking about how wonderful he was. Then the town sceptic asked one of the deacons 'Why is this preacher so much better than the last one you had?' The deacon answered 'The last one told us we were sinners and that unless we repented we would all go to hell.' The sceptic asked 'And what does this new preacher say?' 'This new preacher tells us we're all sinners and unless we repent and accept Jesus, we're all going to hell,' was the answer. The sceptic just shrugged his shoulders and said 'I fail to see the difference between the two.' And the deacon answered 'the new preacher says it with tears in his eyes.'

How do you feel about people who do not know the Lord? How do you feel about people who hear the gospel and keep rejecting it? Jeremiah's heart is broken for the people that won't wake up and turn around. The Lord has him use an object lesson to try and convince the people to change and turn back to the Lord. God instructed Jeremiah to buy a new linen cloth, a kind of undergarment worn close to the skin, waist to knees. Over a long period of unspecified days, Jeremiah was to wear it without washing, then hide it in a rocky crevice, and then dig it up again. By the end, the linen cloth had become dirty, ruined, and useless. All of this was to symbolise God's intimate relationship with Judah that over time had become sullied and ruined. As a result, the Lord evoked another image, this time of wineskins and drunkenness, to depict the ruin and destruction coming upon His people. Sin has the effect of ruining our relationship with God.

Jeremiah then comes and tells them he will weep for them for he longs for them to hear and respond to the Lord. There is still time for them to repent and turn back. He pleads with them with tears in his eyes. When was the last time we cried for the lost?

**Pray:** asking God to give you a heart of compassion for the lost.

**Reflect:** when was the last time I wept for the lost?



*Then the LORD said to me “The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them.” (v.14)*

In 1977 millions of people lined up at museums in various cities across the United States to view the treasures of the tomb of King Tutankhamen of Egypt. Later, Ali Hassan, curator of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, discovered some of the jewels found in the tomb were not genuine. They were nothing but glass! When someone asked how this fact could go undetected for so many years, Mr. Hassan replied, “We were blinded by the gold. One just assumes that real gold and real gems go hand-in-hand. This is a case where they don’t.”

We would also assume that when a prophet claimed to speak for God he was telling the truth. But there are situations where that isn’t the case either. Certain prophets may bear the title and dress the part, but they are fakes. God declared that many of the prophets in Jeremiah’s time were speaking on their own. While they claimed to speak for the Lord, it was not true. They were speaking on their own initiative and weaving tales to deceive the people.

Jeremiah’s day was not the only time when false prophets abounded. There are still many around today. Whatever name they go by, they all have the same intent. Through clever deceptions they trick people into believing lies.

You need to be careful who and what you believe. Every teacher you hear, every person who speaks, every claim that is made, must be consistent with the truths of God’s Word. If they aren’t, they are the product of a false prophet.

Make sure that you test the spirits (1 John 4:1). Don’t believe something because it appears true; believe it because God’s Word says it is true.

**Pray:** thanking God for His Word of truth.

**Reflect:** do I take time to check everything against the Word of God?

*When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty. (v.16)*

New Year is not long passed and one of the customs at New Year here in Scotland is to first foot a neighbour with black bun and a wee dram. Some people use shortbread and Irn Bru. The Japanese eat long noodles. The Greeks bake a special bread. In Spain, the custom is to eat 12 individual grapes in the seconds leading up to the New Year. These are all done to bring good luck. Anthropologists say that eating certain foods to change one's fortune dates back to ancient Babylonia.

The prophet Jeremiah wasn't looking for good luck. As God's spokesman during a difficult time in Israel's history, he suffered rejection and persecution. Yet God's Word produced deep joy in his heart. In a vivid statement, he said to God, '*When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight*' (v.16). Eating certain foods won't influence the year ahead of me one bit. But if I'll make God's Word a part of my life each day through reading, study, and memorisation that will make a difference. The Bible is food for thought and nourishment for the New Year.

Jeremiah also says he bears the Lord's name and that means a lot to him. It is a tremendous responsibility to bear someone's name. From the pages of history we learn of a cowardly young soldier in the army of Alexander the Great. Whenever the battle grew fierce, the young soldier would withdraw to safety. The general called him to account and asked, "What's your name, soldier?" When the timid soldier replied, "Alexander, sir," Alexander the Great sternly warned him, "Either change your name or change your ways."

Never forget the name you bear - you are a "Christian". If you want to find joy in that relationship, take time regularly to read God's Word. Prayerfully consider how you might live out that Word so you will show those around you what it means to be called by His name.

**Pray:** thanking God that His Word is my joy and delight.

**Reflect:** do I live up to the name Christian?

*My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from me, nor is their sin concealed from my eyes. (v.17)*

A man went to steal some corn from his neighbour's field. As a safeguard, he took his little boy with him to keep a lookout. Before beginning the heist, the man looked all around. Not seeing anyone, he was just about to fill his bag when his son cried out, "Daddy, there's one way you haven't looked yet!" The father, supposing that someone was coming, asked his son which way he meant. The young lad answered, "You haven't looked up!" Conscience-stricken, the father took his boy by the hand and hurried home without the corn he had planned to take.

The people of Jeremiah's day were equally sure that they could commit their evil deeds without anyone knowing. But God warned them through His prophet that none of their iniquities were hidden from Him. Whichever way they might turn, whatever wickedness they might perpetrate, God's eye was on them. Even if they sought to hide under the waters, on the mountains or in a hole in the ground, God knew where to find them. Escape from His watchful gaze was impossible.

Technology today has increased astoundingly. Plastic surgeons can alter a person's appearance, and counterfeiters can provide fake identification. But God can't be eluded. His watchful eye can see through any disguise. The one who has deceived those around him has yet to reckon with the One above him. Others may be baffled, but God knows and sees it all.

If you feel a victim of deception, rest assured that God has not been taken in. He has seen every deceitful deed and will eventually bring the guilty party to account. No hiding place is so secure that God's eye cannot see; no guilty party so clever that God will not bring him to justice.

And of course, let's remember that God's eye sees everything. Its time to make sure we live for him all the time and confess our sin regularly for he knows it all.

**Pray:** asking God to forgive even your secret sin.

**Reflect:** do I try and hide things from God?

*The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve. (v.17)*

One summer the State of Delaware experimented with the honour system for 20 days on its motorway. Motorists without exact change at the automatic tollbooths were allowed to take return envelopes and post the money later. The Associated Press reported that in 20 days, more than 26,000 envelopes were taken but only 582 were returned. Of those returned, some had stamps or just pieces of paper instead of money. The experiment cost the state about \$4,000 before it was discontinued, and that didn't include the lost tolls.

Israel also demonstrated a dishonest heart. With their lips the people claimed to worship God, but all their actions indicated otherwise. God accused them of building altars and erecting wooden idols under every green tree (v.2). Jeremiah called their hearts “deceitful” and “beyond cure.” The word beyond cure is also translated “desperately wicked” and means “crooked, polluted or slippery.” They simply couldn't be trusted. But even more tragic, this situation was terminal. They were incurable. They had untrustworthy hearts, and that would lead to their deaths.

Down through the years many things have changed but one thing that hasn't is the human heart. We are still deceitful and desperately wicked. People steal, bully, rape, and kill. Are we really still beyond cure? The great news is we can be “cured” – our sin can be forgiven. Jesus died on the cross paying the price for our sin. All we have to do is repent of our sin and crown Jesus as Lord of our lives. Let us allow the Lord to examine our heart and reveal our sin.

Jeremiah was warning the people and urging them to repent before it was too late. May we do the same in our day and age.

**Pray:** asking God to examine your heart and mind that he may reveal the hidden sin within.

**Reflect:** have I allowed the Lord to change me?

*Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand. (v.6)*

The prophet Jeremiah learned something about God in a potter's shop (v.1-10). The craftsman was working at his wheel, shaping a pot from the clay that swirled through his hands. Then something went wrong. Perhaps there was some impurity in the clay. But the potter did not fling the clay aside; instead, he started forming another pot with a new design.

That's a picture of how our Lord works. He is continually shaping His people. He takes our flawed material and turns it into a new creation. Notice something else about the potter and his wheel. A potter must be willing to get his hands into the clay. God is involved with His creation - and God is involved with you. He does not stand at arm's length from His work. He gets His fingers and hands into it. He saw that we needed a Saviour to rescue us from our sin, so He sent His Son Jesus Christ to give His life in our place (John 3:16; Titus 2:14).

The Lord is like the potter; we are like the clay. God may have one intention for His people, but depending on how they respond (how yielding or intractable they are), God may rework the clay into something else. God illustrated this with two specific examples. If He had planned disaster for them, but they repented, then God would relent. If, however, He had planned blessing for them, but they persisted in evil, then God '*will reconsider the good I had intended*' (v. 10). How we respond to God's work in our life affects our experience of God's blessing or curse. But either way, God is still the potter in control, and we are simply the clay.

Jeremiah was sent again to rebuke Israel for their remarkable infidelity to the Lord, and to remind them once more of the coming judgment (v.13-17). Yet don't miss the underlying mercy available: even as marred clay, if they would repent, the Potter would relent.

**Pray:** asking God to turn you into the person he wants you to be.

**Reflect:** do I allow the Lord to be the potter and do his work in my life?

*Listen I am going to bring on this city and the villages around it every disaster I pronounced against them, because they were stiff-necked and would not listen to my words. (v.15)*

In the film Groundhog Day a weather reporter is sent to a backwater town to report on Groundhog Day. If the groundhog came out its cage then spring was on the way but if not winter was still there for another few months. He didn't like being there and treated everyone badly. He went and reported on the events but could not leave the town because of bad weather. He woke up the next morning to the same day all over again. This happened for some time until he accepted it, changed his ways and fell in love.

There must be a sense of Groundhog Day for Jeremiah and the people. First of all Jeremiah is sent back to the potter's shop but this time as a customer and not as a spectator. He is to take with him some of the Jewish elders. Knowing their evil plots against him this must have taken some courage and faith. Jeremiah began to preach and declared impending disaster because of what the kings of Judah had done: forsaken God, worshipped idols, desecrated the temple, murdered the innocent, and offered their children in altar fires dedicated to Baal.

Then when he made it out of there and returned to the city, he went to the temple and declared the same message. Groundhog Day for the people as they heard Jeremiah share once more that they were wicked and God was going to bring disaster on them.

Can nations and individuals sin so greatly that even God can't restore them? Yes, they can. As long as the clay is pliable in the hands of the potter, he can make it again if it's marred (18:4), but when the clay becomes hard, it's too late to reform. Let's make sure we stay pliable in the potter's hand, and let's keep warning the world around that they might turn back to God.

**Pray:** thanking God for his patience, grace and mercy.

**Reflect:** am I still pliable in the potter's hand?

*O LORD you deceived me and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. (v.7)*

Fred and Ethel Mertz and Ricky and Lucy Ricardo are traveling by train to the Super Bowl. At the station Fred and Ethel each buy a ticket and watch as Ricky and Lucy buy just one ticket. “How are the two of you going to travel on only one ticket?” asks Fred, astonished at what he is seeing.

“Watch and learn,” answers Lucy. They all board the train. Fred and Ethel take their respective seats but Ricky and Lucy cram into a toilet together and close the door. Shortly after the train has departed, the conductor comes around collecting tickets. He knocks on the toilet door and says, “Ticket, please.” The door opens just a crack and a single arm emerges with a ticket in hand. The conductor takes it and moves on.

The Mertzes see this happen and agree it was quite a clever idea, so after the game they decide to try a similar plan on the return trip. When they get to the station they see the Ricardo’s at the window buying a single ticket for the return trip. To their astonishment, the Ricardo’s see that the Mertzes don’t buy any ticket at all. “Aren’t you taking a terrible chance by traveling without a ticket?” says Lucy. “Live and learn,” answers Ethel.

When they board the train the Mertzes cram themselves into a toilet and the Ricardo’s cram into another toilet just down the way. Shortly after the train leaves the station, Fred leaves their toilet and walks over to the Ricardo’s toilet, knocks on their door and says, “Ticket, please.”

Jeremiah feels tricked by God. He feels God has deceived him into serving him but of course as we look back at chapter 1 this is nonsense. He is basically complaining because things are tough. God told him they would be. Jeremiah decides he will quit and not speak of the Lord but the Lord’s word burns in his heart and he carries on as before. When we feel let down and when we are struggling the best thing to do is what Jeremiah did – he went straight to the Lord and talked to him about it. Stick in there...God will give you the strength you need each day.

**Pray:** asking God for strength to keep serving him.

**Reflect:** does God’s Word burn in my heart? Then share it.

*This is what the LORD says: see I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death. (v.8)*

According to Aesop's fables, a long time ago when the world was young, the birds and the beasts were engaged in a bitter war. The bat, not wanting to be on the losing side - whichever that might turn out to be - tried to be on both sides. Whenever the birds won a battle, he would fly with them, telling everyone he was a bird. When the beasts won, he would walk around, assuring everyone that he was a beast. Because he refused to make a choice, he was rejected by both the birds and the beasts. From that day on, according to Aesop, the bat has had to go into hiding, living in dark caves, only daring to come out at night.

God instructed Jeremiah to put before the Israelites a choice. The armies of Nebuchadnezzar surrounded the city of Jerusalem. Those who defected to the Babylonians, God said, would be spared; those who stayed in the city were doomed. This was the very opposite of what the people expected. Surely God would not allow His holy city to be conquered. They were faced with the choice of believing God as He spoke through Jeremiah or their false prophets, who assured them Jerusalem would not fall. One way was life, the other way was death, and there was no middle ground.

There are still many false prophets in the world. They speak eloquently of what God has done or will do. But their words don't square with God's words as found in the Bible. To choose the former is to choose death; to choose the latter is to choose life...but a choice must be made. Taking both sides is not an option.

Have you decided yet what you will choose? Make your choice today. Will it be the wisdom of the world, which brings the way of death? Or will it be the wisdom of God's Word, which brings the way of life? The choice is yours, but a choice must be made. You can't have it both ways. You cannot be like the bat and have a foot in two camps.

**Pray:** thanking God for giving you life in all its fullness.

**Reflect:** am I fully following God and living for Him?