



BIBLE LENS

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Shining a light on the weekly Bible Lessons published in the *Christian Science Quarterly*[®]

Love

January 24–30, 2022

from the **Golden Text**

[Psalms 36:7](#)

How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!

Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings.

—New King James Version[®]

Precious is translated from the Hebrew adjective *yāqār*. Sometimes rendered *excellent* or *priceless*, *yāqār* appears in accounts of the costly gemstones that adorned the Temple (see [II Chronicles 3:6](#)) and in Isaiah's portrayal of Zion's cornerstone (see [Isaiah 28:16](#)). God's lovingkindness is more highly treasured than the most valuable material possessions.

Wings are a frequent symbol in Scripture, especially of divine protection and shelter. In addition to biblical metaphors of mother birds, images of winged cherubim in Jewish places of worship evoke safety and security.

from the **Responsive Reading**

[Psalms 145:8](#)

The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion.

Psalm 145, like many psalms, praises God's goodness and love. But it is distinguished by its emphasis on His allness, repeating the word *all* multiple times. And with its placement right before the final hymns in the collection (146–150), this psalm can be seen as laying the groundwork for the refrain "Praise ye the Lord" in each of those poems.

While graciousness indicates courtesy and kindness today, its use in scriptural depictions of God pertains to divine grace—His attribute of merciful love. *Hannûn*, the term rendered *gracious* here, always refers to God in the Hebrew Bible (see other examples in [II Chronicles 30:9](#); [Joel 2:13](#)). It is often combined with God’s qualities of compassion, lovingkindness, and righteousness. ([Psalms 145:8](#) is reminiscent of God’s self-identification in [Exodus 34:6, 7](#).)

[Psalms 40:10, 13](#)

I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation. . . . Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me: O Lord, make haste to help me.

A heartfelt petition for help is bolstered by the poet’s conviction that God will once again demonstrate His righteousness in coming to His people’s aid. The writer’s confidence in this deliverance is based on precedent. One commentator characterizes God’s previous saving acts this way: “It happened at the exodus; it happened with the return from exile; it happened in the psalmist’s life—God sets things right.”

In the phrase “Be pleased,” the word *pleased* is translated from the Hebrew verb *rāsâ*. Earlier in this psalm a related noun (*rāsôn*) is rendered *will*: “I delight to do thy will [*rāsôn*], O my God” (v. 8, [citation 18](#)). Both terms convey pleasure, delight, and acceptance.

[Psalms 69:16, 30](#)

Hear me, O Lord; for thy lovingkindness is good: turn unto me according to the multitude of thy tender mercies. . . . I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving.

“In the book of Psalms,” remarks a scholar, “to live is to praise God, and to praise God is to live. Thus, even though the psalmist remains threatened and persecuted, he or she lives by entrusting life and future to God.” Where the first 29 verses of [Psalm 69](#) consist largely of complaint and regret, the author concludes with a celebration of God’s loving nature.

Along with [Psalm 22](#), this psalm is one of the most often cited or referenced in the New Testament. Some examples are verse 4 ([John 15:25](#)), verse 9 ([John 2:17](#); [Romans 15:3](#)), and verse 21 ([John 19:29](#)).

from **Section 1**

1 | [John 4:16](#)

We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love.

Translation

We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love

—New Living Translation

With the assertion “We have known and believed” the writer exhibits the confidence typical of early Christian leaders. A scriptural authority notes: “Christian theology (4:7–12) and Christian experience (4:13–16) alike demonstrate that God is love and the origin of all love. Thus, . . . gospel and ethic coincide—in love.”

The statement “God is love” is found only in First John. However, God’s love is honored throughout the Hebrew Bible and is a fundamental theme in Jesus’ teachings.

2 | Psalms 111:1, 2

Praise ye the Lord. I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation. The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.

Translation

Praise the LORD !

*I will thank the LORD with all my heart
as I meet with his godly people.*

How amazing are the deeds of the LORD !

All who delight in him should ponder them.

—New Living Translation

assembly: gathering of people

the upright: those who are honest and just

3 | Psalms 33:6, 9

By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. . . . For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.

To the Hebrew people, God’s Word was more than an utterance; the Word itself had power. In the midst of countless myths attempting to explain the beginnings of the universe, Israel alone attributed creation to the Word of the one God.

“The breath of his mouth” recalls [Genesis 1:2](#), where the Hebrew term rendered *breath* (*rû^a h*) is translated *spirit*. The “spirit of God” moves—and brings all creation into existence.

from **Section 2**

5 | [Psalms 42:5, 8](#)

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance. . . . The Lord will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.

Translation

*Why, my soul, are you so dejected?
Why are you in such turmoil?
Put your hope in God, for I will still praise him,
my Savior and my God. . . .
The LORD will send his faithful love by day;
his song will be with me in the night—
a prayer to the God of my life.*

—Christian Standard Bible

In this and the following psalm (originally a single poem), the writer succumbs three times to a sense of desperation (see [v. 11](#); [43:5](#))—but in each instance, he rises again to faith. One scholar observes, “. . . the psalmist in his refrain gently chides his soul for its restlessness and expresses the confident hope that he will again sing the Lord’s praise in the temple.”

Verse 5 is echoed in Jesus’ appeal in the garden of Gethsemane: “My soul is exceeding sorrowful” ([Mark 14:34](#)). Though centuries apart, both cries acknowledge God’s supremacy even while in the depths of anguish.

Mention of day and night to represent all time is a merism—a figure of speech that employs contrasts to define a larger idea. Other biblical examples are “heaven and earth” for all creation ([Psalms 69:34](#)) and “my downsitting and mine uprising” for all of one’s actions ([139:2](#)). Verse 8 makes clear that God’s blessings and care are constant.

cast down: discouraged

disquieted: disturbed; restless; uneasy

7 | [Isaiah 40:11](#)

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

Translation

He tends his flock like a shepherd:

He gathers the lambs in his arms

and carries them close to his heart;

he gently leads those that have young.

—New International Version

8 | [1 Kings 17:1, 8–16](#)

Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word. . . . And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until

the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah.

Elijah appears abruptly here, with no previous reference in Scripture, and remains prominent through [II Kings 2:11](#). His first words—to Ahab, seventh king of Israel—identify him as a prophet of Yahweh. Although Ahab is an Israelite monarch, he has allowed idol worship throughout the kingdom. By announcing God’s control of the dew and rain, Elijah refutes the notion that the Canaanite storm god, Baal, has any influence.

The story of Elijah and the widow is the first of a series of manifestations of God’s might by the prophet, a sequence that includes the indisputable exposure of the inefficacy of Baal worship at Mount Carmel (see [I Kings 18:17–39](#)). In [chapter 17](#), Elijah’s authority and God’s supremacy are repeatedly confirmed with such phrases as “according to the word of the Lord.” Later, after the healing of her son, the widow affirms, “Now by this I know . . . that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth” ([v. 24](#)). As she is probably not of the Jewish faith, her confession is particularly meaningful—and it contrasts conspicuously with the apostasy of Ahab.

Zarephath was a small Phoenician village, located north of Israel on the Mediterranean Sea (between the two large cities of Tyre and Sidon, or Zidon). It was renowned for colored glass vessels made there, and is thought to have produced dyes of deep purple from local plants and seashells. In the New Testament it is also called by the Greek form of its name, Sarepta (see [Luke 4:26](#)).

fetch: go and get; bring

morsel: bit

cruse: small earthenware pot or jar

wasted not: did not run out

from **Section 3**

9 | [Psalms 51:1, 10, 12](#)

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. . . . Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Translation

Have mercy on me, God, according to your faithful love! . . .

Create a clean heart for me, God;

put a new, faithful spirit deep inside me! . . .

*Return the joy of your salvation to me
and sustain me with a willing spirit.*

—Common English Bible

10 | [Mark 1:40–42](#)

There came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.

In ancient Israel, leprosy was considered an outward sign of inner corruption. Apparently deeming himself a sinner, the leper doesn't ask Jesus if he *could* heal him; instead, he asks whether Jesus *would* heal him. The Master's compassion impels him to reach out and touch the man, violating the strict taboo regarding lepers (see [Leviticus, chaps. 13, 14](#))—and his understanding of man's innate purity brings healing.

11 | [Luke 12:32](#)

Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Jesus' declaration follows the charge "Seek ye the kingdom of God" (v. 31). A Bible authority explains: "On the one hand, disciples should 'strive' for the kingdom. On the other hand, they are assured that it is God's purpose to give us the kingdom The two verses neatly balance the indicative and the imperative, promise and command."

The flock image signifies the community of the faithful. Paul offers this caution: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God" ([Acts 20:28](#)), and [I Peter 5:2](#) admonishes, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly."

Eudokeō, the Greek verb translated "it is . . . good pleasure," means to be pleased or willing to do something. It is the term God uses in His commendation at Jesus' baptism: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased [*eudokeō*]" ([Matthew 3:17](#)).

from **Section 4**

12 | [Psalms 86:12, 15](#)

I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore. . . . Thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.

Translation

I will give thanks to you with all my heart, O Lord my God.

I will honor you forever

you, O Lord, are a compassionate and merciful God.

You are patient, always faithful and ready to forgive.

—GOD’S WORD Translation

Single-minded devotion to God is a theme throughout Hebrew Scripture—often depicted by references to the heart (see examples in [Deuteronomy 6:5](#); [Psalms 9:1](#); [Jeremiah 32:39](#)).

Like [Psalms 145:8](#) (Responsive Reading), verse 15 recalls God’s description of Himself to Moses on Mount Horeb (see [Exodus 34:6](#)). In this list, *longsuffering* alludes to patience and forbearance. Its noun form occurs several times in the New Testament as a Christly virtue (see one instance in [Ephesians 4:2](#)).

13 | I Timothy 1:15

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Translation

This is a statement that can be trusted and deserves complete acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, . . .

—GOD’S WORD Translation

14 | Luke 7:37–44, 47, 50

A woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? . . . Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: . . . And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.

Even as he hosts Jesus, Simon the Pharisee evidently doubts the Master's spiritual status: "if he were a prophet." (See other mentions of Jesus as a prophet in [4:24–27](#); [13:33](#); [24:19](#); [Acts 3:22, 23](#); [7:37](#).) He finds support for his skepticism in Jesus' acceptance of a sinner's touch—in Jewish belief, an act that renders him impure (see [Leviticus 5:2, 3](#)). But Jesus' approval of the penitent woman, as well as his reading of Simon's thoughts, decisively demonstrates his spirituality.

In his parable, Jesus likens God's grace to forgiveness of a large debt. (This analogy would probably have resonated with Simon, given Rome's heavy taxation and the resulting accumulation of debts.) Then the Savior asks, "Seest thou this woman?" According to a commentary, this question exposes the disparity between Simon's and Jesus' view of her. Simon sees an undeserving sinner; Jesus perceives a repentant heart, expressed in a public outpouring of thankfulness.

alabaster: nearly transparent white stone

ointment: oily substance used to soften or treat skin

creditor: person to whom money is owed

from **Section 5**

15 | [Zephaniah 3:17](#)

The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.

Translation

The LORD your God is in your midst—a warrior bringing victory.

*He will create calm with his love;
he will rejoice over you with singing.*

—Common English Bible

16 | Acts 5:12, 16–20

By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; . . . There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one. Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

Scholars point out some irony in this account. The Sadducees, who imprisoned the apostles, did not accept the reality of angels (see [Acts 23:8](#))—the very means of reversing the Sadducees’ mandate and freeing the prisoners.

To Christians and most Jews, angels were heavenly messengers. The words translated *angel* in Scripture (Hebrew, *mal’ak*; Greek, *aggelos*) both signify *messenger*. In Hebrew Bible and New Testament records, angels bring good news, warnings, comfort, guidance, and protection (see instances in [Genesis 19:1–22](#); [I Kings 19:1–8](#); [Luke 1:26–38](#); [Acts 10:1–8](#); [Acts 27:21–25](#)). They were eminently apparent in Jesus’ life, from the events surrounding his birth to his resurrection. And they appear dozens of times in the apocalyptic visions of Revelation.

This is the first of three stories of the imprisonment of followers of Christ. In this case, a group is detained. Later, Peter (see [Acts 12:1–11](#)) and then Paul and Silas (see [16:22–26](#)) are jailed. Each time, divine power frees these believers.

from Section 6

18 | Psalms 40:8, 11

I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart. . . . Let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me.

Translation

*“My God, I want to do what you want.
Your teachings are in my heart.”
... Let your love and truth always protect me.*

—International Children’s Bible

The Psalmist is describing a total surrender of personal goals and desires. When this release happens, God’s instructions do not seem burdensome, but are, as one scriptural authority suggests, “a call to a joyous, active life arising out of the sentiments of a heart that knows itself to be at one with the will (law) of God.”

19 | [Psalms 17:8](#)

Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings.

Translation

*Protect me as you would protect your own eye.
Hide me under the shadow of your wings.*

—New Century Version

Read a related poem, “[Love’s call](#)” by Carol Earle Chapin, at jsh.christianscience.com/loves-call

Resources quoted in this issue

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