

FALL 2025

STANDFIRM

God's Challenge for Today's Man



Devotional Writers for This Issue

Randy Breedlove is the Senior Pastor of Mexia Baptist Church and lives in Monroeville, Ala.

Vito Carlin is a Bible teacher and writer and lives in Murfreesboro, Tenn.

Joseph Cottle is a minister and the Audio, Video, and Lighting Director at LifeMission Church in the greater Kansas City area.

Daryl Crouch is Executive Director of Everyone's Wilson and the Everyone's Welcome Network, a community gospel movement located in Wilson County, Tenn.

Steve Davis is the retired Founding Director of Justice and Mercy International and lives in Granbury, Texas.

Scott Douglas is the Pastor of First Baptist Church in Fairview Heights, Ill.

Matt Duckett is the Associate Pastor of Discipleship at Metro East Baptist Church in Wichita, Kans.

Dietrich Gruen is a freelance writer and Bible study materials editor and lives in Madison, Wis.

Stephen LeFeuvre is an elder at Emmanuel Church and the founding Headmaster of Hope Academy and Hill Cross Day Care Center in Gqeberha, South Africa.

Alex León is the Connections Pastor at Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova, Tenn.

Grant Medford is the Pastor to Parents and Family Discipleship at Living Hope Baptist Church in Bowling Green, Ky.

Walter Norvell is a retired Christian Ministries professor and lives in Bull Shoals, Ark.

Cody Strawser is a freelance writer and lives in Ashland, Ohio.

Matt Tullos is the Stewardship Specialist for the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board in Franklin, Tenn.

Matthew Watson is a communications associate for a foster care ministry and a bivocational minister and lives in San Antonio, Texas.

Glen Whatley is a church planter and Director of The Gathering Place Network in Pineville, La.

Martin Wiles is the Pastor of Buffalo Baptist Church in McCormick, S.C., and an English teacher at a Christian school in Greenwood, S.C.

Rhett Wilson is a writer/editor and bivocational pastor living in Lancaster, S.C.

WHAT MATTERS

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to
gain what he cannot lose. – Jim Elliot

www.lifeway.com

Fall 2025

1 Samuel 26:7-21

Saul responded, "I have sinned. Come back, my son David, I will never harm you again because today you considered my life precious. I have been a fool! I've committed a grave error" (v. 21).

Repentance changes lives.

I am fascinated by alpine headwaters — the canyons that are tucked away high in the mountains where winter snow gathers into small unnamed streams. Each little stream runs downhill, collecting water from other streams and forming creeks that collect again to form some of the mightiest rivers of the American West — the Arkansas, the Rio Grande, and the Missouri. In "The Road Not Taken," Robert Frost said that "way leads on to way," and like the momentum of those little streams flowing downhill, sometimes one thing in life leads to another. A small lie turns into a cover-up. One compromise snowballs into more compromises. A hidden sin erodes character like a neglected dam. And suddenly, life is flooded with consequences. The choices a man makes early in his life might ripple across years, making it easy to wonder if the waters will ever be calm again. But life is not predetermined like so many streams, creeks, and rivers to flow along the path of least resistance. Why? Because repentance can change lives.

Saul's path might have changed had he clung to the repentance he promised in this verse. I have to wonder if the Lord might have relented, letting Saul remain king, just as the Lord relented with the Ninevites, with King Ahab, and so many others who earnestly sought forgiveness and repentance. Had Saul found genuine repentance, perhaps he wouldn't have consulted with the witch just two chapters later or wouldn't have died by suicide to end his tragic story. What a kind Father we have not to consider our stubborn choices and even outright rebellion to be final. In this Scripture and the other stories mentioned, He is eager for us to turn to Him and choose the good path of repentance that leads us back into communion with Him so that we can walk in His good favor.

Father, lead me to have a heart of repentance that turns from foolishness.

CONSIDER THIS

- **Read:** 1 Samuel 26:7-21.
- **Where in your life do you need repentance to change your path right now?**
- **In the past years, how have you seen the mercy of God after you repented?**

Zephaniah 2:1-7

The seacoast will become pasturelands with caves for shepherds and pens for sheep (v. 6).

God is looking for shepherd hearts.

I had a shepherding experience as a child, sitting on a hill overlooking a parcel of prime northeastern Michigan pastureland that belonged to my grandfather. From the hill I could see distant stands of hardwood and white pines and blue spruce covering up a gullied creek. Grandpa's quarter horses grazed contentedly in the late summer sun, their tails swishing at flies and mosquitoes. I was not really a shepherd, nor did the horses even need shepherding; they could handle themselves. But I felt like a shepherd, and I thought about David and what his life was like living in open fields under the sun, moon, and stars. It seems the Lord had a particular affinity for shepherds. I suppose it's because shepherds cared for God's creatures and shared a special relationship with the earth, knowing where the good grass was, where predators roamed for prey, and which canyons were safe for a sleeping flock. In a way, shepherds had returned to Eden, living from God's provision on the earth while tending its creatures as the coastal cities of the Philistines would be destroyed and turned back into pastures to be occupied by sheep and shepherds.

Today's passage carries a decree of the Lord's judgment, but also a plan to restore the land from its wickedness. It makes me wonder how we, as men of God, can take on the heart of a shepherd. Instead of striving for success and running after the gods of our consumerist society, we can sit in the presence of the Lord on His hill, tend the flocks He's given us — our marriages, our children, our church communities, and our neighbors. That is not the world's way, but I have a notion that it is the way of the Lord — to live from a heart that trusts Him to provide our needs and bring us peace, which is what the people of this world really need if they are to ever be restored.

Lord, set me on the hill of Your provision and peace to shepherd others.

CONSIDER THIS

- **Read:** Zephaniah 2:1-7.
- **Who in your life is an example of a good shepherd?**
- **How can you take on the heart of a shepherd in your life?**

TUESDAY • SEPTEMBER 23**Matthew 13:18-23**

"But the one sown on the good ground—this is one who hears and understands the word, who does produce fruit and yields: some a hundred, some sixty, some thirty times what was sown" (v. 23).

Becoming good soil requires intentional work.

I have soft grass in my backyard this year, which is a minor miracle. I have to admit it's somewhat accidental. No one told me five years ago when I moved to the Kansas City suburbs that I'd have to become a grass farmer. I'm not good at it, and the soil here in Kansas doesn't like to grow grass, a bit of irony given the state's reputation for wide-open prairies. The soil is silty, and when laid bare it turns concrete hard with desert-like cracks in the rainless late summer, but then mucks into a persistent and odorous mud after a couple of passing storms. The grass needs constant care. This past summer was particularly wet, and a friend gave me one of those D.I.Y. sprinkler systems, so I've been able to keep the fickle grass in a state of relative care. It's ridden with clover, henbit, crabgrass, and bare spots from kids and the dog, but it looks alright from the correct angle, and it's pleasant to sit on. What more do you need out of grass?

Some years it's easy to be good soil — the kind Jesus talked about in today's passage. Good rain and mild temperatures make for lush, green grass and the whole process is light work, but the dry years require a disciplined heart set on the ongoing work of watering and weeding. Likewise, our hearts need tending, just as the grass that guys like me neglect amid the demands of parenting and working. I must daily tend to my heart's soil by returning to the presence of Christ in prayer, in Scripture, and in the fellowship of those who love me and whom I love: my spouse, my children, and my friends. I must daily set my heart on rooting out weeds of pride, selfishness, vain ambition, and discontent. Good grass takes consistent intention; so does a good heart.

Lord, set my heart on becoming good soil so I can flourish with the growth You desire for me.

CONSIDER THIS

- **Read:** Matthew 13:18-23.
- **What are some weeds in your heart's soil you might need to pull?**
- **Whom can you consistently connect with in your life who carries the presence of Christ?**

Psalm 27:1-6

I have asked one thing from the Lord; it is what I desire: to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, gazing on the beauty of the Lord and seeking him in his temple (v. 4).

God's beauty overcomes our stresses.

The desk in my office sits under a window, and from that window I can see song birds rest and sing on tree limbs, watch the wind stir leaves of oak trees on the lawn, and take in light from the blue sky. It's a beautiful gift I particularly relish, especially on stressful days. My life — a dad of four, a full-time ministry director, and a freelance writer — isn't any more stressful than the next person's, I suppose, but the daily stresses of marriage, kids, work, bills, errands, and chores can easily overwhelm the best of men. However, I'm certainly not experiencing the psalmist's sort of stress from this passage: the fear of enemies, destruction, and death. It's just that life is a lot to deal with, and sometimes finding the beauty of the Lord in His temple is the last thing on my mind.

That is one reason why I'm thankful for my window. The birds, the oak trees, and the blue sky remind me of the Creator who spoke it all into being. I'm thankful for my family because I remember how my kids smile when they see me after work and how my wife fills our home with her beauty each morning when she greets us all. It's in those times I realize I have gazed on the beauty of the Lord resting in hidden places that I often overlook. His beauty is waiting for me if I'm willing to take just a minute and notice it. It's in the noticing that the beauty of the Lord undoes the twisting and wringing of my soul from the daily pressures of providing for my family and being a husband and father. That beauty offers solace in a place where God's presence always waits for His children to join Him, and in that presence is fullness of joy. Peace is one fruit of His Spirit, and it's hanging off every nearby branch, always ripe for the taking.

Lord, help me notice Your beauty that surrounds me every day in overlooked places.

CONSIDER THIS

- **Read:** Psalm 27:1-6.
- **Where do you think you overlook the beauty of the Lord in your life?**
- **Where can you find a daily secret place to rest in His presence, even for a few minutes?**

Matthew 6:9-13

"Give us today our daily bread" (v. 11).

Rely on God to provide.

At the time of this writing, the stock market dipped recently, erasing nearly three trillion dollars from the global economy according to financial reports. Of course, the news media went nuts for a day or two, stoking fears about a recession and what that might mean. For providers of families, those financial fears can be all too real. Yet, the single line from today's verse in the Lord's Prayer has never changed, and it's been prayed over and over by countless saints for 20 centuries. What a curious prayer to pray when it's weighed against cash flows, 401(k)s, index funds, and investment portfolios. Our culture is obsessed with financial independence, climbing corporate ladders, and buying bigger houses and better cars. I have to ask myself if I really mean that prayer when I pray it, because it implies I would be content knowing today's basic needs are supplied without giving much thought to tomorrow, and that God's daily provision is enough. If I'm honest, I'm not OK with not knowing about tomorrow's bank account balance. I crave control!

Most Christians are familiar with that craving, making this prayer all the more necessary. It forces us to admit we are not in control and that we need a good Father to provide for us. This prayer means I can only take so much credit for my financial successes, because I could not store resources without the kind provision of God. This prayer also calls my attention to the needs of those around me and away from a culture that shouts, "Me! Me! Me!" and, "More! More! More!" This prayer tells me I rely on God to provide for my family and our future, and His provision is fully sufficient for our contentment and happiness. This prayer is a provision all on its own, a means of grace to draw me closer to my Father who cares deeply for me.

Father, thank You for providing for me. I readily admit that I can't provide for myself on my own and need You.

CONSIDER THIS

- **Read:** Matthew 6:9-13.
- **Are you relying on God to care for your needs or are you relying on yourself?**
- **If your needs are provided, are you being generous with any extra that is stored up?**