
**10 VERSES
TO MEMORIZE
AS A FAMILY
THIS SUMMER**

INTRODUCTION: WHY MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE WITH YOUR CHILDREN?



THE PSALMIST said, “Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day” (Ps. 119:97). He understood the benefit of meditating on Scripture to gain the wisdom of God. This wisdom is never meant to make us prideful or arrogant. Instead, meditating on the word should transform us more and more into the image of Jesus, our Savior. Memorizing Bible passages is a great way to meditate on God’s word, and it is one of the ways God passes the faith on to the next generation.

Writing to Timothy, Paul said, “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well” (2 Tim. 1:5). How did this faith come to dwell in Timothy? Just a little later, Paul would say, “from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). God planted the seed of faith in Timothy through the faithful labors of his grandmother and mother. As they watered Timothy with the word, God brought about spiritual growth.

As parents, we can’t cause our children to be born again, but we can acquaint them with the word through which God affects the new birth. Peter said, “you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God” (1 Pet. 1:23)

That’s why I’m excited that you’ve picked up this resource, “10 Verses to Memorize As a Family This Summer,” written by William Boekestein (pastor at Immanuel Fellowship Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan) and Dan Warne (pastor at Christ Presbyterian Church in Temecula, California). We believe that these verses in particular will help to ground you and your children in the “ABCs” of the faith. These passages will help your children understand who God is and what the gospel is. I’ve had the privilege of going through some of these passages with my own children, and with you I pray that God would use his word to ignite faith in our families.

May God bless you as you begin!

Pastor Adriel

HOW DID EVERYTHING BEGIN?

HEBREWS 11:3

“BY FAITH we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” (Heb. 11:3)

It’s hard for us to imagine a time when everything we see was not. And what we see is only an impossibly tiny fraction of what is. To short-lived people, the universe feels eternal. And if it isn’t, what can explain its beginning?

The answer is a matter of faith for everyone: None of us witnessed creation’s birth (Job 38:4), and the experiment isn’t repeatable. But God tells us what happened. The Bible’s first words are, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). Creation is his first example of what it means to live by faith as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). The early church put creation first on the list of what Christians must believe: “God the Father Almighty” is the “Maker of heaven and earth.”

Creation is an all-or-nothing doctrine. Either God is the creator of all things or there’s no God, at least not one who deserves full allegiance from every creature. If we doubt that God created the visible world, how can we know that he’s making a new heaven and earth that can’t yet be seen? If we don’t believe in the first creation, what hope can we have of

becoming new creations ourselves (Gal. 6:15)? But people of faith confidently press on, desiring a better, heavenly country prepared by the God who made this one (Heb. 11:16), eagerly anticipating their own re-creation (2 Cor. 5:4).

It’s hard not to sense the truth of divine creation (Rom. 1:19–20). But our sensory experience can only be transformed into trust, thanks, and praise when the Holy Spirit leads us to believe. Here’s what we believe: Merely by words spoken into nothingness, God made a universe that bends our minds both by its massiveness and its minute detail. And if he is “my God and Father for the sake of Christ his Son,” I can trust that he will “provide whatever I need for body and soul and will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends upon me in this vale of tears.”¹

“The great significance of the opening statements of the Bible lies in its teaching that the world had a beginning.”² God alone is eternal (1 Tim. 1:17). And the world will have an end (2 Peter 3:10). “The origin unfolds into consummation, and the end is already in the beginning.”³ In the end, each of us will stand before God to be judged by how we have used the light he gave us. Creation teaches us to prepare for that day by trusting in God through Christ, enjoying him and his countless gifts, and behaving wisely in his world.

1 Heidelberg Catechism, Q/A 26.

2 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), 130.

3 Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1977), 442.

2

WHO IS GOD?

1 TIMOTHY 1:17



“**TO THE KING** of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Tim. 1:17)

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”¹ God made people “that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him” (Acts 17:26–27). Knowing our maker is the first step toward knowing ourselves and the rest of our world.

It is not enough to believe in the existence of a god; even God’s fiercest enemies do better than that (James 2:19). We must know him. And in his word, God tells us how. Paul’s exclamation—prompted by his experience of divine mercy—is a crisp summary of how we should think of the Lord.

God is the only god. “I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God” (Isa. 45:5). Because humans are incurably religious, we shouldn’t be surprised at how many false gods are worshiped in the world. People believe in false gods because their darkened hearts mishandle the clear evidence for the real one. False gods are strong proof of the one true God, even as they are shabby recreations of him, like the result of drawing your best friend while blindfolded. Your friend is real even if your sketch is poor.

God is immortal and invisible. Curiously, Paul honors God by declaring what he’s not: corruptible and visible. Paul knew these divine traits from special revelation (Rom. 1:23; 1 Tim. 6:16). But he also knew that, because of God’s differences from us, it’s easier to say what he’s not. The sixteenth century Belgic Confession describes God as “incomprehensible, invisible, unchangeable, infinite” (art. 1). God cannot be neatly defined. Another historic catechism asks not, “*Who* is God?”, but, “*What* is God?”² Knowing God isn’t like picking a particular

person out of a crowd; it’s trying to figure out what kind of being he is.

God is the King of the ages. There are two ages: the present age of tension between good and evil, and the future age in which sin will be banished from the reconstituted world. God is unshakably enthroned as King over both. He laughs at those who resist his rule (Ps. 2:4).

God is worthy of our glory and honor. Those who come closest to what it means to see God are always struck by his infinite worth. The angels declare his holiness (Isa. 6:3). The redeemed in heaven fall “on their faces before the throne and [worship] God, saying, ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen’” (Rev. 7:11–12). Only when we reject any notion of a domesticated deity can we commune with him “in adoring silence” and unhindered praise.³

1 A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York, HarperCollins, 1961), 1.

2 Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q/A 4.

3 Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, vii.

3

WHAT IS NATURE SAYING?

PSALM 19:1



“**THE HEAVENS** declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” (Ps. 19:1)

Nature has a voice. It’s a loud voice. It goes through all the earth (Ps. 19:3–4) and can only be muted through strenuous suppression (Rom. 1:19). This voice sings the song of “the glory of [God’s] eternal power, wisdom and goodness.”¹ God’s masterpiece of creation is “like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God,”² like his precision, love of beauty, orderliness, dependability, originality, and much more.

Protestant Reformer John Calvin said that creation is like a majestic theatre.³ When David entered this theatre he was struck with God’s care of his people who, in comparison with the heavens, seem insignificant (Ps. 8:3–5). We are shocked by the number of stars we can see on a clear night. But even under perfect conditions, we can see only several thousand of the 100 billion stars in our galaxy alone. God brought Job into his theatre to challenge his pride: “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” (Job 38:4). How deep are those foundations? The deepest hole humans have dug—less than seven miles—is only a thousandth part of the way to the earth’s center. Studying creation should sober creatures and magnify the Creator. “How unreasonable is it that we should

delight in the world, and not much more in him that made it!”⁴

To be drawn to God through nature, we must learn from Scripture to observe nature. Stargazing helped Abraham begin to understand the magnitude of God’s covenantal plan of salvation (Gen. 15:5). David considered God’s heavens (Ps. 8:3) and listened to its speeches (Ps. 19:1–3). Solomon invites wisdom-seekers to consider the ant (Prov. 6:6). God illustrates his peoples’ backsliding through the migration patterns of storks, turtledoves, swifts, and swallows (Jer. 8:7). Jesus, too, assumed that his hearers were birdwatchers: “Consider the ravens” he exhorted (Luke 12:24). He insisted that they pay attention to the flowers: “Consider the lilies” he said (Luke 12:27). Jesus could teach about the Holy Spirit to people who spent time in the wind, hearing its sound, feeling its effects (John 3:8).

It’s not too narrow an application of the doctrine of creation to say, *Get outside! Take a walk in the woods. Gaze on the stars. Study the ants. Be still and listen.* Researchers have noted that nature walks expose you to “inherently fascinating stimuli” that “invoke attention modestly, allowing focused attention mechanisms a chance to replenish,” boosting concentration.⁵ By faith, your nature study will yield an even greater reward: a richer, deeper, more confident knowledge of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

1 Westminster Confession of Faith, 4.1

2 Belgic Confession, 2; Rom. 1:19–20.

3 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) e.g., 1.5.8; 1.6.2; 1.14.20; 2.6.1.

4 Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (London, Banner of Truth, 1965), 118.

5 Cal Newport, *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016), 147–48.

4

WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

2 TIMOTHY 3:16



“ALL SCRIPTURE is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” (2 Tim. 3:16)

Nature reveals God. As a worn inscription on an ancient tombstone hints at a craftsman’s work, so nature reveals a creator. But it doesn’t tell us his name or how we can become his friends. Because of sin, we now struggle to value nature’s “manifold witness to [God’s] great faithfulness, mercy, and love.”¹ But God has another witness. Here’s how John Calvin put it:

Just as ... those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the use of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispelled our dullness, clearly shows us the true God.²

In God’s general revelation (creation), his breath formed the universe. In his special revelation (Scripture), God’s breath wrote a story.

The Bible is God’s way of making “himself known to us more openly ... as much as we need in this life, for his glory and for the salvation of his own.”³ Scripture bears the marks of its human authors. But it’s God’s book, through and through: “For no prophesy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21). As God’s word, the Bible speaks with authority

on all matters “that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3).

Being “living and active” (Heb. 4:12), Scripture works in a variety of ways. As a teacher, it tells us what “to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires” of us.⁴ Because “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), it also reproves, or shows our fault (Rom. 3:20). But God doesn’t leave us in the misery of our failures. Scripture corrects us; it shows us the way to get back on the path of righteousness after we’ve lost our way. If we humble ourselves, God will exalt us (James 4:10). Finally, Scripture trains us in righteousness. As food nourishes our bodies, Scripture feeds our souls with the wisdom and fortitude necessary to live as we should. Under Scripture’s training we can become “complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17). God gives this promise: The one who hears his word and does what it says “will be blessed in his doing” (James 1:25).

Most importantly, the Scriptures reveal God’s plan to save sinners; they “are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 3:15). The Bible is mainly about Jesus (Luke 24:27, 44–47), “the Word” who “became flesh” (John 1:14). The Scriptures show us the way of eternal life. And that way is Jesus (John 5:39; 14:6).

1 Thomas O. Chisholm, in “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.”

2 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.6.1.

3 Belgic Confession, art. 2.

4 Westminster Shorter Catechism Q/A 3; Micah 6:8.

5

WHO IS JESUS?

MATTHEW 16:15-16



“**HE SAID** to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’” (Matt. 16:15–16)

The Bible is a story about the God who created, who governs everything by his providence, and who will one day transform heaven and earth into an eternal home for himself and his people (Rev. 21:1–3). And through general and special revelation, this God can be known even if the glass through which we see him is presently dim (1 Cor. 13:12). But though God has never been far from us (Acts 17:27), sensory creatures are accustomed to knowing in intimate closeness. How could we love God like that? The answer is Jesus.

There is only one, true, eternal God (Deut. 6:4). But he is a Trinity, revealing himself in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). And while “no one has ever seen God,” Jesus “has made him known” (John 1:18). If we see Jesus, we see the Father (John 14:9). And his disciples were adamant: “We have looked upon ... the word of life” (1 John 1:1–4). But you don’t have to have seen Jesus with your eyes in order to know him and the Father. “Blessed are those,” said Jesus, “who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

Many people in Jesus’ day, even those who had seen him in the flesh, thought he was just one of God’s messengers (Matt. 16:13–14). But Simon Peter knew better. God had revealed to him that Jesus is the Christ. *Christ* is a loaded word. It’s the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *Messiah*, which means “anointed one.” Jesus is the promised “anointed one” who fulfilled the Old Testament offices of prophet, priest, and king. He is the blessed “King who comes in the name of the Lord” (Luke 19:38). He is the great priest “who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). And he is the last prophet, God’s final

Word (Heb. 1:1–2). Jesus is the one true believers seek, and when they find, never forsake, knowing that he has “the words of eternal life” and is “the Holy One of God” (John 6:68–69).

And Jesus is “the Son of the living God.” When Scripture calls Jesus God’s only Son (John 3:16), begotten of the Father (Ps. 2:7), it isn’t saying that he came into being; it’s stressing his inseparable union with the Father and the Spirit. Jesus did become one of us, being born of the Virgin Mary. But he is God’s eternal Son, neither made nor created, but begotten from the Father before time.¹

Jesus was pleased with Simon’s answer (Matt. 16:17). And he promised that God’s church is immovably established on this confession of Christ (Matt. 16:18). So everyone who follows Peter in truly confessing Jesus Christ as Lord will be saved (Rom. 10:9).

¹ Athanasian Creed, 10, 22, 31.

6

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

1 PETER 2:24



“**HE HIMSELF** bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.” (1 Pet. 2:24)

The gospel is the good news that broke into this world gone desperately wrong. When Adam and Eve gave into temptation in the Garden of Eden, their sin brought a curse into the world (Gen 3:1–19). That which was to be life-giving became pain-inflicting. The harvest of the ground, meant to be life-sustaining fruitfulness, would become an exhausting part of our existence (Gen. 3:17–19). Childbirth, bringing new life into the world, would be excruciating and painful (Gen. 3:16). What would mankind have to show for this labor and toil and pain? “To dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19). And when Adam and Eve were sent away from the Garden, the way back home with God was barred by an angel with a flaming sword, picturing the curse of the broken law which no sinful human being could hope to overcome (Gen. 3:22–24).

The curse could only be broken by someone who didn’t deserve to bear it, taking its full penalty on himself. Peter speaks in terms of the curse when he says that Christ “bore our sins in his body on the tree.” This is curse-bearing language. Paul writes, citing Deuteronomy 21:23, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is

written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’” (Gal. 3:13).

The one who perfectly obeyed the law, and didn’t deserve to be inflicted with the pain of the curse, died in agony so that we might live the life we were created to live (2 Cor. 5:21). It’s worth remembering the words Jesus spoke to the penitent thief who hung next to him on the cross: “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). Through his cursed death on the cross—cursed finally and fully in the place of all who believe—Jesus walked through the flaming sword of God’s justice and opened the way to paradise. “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” Jesus says, “No one comes to the Father but through me” (John 14:6). That’s the good news—there’s a way back home again by faith in Jesus.

What Jesus accomplished for all who believe is not just reentrance into the blessing of God’s presence but a return to the blessed way of righteous living according to God’s law. It can no longer inflict judgment upon us because through his wounds we have been healed (Isa. 53:5). Christ has paid it all—our record of debt was nailed with Jesus to the cross (Col. 2:13–14). Now, rather than fear death, we can live to righteousness, because in him we have been made righteous (1 Cor. 1:30).

7

WHERE DOES WISDOM START?

PSALM 111:10



“**THE FEAR** of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!” (Ps. 111:10)

Wisdom starts with God. That sounds crazy to most people, because the wisdom of the world looks nothing like the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:18–21). In fact, the Bible says that many who claim to be wise are fools, precisely because they deny God as the beginning of wisdom (Ps. 14:1). If you want to be wise, you have to start with acknowledging God.

But you aren’t quite there if you just acknowledge God. Wisdom starts with fearing God. This isn’t the same as being afraid of God, since “Even the demons believe—and shudder!” (James 2:19). The fear that leads to wisdom acknowledges God’s holiness and his wrath against sinners (Ps. 5:5), but it’s the next step that’s important. The fear of the Lord that leads to wisdom requires running in a direction you might not think. Fearing the Lord doesn’t mean running away from him, but running to him (Isa. 45:22). Augustine wrote: “There is no place where you may flee from an angered God except to a God who is pacified. There is absolutely no place for you to flee to. Do you want to flee from him? Flee to him.”¹

A good example of two kinds of fear, one that leaves you condemned and one that leads to salvation, is found in Hebrews 12, where there is a description of two mountains (Heb. 12:18–24). The author presents Mt. Sinai and Mt. Zion as a way of describing the two ways people relate to God. Sinai, representing the law which we all have broken, will crush you in condemnation if you stay trembling beneath it (Heb. 12:18–21). But Zion, representing the place where Jesus’ blood cries out forgiveness for his people, is a place of rejoicing

(Heb. 12:22–24). What makes all the difference between these two mountains representing two ways to relate to God?

Jesus makes all the difference. 18th century Anglican Bishop George Horne puts it this way, “The “fear of God” is the first step to salvation, as it stirs a sinner to depart from evil, and to do good; to implore pardon, and to plead for grace; to hold fast to a Savior for the one, and to a Sanctifier for the other.”² God hasn’t changed—he’s still the consuming fire that set Sinai ablaze and strikes fear in the hearts of the wicked (Heb. 12:28–29). What changes—where wisdom begins—is a fear that leads to redemption by faith in God’s Son.

¹ Augustine, *Exposition on Psalm 74*.

² George Horne, *A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 408. Language updated.

8

WHAT ARE THE GREAT COMMANDMENTS?

MATTHEW 22:37-40



“AND HE SAID to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.’” (Matt. 22:37-40)

“Love is the grand secret of true obedience to God.”¹ At Sinai, God’s moral law was given in the form of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:2-17; Deut. 5:6-21). In Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus gives a concise and searching summary of this law, distilling it into two all-encompassing commandments: 1) Love God, and 2) Love your neighbor.

The love that God’s law demands presents a problem for approaching God, because we’re not loving by nature. We may love in a sense—the love that a mother has for her child, or the love between a husband and wife, or even the love friends have for one another. But sin disrupts true love for God and neighbor. Our love for the things of this world prevents true love of God (1 John 2:15) and our self-interested sinful tendencies produce hatred of our neighbor (Titus 3:3).

In Matthew 19, a rich young man came to Jesus and asked what he must do to inherit eternal life (Matt. 19:16-22). He prided himself on keeping many of God’s commandments, but

Jesus put his finger on a problem in his heart when he told him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” This isn’t a general command for everyone to obey. It was an application of the command to love your neighbor as yourself, applied to what Jesus knew was in the young man’s heart. Rather than express a generous love for his neighbor, he “went away sorrowful” (Matt. 19:22), because his attachment to things of this world proved he didn’t love his neighbor, and in truth, neither did he love God.

The young man’s problem couldn’t be solved by selling his possessions. What Jesus revealed in this encounter is that the law should bring us to the end of our confidence that we can inherit eternal life by keeping it. In fact, we can’t keep the law. Only the Spirit can produce love for God and neighbor: “The fruit of the Spirit is love...” (Gal 5:22).

When we learn this important lesson, we won’t have to go away sorrowful like the rich young man. We will instead run to Jesus for forgiveness—and for his righteousness applied to us—not by works, but by faith (Rom 3:21-26). As the Spirit produces fruit in us, we will carefully devote ourselves to keeping the great commandments: to love God and to love others (Titus 3:8).

¹ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Matthew*, 293.

9

WHAT IS THE GREAT COMMISSION?

MATTHEW 28:18-20



“**AND JESUS** came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’” (Matt. 28:18-20)

“Jesus’ universal Lordship now demands a universal mission.”¹ The Gospel of Matthew has been called the Gospel of the Kingdom. Its final verses, known as the Great Commission, bring this theme to a climax with this revelation: The cruel cross which left the disciples feeling defeated was in fact the path to their long-awaited Messiah’s victory.

They receive a commission from their king to be about the business of his kingdom. But this kingdom business looks a lot different than the sort of kingdom than many were anticipating. The Jews wanted a champion to fight for their earthly freedom—it’s no coincidence that, when presented with the choice to release Jesus or Barrabas, they demanded the release of the freedom-fighting zealot (John 18:40). But the kingdom that Jesus brought near (Luke 17:21) looked like freedom from

the kingdom of darkness (Col. 1:13), into the freedom found following him (John 8:36).

The methods of the kingdom are unlikely and unimpressive. They look more like what a rabbi would do than a revolutionary. Jesus tells the disciples to go and make more disciples, to baptize them in the triune name, and to teach them to live like citizens of the kingdom. While this may not look like a revolution by any earthly measure, the followers of Jesus would be known by their opponents as “These men who have turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6).

The Great Commission ends with a word of comfort for the disciples in their kingdom work, and for us as we continue the mission today: The King is always with us. When we follow the Great Commission, we aren’t building kingdoms that will rise and fall with our own commitment and consistency. We bring our lives under the authority of the King, and it is he who works through us. Our mission is to preach a gospel that carries his authority, to bring people into the ways of the King who rules over all things, and to teach the way of life he calls us to live.

1 R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, 419.

10

WHAT IS GOD'S WILL FOR ME?

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18



“REJOICE ALWAYS, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thess. 5:16-18)

When things are going well, it's easy to rejoice, to pray, and to give thanks. But Paul raises the bar when he says we should these things: “... always ... without ceasing ... in all circumstances.” Now that's a different story, isn't it?

Surely if anyone knew this was a hard thing to do, it was the apostle Paul. He was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19), beaten, and shipwrecked, (2 Cor. 11:25), sometimes narrowly escaping opponents who were furious with his gospel preaching (Acts 9:22-25). Is this what Paul had in mind when he wondered about the will of God for his life? Paul had scars that showed it's not always easy walking in God's will. Yet Paul calls us to joy, prayer, and gratitude—not just in the comfortable moments but even in the midst of tragedy, loss, and sorrow. He wrote similar instructions in his letter to the Christians in Rome: “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer” (Rom. 12:12).

When it comes to considering major life decisions, it's not always easy to answer the question, “What is the will of God for my life?” Maybe we wonder if we've made the right choice. But no matter the situation, joy, prayer, and gratitude are always the right answer.

Just one chapter earlier, Paul summarizes God's will for his people another way: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:3). Sanctification is a gracious work of God in us that makes us more and more willing and able to die to our former, sinful ways, and instead to live godly lives.¹ Growing in godliness doesn't mean getting out of hard times, but going to God in hard times. If you're learning to find joy in

God always, to go to him continually in prayer, and to thank him for his goodness in all things, then you can say with confidence that you're walking in God's will for you.

For example, consider this: What might it look like to “pray without ceasing?” Surely it doesn't mean we sit in silence with our hands folded praying all day long. We have too many other God-given responsibilities to imagine that's what Paul is saying. Puritan pastor Thomas Manton helpfully explained it this way: “All duties may be resolved into prayer and praise. Now as the life of a Christian is a life of love and praise, a kind of confession or hymn to God, so in other respects it is a prayer.”² Do you see? Praying is a way of life. The kind of life King David describes in Psalm 25:2: “Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.”

¹ Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q/A 34.

² Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, vol. 17, 493.

