2026 Monthly Devotions

November 1 -- 15 2026

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church
Hummelstown, PA
Pastor Dave Schreffler

November 1, 2026 – All Saints Day

So on this All Saints Sunday, it is appropriate to ask the question what is a Saint? I can give you a brief synopsis of how saints have been defined over the last two thousand years. In the first three hundred years of the early church, a saint was someone killed for the sake of Christ. They were the martyrs of the church, burned at the stake, tortured to death in gruesome ways. To qualify for sainthood in the first three hundred years of the church, you had to be killed for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Then, around the time of Emperor Constantine circa 317 CE, in the famous Edict of Milan, the Emperor legalized Christianity in part to bring together his empire. Now, the Roman Catholic Church began to canonize Saints. A chapel would be built to honor a saint and people also began to pray to the saints to intercede to God on their behalf. Praying to a saint who could intercede to God on your behalf became an important aspect of the Medieval Catholic Church, for some 1200 years – at least until the time of the Reformation. Martin Luther and other reformers did not like the idea of praying to and through the saints. They liked to believe that we could pray directly to God, and in the process of changing their thinking, the idea of what the meaning of a saint was changed as well. A saint then began to refer to one of our Christian loved ones who had died and gone on before us. Saints now began to refer to our loved family members who preceded us in death – mothers, fathers, grandparents, brothers and sisters. Today, we list saints as those within our church family as well as our personal family who have died – and we remember them on this All Saints Sunday.

So, I ask again, what is a saint? Some might still say that a saint is someone who lives with and puts up with an unbearable person. Some people would say that my wife is a saint to live with and put up with me. There is one thing about this definition of saint that is true – that saints do not have to be dead people – but can be living people who inspire us – people through whom the light of God shines and inspire us to be better people. When we pray the Apostles' Creed, we say, "I believe in…the communion of saints." The communion of saints is made up of men and women who have placed their hope in Jesus Christ and through Baptism, are his adopted sons and daughters. The communion of saints includes the living and the deceased, whether they are with G-d in heaven or continuing to live their lives of faith in this world. You see, when we remember our loved ones who have passed on from this world, not only do they live on in our collective memories, but their faithfulness, their perseverance, and their courage continue to assist us in our efforts to remain faithful to the Christian life.

My friends as we join ourselves to the slow, chugging train that is the end of our church year, and of course the end of 2022, I pray you will remember often the lives of your family and friends who lived lives worthy of the "communion of Saints". Let them be for you the inspiration you need to continue to live the Christ-like life.

Pastor Dave

November 2, 2026 – All Souls Day

The month of November begins with two days of remembrance: All Saint's Day traditionally celebrated on November 1, and All Soul's Day traditionally celebrated on November 2. So what is the difference between these two days? All Saint's Day and All Soul's Day are related, but they are two separate celebrations. On All Saint's Day we remember all the saints who lived before us, the saints who live now, and the saints yet to come. We remember those mentors of the faith who remind us how we're supposed to live. We are reminded to remember those who have impacted our lives, especially our lives of faith – people who have modeled for us the life of the faithful Christian.

On All Soul's Day we remember all people – all who have died whether of the faith or not asking G-d's mercy for them. We remember those people who have died before us and pray for their collective and individual souls through the grace of Christ. Of course the question we may ask is "why?" Why are these days important to the church?

All Souls' Day, Nov. 2, reminds us that in life and even in death, we are connected to each other. All Soul's Day brings an awareness to Christians in 21st century America the understanding that people from many cultures have expressed for thousands of years -- that the dead are bound still to the living, and the living to the dead.

From time immemorable, even before the appearance of our Scriptures, people everywhere intuited this connection and so developed many different rituals to remember their dead loved ones year after year. Time may dull our memories, but the presence of our loved ones remain – so it is appropriate we take one day out of each year to bind ourselves to all our dead -- and we do so most especially on All Souls' Day.

Pastor Dave

November 3, 2026 -- Devotions – Does the Bible Say…?

Does the Bible Say "Money is the Root of All Evil?

"Whoever teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that is in accordance with godliness, is conceited, understanding nothing, and has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words. From these come envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions, and wrangling among those who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains." 1 Timothy 6:3-10

We might call this kind of use of scripture as "Eisegesis" – you know, when someone needs some scripture to support their argument, so they take a line and use it out of context. After all, if it is in the Bible, it must be true, right? Look, we all know that money can be used in evil ways. Money can cause people to seek evil outcomes, and to do evil things. And, in the ever "soul-crushing" desire to have more and more "stuff", some people will be lured into evil deeds and decisions. But, my friends, money is not the root of all evil – that is not what Paul is saying. When you read the scripture, you see that he says *"…the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains."*

Paul does teach people to be content with what we have, not to get lost in seeking more and more, for *"Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it"*. In other words, empty handed have we come into this world, and we will go out of this world empty handed, as Martin Luther so famously said: *"We are all beggars"*.

My friends, we all need money to live. But we are not to live for money. Paul does not teach that rich people are going to hell, or that rich people should become poor to be closer to G-d. He does teach that those who have should be generous with and toward those who do not have – and that we must always thank G-d for the abundance of blessings, material and spiritual, that we have

been showered with. Money must not become a "god" for us – but we always thank G-d for the money we have – and then pray for the strength and guidance to share out of our abundance.

Pastor Dave

November 4, 2026 -- Devotions – Does the Bible Say…?

Does the Bible Say "Thou Shalt Not Kill?"

"Moses convened all Israel, and said to them: Hear, O Israel, the statutes and ordinances that I am addressing to you today; you shall learn them and observe them diligently. The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. Not with our ancestors did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today. The Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the fire. And he said: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you, so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder."
Deuteronomy 5:1-17 (not inclusive)

It is true, not all killing is murder. That may seem hard to accept, especially anyone who thinks that killing animals for people to eat is a type of "murder". However, if you have read even small parts of the Old Testament, you will understand that there is plenty of "G-d directed" killing – when the people come in to possess the Promised Land; and when the Israelites are in battle with their enemies, like when David kills Goliath.

There are two different Hebrew words used for the taking of life— "harag" is translated as "to kill", and "ratsach" which is translated as murder. The word used in the 6th commandment is *ratsach* and implies the premeditated taking of human life, typically out of malice. The word *harag* is the term generally used for the killing of animals and the ruthless personal violence of man against man. Even in the Old Testament there was a distinction between "premeditated" murder and the unintentional killing of another human. *"Now if the avenger of blood pursues him, then they shall not deliver the manslayer into his hand, because he struck his neighbor without premeditation and did*

not hate him beforehand" (Joshua 20:5). The manslayer could flee to a designated city for protection from an avenger.

The Old Testament is hard for many people to read and understand because there is so much violence, and killing, and it seems to be "G-d-ordained" or "G-d-permitted" killing. And I must agree, it is hard to wrap our heads around those stories. As far as we know from the biblical witness, Jesus never called for a holy war against the Roman occupying forces – nor did he advocate attacking his most ardent detractors. In fact, he rebuked Peter for cutting off the ear of the High Priest's servant. All murder certainly involves killing, but not all killings are considered murders. Murder represents an unlawful killing. Soldiers who kill in combat during the course of a "just" war, for example, kill their enemies — but such killings have not typically been considered murder. Of course the argument will always be *"What is considered a "just" war?"* Similarly, a state may execute murderers for their crimes, but the representatives of such states would not see their execution as equivalent to someone bashing in the heads of a family with the blunt end of an axe. In both of these examples, the "just" war, and the execution of a murderer, the killing is done by representatives of the state and are therefore, technically, legal. But there is also a moral distinction in these examples. In some cases, private citizens can kill someone without charge. A car driver may accidentally hit a jaywalking pedestrian, killing them — but this is not seen as "murder."

But Jesus seems to teach just the opposite stance – because he was a teacher of "non-violence". Jesus taught: *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you"* (Matthew 5:38-39, 43-44).

Pastor Dave

November 5, 2026 -- Devotions – Does the Bible Say…?
Does the Bible Say "Do Not Judge?"

"Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye." Matthew 7:1-5

There is a television show I have run into, more like crashed into while I was looking for something "decent" to watch – which usually felt like a losing battle. Anyway, I remember watching just a brief sample of this show when a woman would repeatedly say "Don't judge me". Have you ever said that: "Don't judge me?" Is it biblical? Well, sort of – but it has been taken out of context for so long I don't think people will believe you if you try to correct them. Let's consider a few angles on this text.

First of all, for anyone to say to another *"Don't judge me – the bible says you aren't supposed to judge a person"* – well, they are in the act of judging the other person to whom they are uttering those words. You are in the act of pronouncing judgment upon another person when you say "Don't judge me" – for you in the act of judging them thinking they will judge you. Good G-d almighty, have I made my point?

Second, the bible does not simply say: "Do not judge…" – the scripture above says *"Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get."* And in just another verse Jesus says *"You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye."*

It appears that this text is not about judgment, it is about hypocrisy. We are not supposed to be so quick to judge the words or actions of another person until we have our own spiritual and behavioral house in order. In John 7:24, Jesus says "*Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."* If you read a few verses before that passage, Jesus is judging the Jews and the religious leaders telling them they have not kept the law. And he concludes his argument with the words *"..judge with righteous judgment."* And this appears to be the key. Jesus is charging all of us to be careful of hypocritical behavior – and hypocritical judgment.

We cannot live in a world without judgment – this is why we have court systems and people who are supposed to be steeped in-laws and "right" punishments. And those who judge are supposed to expect to be judged with the same judgment they have meted out on others. As Christians we are called to rebuke, when it is necessary – but not in a manner where we believe we are more righteous or are "better" people. If we always remember that we are all "sinful and unclean" and that Jesus teaches us to *"…judge with righteous judgment"*, then our relationships in the church and in the secular world may be just a little better. Perhaps it is better to leave the judging to G-d, and to be careful and prayerful with our rebuking. And in the meantime, make sure we

have our spiritual and behavioral houses in order. Good G-d Almighty, don't judge……

Pastor Dave

November 6, 2026 -- Devotions – Does the Bible Say…?

Does the Bible Say "The Lord Will Fight Your Fights – Just Be Still?"

"As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the LORD. They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, 'Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." But Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still." Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground." Exodus 14:10-16

This chapter and verse causes us to think back to the Israelites, and their initial journey out of Egypt. Thinking back to our expanding band of Israelites, Moses, with a lot of help from the Lord, had finally convinced Pharaoh to let them leave. But the Israelites are not far off when Pharaoh has a change of heart. He pursues them to the point where the people are trapped between the Red Sea and the advancing army of Egypt. In their fear the Israelites began to cry out to Moses that they would have been better off had they never left Egypt. In the NIV translation, Moses responds by telling them not to fear, *"The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."* The Lord will fight for you; you need only be still. It is a saying that has been printed on t-shirts, bumper stickers, posters, and the like so much it has lost its original meaning. Too many people turn to this verse thinking that if they just wait for the Lord to act in their lives, if they just sit still, the Lord will deliver them from whatever trial they are facing. But unfortunately, this is not the kind of "being still" the text is talking about. In fact, if you look up different translations, you will find this verse has different interpretations:

The New King James and the ESV translate the verse as "The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace," and, "The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent," respectively.

The Hebrew word translated here does not have an English equivalent, but means all of the things stated in those translations…to be still, peaceful, and silent. As such, the verse has nothing to do with the people sitting still – and has everything to do with the people remaining calm. Which then sets up the next verse which reads: *"Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on."* (Exodus 14:15)

That's right – the Lord tells them to move on. Why would the Lord tell Moses to tell the Israelites to sit still in one breath, and in the next breath tell them to "get going"? Because, the people were told not to sit still, they were told to be calm. To understand one verse you have to read the second with it – and when you do it becomes clear that we are being told that our reaction to mounting trials should be two-fold. First, we are to remain calm and remain steadfast in our hearts. We are to trust the LORD will always fight for us. But don't stop there. We, then, must move in faith. Don't stand still! God says, Get moving!!!

Pastor Dave

November 7, 2026 -- Devotions – Does the Bible Say…?

Does the Bible Say "G-d Will Not Give Me More Than I Can Handle?"

"I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness. Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play." We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to

everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it. Therefore, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols." 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Too often this text has been translated or thrown out to people who are suffering in either body, mind or spirit to suggest that the bible says *"G-d will not give you more than you can handle."* In fact I have referenced it in a few, exceptional situations in my ministry. In my life, I have found that I had been given plenty that, at the moment I was in the midst of the valley of the shadow of death, I believed that it was too much to handle. People use this idea (G-d does not give us more than we can handle) as some pop-cultural saying to help us believe that either:

A.) G-d is not at the source of our calamity, or
B.) that we have a deeper well of reserves we can dip into because "we have it in us to handle all situations".

It is my belief that a saying like *"G-d does not give us more than we can handle"* is a form of cheap Grace. In other words, if we just believe, if we have a deep enough faith, then we will easily be able to handle the loss, calamity, cancer, or depression because obviously G-d knows we can handle all of those.

My friends, Grace is costly. Grace was won for us through the suffering and death of Jesus. Even Jesus doubted, if just for a microsecond, that he could handle what his Father was giving him when he prayed in the Garden. It is not G-d acting as the Divine "bug-zapper" meting out punishment and calamity with the merriment and glee of Job's protagonist. (read Job 1:6-21) It is life that gives plenty of people more than they can handle. Through our decisions, through our actions, and just through random acts and situations well out of our control, we are given terrible situations – and sometimes they drive us to our destruction. That is why our hope comes through the Grace of G-d won for us through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But when I feel as if my plate is too full of hurts and stress and loss, I find myself moving to a different verse of scripture, Philippians 4:13: *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* This is a verse I will address in a future devotion, but for now, what I am saying is this: whatever life may continue or will give to me in the future, I will be able to endure and thrive with G-d's strength.

Pastor Dave

November 8, 2026 – Pentecost 24A

[Jesus said to the disciples:] "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten young women took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those young women got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. Later the other young women came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." Matthew 25:1-13

Our Gospel lesson this morning describes a wedding scene and individuals in various stages of preparation. Ten bridesmaids gathered with oil lamps in hand waiting for the bridegroom. Five of the bridesmaids are prepared having extra oil just in case the wait will be long -- the others have come "unprepared". After some period which includes a long nap for everyone, the bridegroom arrives and the bridesmaids are pressed into action - forced to assess their oil levels. The five with extra oil do not want to share their oil and force the other five to go to the market to buy more. Of course, we know the ending: the five, foolish, unprepared bridesmaids are left out of the wedding party – and then Jesus gives the warning: "be prepared".

Now, as we are inquisitive people, we have questions about this text. Why do five not come with extra oil, and why do the other five not share their oil? Maybe the five who brought oil brought all that they had left at home, while the five without had a ton of the stuff at home. Of course, maybe, just maybe this story is not about how much oil you have in storage, but instead it is about the oil that you are prepared to carry with you. Martin Luther, in responding to this text took an allegorical approach and spoke of the oil as faith – all ten were prepared for the bridegroom, but five had an enduring faith that they carried with them – the other five went off seeking some extra faith somewhere else.

Let me ask you this question then, what kind of oil do you carry with you? And not only what kind of oil do you carry but are you in danger of running out? How do you refill your oil tank? Remember that our supply of oil begins at our

baptism, when the pastor traces a cross on our foreheads in oil stating that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. Also at our baptism, a member of the congregation stood and repeated these words: Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven. We are called through the Holy Spirit to live lives where the light of Christ is reflected in our very being, where it shines forth in our loving deeds, our devotion to understanding scripture and our love of G-d – all bolstered by faith.

The truth of the matter is, my friends, that every so often, our oil is going to run low. I know what it means to run low on energy if not to crash at the end of the day. It's a simple formula: if the arrow on your gas tank points to empty, you're going to run out. If a three-year-old is without a nap, he or she is going to crash; if you haven't had the chance to have a long meaningful conversation with your spouse, your marriage will run dry; if you average an eighty hour work week for too long, your relationships will suffer; and if your spiritual oil runs dry, then so will your relationship with G-d.

So how can we enrich our supplies of spiritual oil? As Lutherans, we speak of two very specific ways – Word and Sacrament. There are many ways in which we can engage in G-d's Word:
Prayer: our prayer lives can always improve – I think it is safe to say that we could always pray more.
Reading: I also doubt that too many of us can claim that we read the bible too much, or we attend too many bible studies, or we are tired of discussing our faith, or we are taking the teachings of Jesus too seriously.
Communing: coming to G-d's table where we receive not only the forgiveness of sins, but the promise of life and salvation.
Gathering: not only at the sacraments but actually gathering with one another – the strength and benefit of being involved in a faith community is the relationships we make with each other – who will be the people who will gather around us and support us when our faith oil runs low.
These are the things that fill our oil tanks – that give us the strength to persevere – that increases our preparedness.

Pastor Dave

November 9, 2026 -- Devotions – Does the Bible Say…?

Does the Bible Say "G-d Will Give Me The Strength to do Anything?"

"Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress. You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once." Philippians 4:8-16

We see, again, the tendency or the temptation to take a single verse and apply to us or to our lives outside of its context. For the text to be completely understood, you must read what comes before and what comes after. This is not about the Lord granting you the strength to do anything: I could pray for G-d to give me the strength today to climb Mt. Everest, but all of the prayer, vitamin pills and sit-ups will not get me to that summit. Paul says: *"I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need…"* . He is saying to these people from Philippi that G-d grants him the strength, no matter the circumstance, to persevere. This is an expression of strength of understanding a person's place and lot in life; of growing through the many ups and downs in life; of living into and through all that life has given. Whatever life may continue or will give to Paul in the future, he will be able to endure and thrive with G-d's strength. He is not boasting of what he might achieve, he is giving G-d due for all that he has endured and might endure in the future. That is completely different than praying for the strength to become CEO of your company, or to score the winning goal in your soccer game.

So if you ever find yourself persecuted for your faith, oppressed for your beliefs, or imprisoned unfairly because you have stood up for your faith, it's

appropriate to remember and quote Paul's example, and his words in this verse. Shouting it at the church softball game so that you can Samson-strength the ball over the tree line, or grunting it out at the gym in an effort to bench 300? Not so much.

Pastor Dave

November 10, 2026 -- Devotions – Does the Bible Say…?

Does the Bible Say "G-d Helps Those Who Help Themselves?"

"For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." Romans 5:6

"For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat. When the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm, the noise of aliens like heat in a dry place, you subdued the heat with the shade of clouds; the song of the ruthless was stilled." Isaiah 25:4-5

Most people have heard the saying: *"God helps those that help themselves."* You can read the Bible from cover to cover and you will not find this saying on the pages – no matter what translation you read. In fact, what I have told people is just the opposite is true about G-d: *"G-d helps those that cannot help themselves"*. This phrase "God helps those who help themselves" appears to have originated in ancient Greece and may originally have been proverbial. It is illustrated by two of Aesop's Fables. Although it has been commonly attributed to Benjamin Franklin, the modern English wording appears earlier in a work by Algernon Sidney, who as a contemporary of John Locke, are considered cornerstones of western thought.

The passage is popular in part because it reflects good old American values: individual liberty, self-reliance, pulling oneself up by their bootstraps, stepping out on one's own, making your way in life. It might reflect secular culture, but it is not biblical. This passage is the opposite of the teachings Jesus regularly teaches: sell your positions and give the money to the poor, do unto others, turn the other cheek, if you have two coats give to someone who has none, the last will be first and the first last, take the lower seat instead of the higher.

The bible calls us to love our neighbor, to forgive limitlessly, to pray for our enemies, and to put others first. In these ways we hear just the opposite teaching: “G-d helps those who cannot help themselves”.

Pastor Dave

November 11, 2026 -- Devotions – Does the Bible Say…?

Does the Bible Say “Mary Was Born Without Sin?”

“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” Luke 1:26-28 (NRSV)

“And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.” Luke 1:26-28 (KJV)

“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!” Luke 1:26-28 (RSV Catholic Version)

From one sentence, *“Hail, (Mary) full of grace, the Lord is with you”* the Catholic Church develops the teaching that Mary was born without sin. This is what the Catholic Church calls “The Immaculate Conception”. This teaching is not about Jesus – it is the teaching that Mary had to be born without sin to bear the Christ Child – who is without sin. And that teaching comes from the first chapter of Luke. But there are only four translations I have been able to find that renders the text “Hail, full of grace.” Usually the text is translated “Greetings, favored One”.

In fact, here is the teaching of the Catholic Church rendered the “Immaculate Conception”:

“Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, “full of grace” through God, was redeemed from the moment of her

conception. That is what the dogma of the Immaculate Conception confesses, as Pope Pius IX proclaimed in 1854: The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin." (CCC, 491)

The Catholic Church understands Mary as the new Eve, thus both are born in a state of sinlessness. It is a teaching of the Catholic Church in the tradition of the Talmud and the Midrash – sometimes the church seeks to read between the lines when the Bible does not state something outright. Is it right? Is it wrong? We can leave that judgment up to G-d. But we Lutherans still revere Mary.

Pastor Dave

November 12, 2026 -- Devotions – Does the Bible Say…?
Does the Bible Say "Mary Magdalene Was A Prostitute?"

"Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources." Luke 8:1-3

Mary Magdalene is named accordingly because she was from the town of Magdala. It was a thriving fishing town on the coast of the sea of Galilee. Magdala is also within walking distance of Capernaum, an area Jesus was very familiar with. There are many "Mary's" in the bible, Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary the sister of Lazarus, and Mary, the woman Jesus cast out many demons. (see above text)

Why was she called a prostitute? She was called a prostitute thanks to her story being merged with that of a sinful woman from Luke 7:36-39:

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the

ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner."

This "composite Magdalene" was popularized in a sermon given by Pope Gregory I around 591 CE:

"She whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls Mary, we believe to be the Mary from whom seven devils were ejected according to Mark. And what did these seven devils signify, if not all the vices? It is clear, brothers, that the woman previously used the unguent to perfume her flesh in forbidden acts… What she therefore displayed more scandalously, she was now offering to God in a more praiseworthy manner." — Pope Gregory the Great (homily XXXIII)

Conflating the stories of biblical characters was not uncommon in those days. But Mary Magdalene is named at least 12 times in the gospels, and not one of those references supports this interpretation. Even though Mary Magdalene was not a prostitute, she did have her issues. And, the fact that she was traveling with so many men, something that would not have happened in her day, this fact would have contributed to her being targeted for labeling. And yet, she did not shrink from serving Jesus. So, no, Mary Magdalene was not labeled a prostitute in the bible – it was the gossiping that occurred hundreds of years later to which we must place the blame. The Catholic church would change that label for Mary in the mid-twentieth century. Everything you hear about Mary Magdalene, if it is negative labeling about her character, is pure speculation and nonsense.

Pastor Dave

November 13, 2026 -- Devotions – Does the Bible Say…?
Does the Bible Say " Balaam Had a Talking Donkey?"

"So Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the officials of Moab. God's anger was kindled because he was going, and the angel of the Lord took his stand in the road as his adversary. Now he was riding on the donkey, and his two servants were with him. The donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road, with a drawn sword in his hand; so the donkey turned off the road, and went into the field; and Balaam struck the donkey, to turn it back onto the road. Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on either side. When the

donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it scraped against the wall, and scraped Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck it again. Then the angel of the Lord went ahead, and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it lay down under Balaam; and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the donkey with his staff. Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and it said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a fool of me! I wish I had a sword in my hand! I would kill you right now!" But the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey, which you have ridden all your life to this day? Have I been in the habit of treating you this way?" And he said, "No." Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road, with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed down, falling on his face. The angel of the Lord said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? I have come out as an adversary, because your way is perverse before me. The donkey saw me, and turned away from me these three times. If it had not turned away from me, surely just now I would have killed you and let it live." Numbers 22:21-33

We always need to remember that the Bible is filled with amazing, intriguing, and sometimes funny stories. This is the case with Balaam's donkey. Balaam is described as a seer, not necessarily as a priest or prophet of the Lord. The king of Moab recognized G-d's presence in Balaam, saying, *"I know that whomever you bless is blessed, and whomever you curse is cursed."* Fearing the strength of the Israelites, the king of Moab sent emissaries asking Balaam to come to Moab and curse the Israelites to rid him of the perceived threat (Num. 22:1-6).

G-d, however, informs Balaam neither to go to Moab nor to curse Israel. However, after multiple embassies from the king of Moab, Balaam agrees to go to Moab. His hosts try to bribe him to curse Israel, but Balaam warns them that he will do only what the Lord commands. G-d seems to agree with this plan, but as Balaam rides his donkey toward Moab, an angel of the Lord blocks his way – not once but three times. The angel is invisible to Balaam, but the donkey sees the angel and turns aside each time. Balaam becomes infuriated at the donkey and begins to beat the animal with his staff.

"Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and it said to Balaam, 'What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?' Have I been in the habit of treating you this way?" And he said, "No." Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road, with his drawn sword in his hand; ".

In this funny but insightful story we soon learn that Balaam's donkey has more insight than the seer. More importantly, G-d will find any way possible to get our attention. And we need to be careful that we do not become so single-minded or narrow-minded that we do not realize when G-d is speaking to us.

Pastor Dave

November 14, 2026 -- Devotions – Does the Bible Say…?
Does The Bible Say "King Solomon Ordered a Baby Cut in Half?"

"Now two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. One of them said, "Pardon me, my lord. This woman and I live in the same house, and I had a baby while she was there with me. The third day after my child was born, this woman also had a baby. We were alone; there was no one in the house but the two of us. "During the night this woman's son died because she lay on him. So she got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while I your servant was asleep. She put him by her breast and put her dead son by my breast. The next morning, I got up to nurse my son—and he was dead! But when I looked at him closely in the morning light, I saw that it wasn't the son I had borne." The other woman said, "No! The living one is my son; the dead one is yours." But the first one insisted, "No! The dead one is yours; the living one is mine." And so they argued before the king. The king said, "This one says, 'My son is alive and your son is dead,' while that one says, 'No! Your son is dead and mine is alive.'" Then the king said…" 1 Kings 3:16-23

Solomon was the son of David. When David was about to die, he set up his son Solomon as king. *"So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his rule was firmly established."* (1 Kings 2:12) Solomon would prove to be a wise king, but also a troubled king – and in fact his reign would result in the division of the kingdoms. But it all starts out good:

"At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." (1 Kings 3:5)

Solomon then has a dream in which G-d offers him anything he wants. This is an amazing proposition. Many in this situation might ask for riches, for long life, for many, many wives. But instead of asking for money or power, he asks for wisdom so that he can rule the people of Israel with integrity. G-d is so pleased with this response, that Solomon not only receives wisdom in spades, he also is given wealth and power besides. This is the context of the famous,

and odd story about the two women who come to Solomon, each claiming to be the mother of a certain child. It's an illustration of his wisdom — he's a man who can see beneath the surface and discern people's motives and character. What was Solomon's decision about the two women claiming the baby is theirs?

"Bring me a sword." So they brought a sword for the king. He then gave an order: "Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other." The woman whose son was alive was deeply moved out of love for her son and said to the king, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!" But the other said, "Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!" Then the king gave his ruling: "Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother." When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice." 1 Kings 3:24-28

Solomon's reign, though beginning with great demonstrations of wisdom would prove to be a troubled reign. In fact, he would eventually be responsible for failed allegiances, and questionable decisions – seemingly squandering his wisdom. With great wisdom and insight comes great responsibility.

Pastor Dave

November 15, 2026 – Pentecost 25A

[Jesus said to the disciples:] "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. At once the one who had received the five talents went off and traded with them and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few

things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance, but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' " Matthew 25:14-30

What confuses people about this parable is the use of the word "Talanta". In first century Palestine, a "Talanta" or Talent was a large sum of money – 6000 Denarii or 15 years worth of wages for a day laborer. Of course, today we use the word differently – it is not money we are talking about, but some special ability that a person has. Are you talented? What talents do you have? In this world, we have people who are talented at the 5 level, some at the 2 level, and most of us at the 1 talent level.
Now, though in the first century, a Talent is a Talent is a Talent – they are all the same. But for us, our talents vary widely. Some have multiple talents, some have just one or two. But, though the monetary equivalent of one "Talanta" compared to another is the same, our talents are also of equal value in G-d's eyes – well as long as we do not bury then into the ground. G-d's gifts that go unused are as worthless as money that we bury in the ground. So the message we need to hear today is this – "A talent that goes unused is plain worthless".

Why do people not use their talents, their G-d given gifts? I have assembled some excuses that people may give:

Fear – they are afraid to do something and be mocked for their faith.
Shyness – they can't use their gifts in front of others.
Selfishness – they see their talents as theirs, and will use them in their own way, in their own time, as they see fit.
Jealousy – they spend their time comparing their gifts to others and complain that others have more.

My friends G-d has gifted us and blessed each one of us with talents. The Holy Spirit blesses each one of us with the intellect and the ability to use those talents. But because there are consequences for not using those talents, G-d

calls us to be wise in the use of our talents – or in other words, we must do better than "just the best we can". As Jesus warns in the Gospel of Luke, *"To those entrusted with much, much is required."* Take the risk of sharing your talents; risk living by faith. Don't bury your talents and gifts but allow trust and faith and hope to sustain you. Let's work together multiplying the love of G-d. It will take all of us to defeat the dominion of sin. When we step forward together in trust and faith, it is then that the power of the Holy Spirit is released in the church, and in the world – and the gifts of G-d will be multiplied beyond our belief.

Pastor Dave