



Christian Ambassadors, Inc.

My Brother's Keeper

Volume 23, Number 2, Second Quarter, 2018

GROWING on the WORD

A Scripture Study

The Word of God is the source of light, truth and power, for those who seek its meaning and apply it to their life. Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh, and we seek to follow him.

John 8:12 (NIV) – *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*

John 12:46 (NIV) – *“...No one who believes in me should stay in darkness.”*

Each issue of “My Brother’s Keeper” features a WORD study. This issue’s Word Study comes to us from Sharon K. Griffie, Co-founder of Christian Ambassadors, Inc.

Grace – Our Season of Opportunity

By: Sharon K. Griffie

John 15:1-4 (NIV) – *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain*

in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”

Brothers and sisters, make no mistake, Jesus is looking for fruit, even abundant fruit. Every year in Palestine gardeners pruned their vines cutting off the dead branches, those with no life in them, and also trimming the living branches so they would yield more fruit. What does this mean for us?

Without the life of God flowing in us, no real fruit can be produced in our lives. God freely provides the grace, but without our faith to access it, we deprive ourselves of God’s life-giving nourishment. Given that God’s grace is accessed through *faith*, when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we have the remarkable privilege of approaching God and standing in his presence.

Romans 5:1-2 (NIV) – *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.”*

As we, through faith receive the grace that God freely offers, our interaction with God does not stop there. Remember the warning Jesus gave, *“Remain in me”*. To stay in peace with God, we must be faithful to Jesus, as He is faithful to us. *“Remain in me, as I also remain in you.”*

We can’t just say, “I’ve accepted Jesus, *I’m in, I’m saved*”, and then go back to our ordinary way of life. If our hope in God is to be alive, we must be willing to allow Father God to take the pruning shears to our lives and clean out the

debris. There are some dead branches that need to come off. There are also some live branches that need to be pruned to bear more fruit.

Our season of opportunity

What will we do with our season of opportunity? Will we use this precious time here on earth to bear good fruit for the Kingdom of God? This is the underlying question Jesus raises in the following parable of the barren fig tree. This parable was given to the nation of Israel, offering them an opportunity to respond. Unless Israel produced the fruit of repentance, it would face judgement.

Luke 13:6-9 (NIV) - *Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So, he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"*

A fig tree normally takes three years to reach maturity. If it is not bearing fruit by that time, it is not likely to bear fruit at all.

In this parable, the fig tree was looking pretty hopeless. It was not bearing fruit after three years. It should have been doing better. The fig tree was planted in a vineyard where it would receive the best opportunity for growth and maturity. It received the daily care of the vinedresser. It was getting plenty of water and was drawing strength and nourishment from the soil, yet it was producing no fruit. This was its sin. It was taking out, but it was not giving back.

Jesus was making an analogy (comparison) through the example of the fig tree. He was showing us the characteristics of two kinds of people in the world; those who take out more than they put in, and those who put in more than they take out.

Notice that the vinedresser [Jesus – our intercessor] did not plead for the indefinite existence of a fruitless fig tree. He only asked for extended time to see if the fig tree would bear fruit. During that time, He promised to give the tree special care (digging and fertilizing) to see if it would bear fruit. That's just how God is. In His mercy He gives us ample opportunity to bear fruit, to see if we will make something good come out of our lives.

God is infinitely kind to those who fall and rise again. He is long suffering, not willing to give up on anyone who is *trying*. He waits a long time for people to repent – but there is also a warning in this parable. There is a limit to his waiting. At some point a person openly demonstrates (through their failure to give back) that no matter how much grace God offers, they have no intention of ever bearing good fruit. At this point, their heart has become hardened to receive from God. (Mark 6:52; Acts 28:27)

Jesus brings the end result of this parable: People are not saved so they can sit, year after year, living off of God's grace. After some period of extended time, they must either bear the nature of God in their life, or they cannot be known as a child of God. Jesus firmly directs,

Matthew 12:33 (KJV) – *Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.*

Whether its fruit is good or bad, Jesus is telling us that a tree is known by its fruit. A pattern of behavior will begin to emerge, exposing the nature of the tree.

Do not receive the Grace of God in vain

II Corinthians 6:1-2 (NKJV) – *We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain, for He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*

Apostle Paul and his co-workers in ministry had through much patience, labor, imprisonments, sleeplessness, and hardships, been pleading with the Corinthians not to receive God's grace in vain. Their concern was that some might listen to false prophets and deny their strong message of salvation, that the righteousness of God was obtained by faith.

II Corinthians 11:3 (NLT) – *But I fear that somehow your pure and undivided devotion to Christ will be corrupted, just as Eve was deceived by the cunning ways of the serpent.*

The word “vain” translates as (empty, without content, without result, useless). Paul and his co-workers were simply conveying the message Jesus brought at the beginning of His ministry, the message of God's grace – the message of God's favor. Their message was one of urgency, “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

I like the way II Corinthians 6:1 is translated in the NLT Bible which says, “*As God's partners, we beg you not to accept this marvelous gift of God's kindness and then ignore it.*”

The Apostle Paul was well qualified to speak about God's grace, and the importance of not ignoring it, for he had personally experienced its powerful effect on his own life!

I Corinthians 15:9-10 (NKJV) – *“For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”*

God's grace toward Paul was definitely not in vain. Before Paul's conversion, Paul (then known as Saul) actually hunted down Christians to have them murdered. But once Paul received the revelation of Christ Jesus, he never turned away from Him. His testimony was robust.

I Corinthians 15:3-8 (NKJV) – *For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.*

Be strong through God's Grace

When Apostle Paul's ministry was coming to an end, he entrusted Timothy to continue spreading the good news of Jesus Christ.

II Timothy 2:1-2 (NLT) – *Timothy, my dear son, be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus. You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.*

Paul encouraged Timothy, whom he thought of as his very own son, to live a life of faithful devotion and self-discipline in his service to the Lord. To do that Timothy would need to rely on the divine gift of grace, and not on his own strength. Paul's counsel to Timothy was based on his own personal experiences. Paul totally depended on God's grace, declaring;

Philippians 4:13 (NKJV) – *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”*

Grace – Our season to respond!

Our life on earth is brief. James tells us, “*You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.*” (James 4:14b) Through Grace, God gives us the opportunity to bear fruit. May we, through faith, receive the life-giving nourishment that transforms into action. Amen.



Sharing the Good News

“We are therefore Christ's Ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

II Corinthians 5:20-21

From: Ernesto F.
Community Correctional, McFarland, CA

Dear Sister Sharon; I want to thank you for the last “My Brother’s Keeper”, volume 23, first quarter, 2018. Also, thank you much for all your prayers for my brother Arturo. Now I’m going to be able to see him soon. God has given me an early release. I’m going back home next month to Tijuana, Mexico.

It has been a long, long experience in life being here. I’ve learned so much about God’s Christ, and you were with me along this long and winding road and now it is time for me to be out in a free world. It’s gonna be hard, but I’m not alone like before I got here. Now I got Christ in me, so I feel all good and secure. I’m gonna do fine back home again.

I got your info from the web, don’t be surprised if you hear from me later this year. I’m gonna do my best to keep in touch somehow. May God bless you always.

Your brother in Christ, Ernesto

From: Marvin H.
Potosi Correctional, Mineral Point, MO

Dear Alan and Sharon; I received your March 2018 letter and lesson on Easter. Remembering what Christ did for us on the cross and the fact that He is not in the tomb, but is alive today, is the foundation of our faith and beliefs.

I praise God that He sent His Son to pay for my (everyone’s) sins and sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for us!

I want to tell you that I was transferred and here is my new address. I will serve Christ for the rest of my days on earth!

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name”. **John 1:12**

I thank you for your monthly letters, they are a good encouragement and tool for spiritual growth.

A brother in Christ, Marvin

From: James T.
MacDougall Correctional, Suffield, CT

Dear Christian Ambassadors; Praise the Lord, I give all honor and glory to our God. He has done and still doing great and marvelous things through Christ Jesus.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge the Griffie household, and everyone under the covering of Christian Ambassadors family, as well.

I wrote a while ago sharing how I came to know about this wonderful ministry, and the transforming words great food for thought. I also hold dear the testimonies from my brothers and sisters who are incarcerated but free.

Now all I want to do is share God’s Word with others, in ways He has touched my life, personal issues, prayer, and the overall way I view things.

Lately God has been speaking to me concerning obedience and being a doer and not just a hearer of God’s Word. That brings me to this point.

I have tithed in the past to other ministries (wonderful ministries) who are doing great work for the Lord. But I have grown to care for this ministry, and how it speaks directly to the believer behind the wall and gives that same believer the avenue to express our love for Jesus and the chains that are being broken.

So after not tithing for a while the Holy Spirit put it on my heart to start again and trust God for the outcome. (See: Malachi 3:8,10)

My job doesn’t pay much, yet it reminds me of the widow in the gospel who gave all she had and we all know what God can do. So, my 10% is included, and I’m believing God for your increase as well as mine.

Respectfully Yours, James

From: Jason E.
Turbeville Correctional, Turbeville, SC

Dear Christian Ambassadors; I pray that all is well with you on this day that the Lord has made. I'm really enjoying the letters I'm receiving.

I went to another prison, so my new address is on the front of this envelope.

Thank you for the inspiring and encouraging letters.

God Bless, Jason

From: Marlowe B.
San Quentin Prison, San Quentin, CA

Hi Sister Sharon; May God bless you and the Christian Ambassador family, and I feel assured that it's God's will for that to remain the same.

I've been receiving the wonderful words and wisdom of the Lord, which you know I gratefully appreciate.

I've been working on a couple of projects, one being Law, which can be ongoing and as wide and deep as any river can be, but it's important, so there's no doubt that it has to be done.

As we Christians know, sister Sharon, once we put a problem or situation in God's hands, from that point on, we'll just ride along.

So, I'll close now with nothing but praise and empathy for Christian Ambassadors, Inc.

Sincerely, Marlowe

From: Roger C.
Trinidad MR, Model, CO

Dear Sister Sharon; Blessings and peace of Jesus be upon you. I related to your recent [March, Spiritual Growth Lesson]. In fact, I have repeatedly come across men in prison who had the same experiences as "Pete", in your article. They went to church as a young person, because of various reasons, but the Christ of the church never got in them. At times it caused them confusion because they didn't experience the power of Christ or the Gospel, despite being told they would.

Many times, I have had to show them where they were missing it and by the Lord's grace, led them to the relationship with Christ they wanted. In fact, I'm

giving this recent lesson you sent, to [someone] who had the same background and testimony. So, thank you for being sensitive to the Holy Spirit.

The Lord is moving on my behalf on many fronts. The Lord has united me with people, who have come alongside to help me on my transition out of prison. It is a move of God for certain. God bless your work.

In His Arms, Roger

From: John T.
California State Prison, Lancaster, CA

Greetings Sharon & Alan; Your story about "Pete" [March, Spiritual Growth Lesson] is one like mine, except I don't even have a T.V.

But one thing I have is a Bible and a lot of Christian friends from the streets writing me.

It keeps me focused. John

God's Deep Love

By: Bret Sisson, 2017

Pendleton Correctional, Pendleton, IN

Deeper than any known hole,
 stronger than any grip or hold,
 purer than any water or blood,
 is the Lord our God's love.

Brighter than any seen darkness,
 more comforting than any known softness,
 held higher than the skies above,
 is the Lord our God's love.

More promising than a rainbow after the rain,
 more joyous than any known pain,
 more meaningful than that of a dove,
 is the Lord our God's love.

Held in my heart each day,
 guiding me in His path to the right way,
 leading me to heaven above,
 is the Lord, our God's love.

*Dedicated to Lisa and Larry, for keeping
 faith and trust in me, and having God's love.*

From: Daniel P.

Kilby Correctional, Mount Meigs, AL

Hi Christian Ambassadors; When I came to prison twelve years ago, I was determined to know what it meant to be a "Christian". I did not grow up in "church" nor was I a "good" kid. My background/childhood was abusive to say the least. Before I was out of junior high, I had experimented in sex, drugs, and alcohol, all of which turned into serious addictions... I just wanted peace... I just wanted to be loved... I just wanted (fill in the blank).

The meat of my true rebirth was at my first joint [prison]. I was extremely frustrated. There were all these so-called "elders" of the church ranked according to the day they accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior. The problem with this, is these men were not following what I was reading in the Bible. (I was a babe in Christ and things just weren't making sense.)

So, I cried out to God in great frustration. What makes me an elder? What makes me a Christian? He whispered in my heart, "*How many seconds are in a day?*" Being still a quite young Christian, I ignored the question, wrote it off as stupid, and got even more frustrated.

God didn't write me off and pestered me relentlessly. "*How many seconds are in a day? How many seconds are in a day?*" On and on and on!

There are 86,400 seconds in a day! Then He asked me what I thought was a silly question; "*Which one do I want?*" Simple answer, "All of them!"

His answer was a gentle rebuke, "*Nope, try again.*" Again, in frustration, I sought the answer in prayer and Scripture. He led me to the man on the cross who followed Christ into Paradise. He led me to Philippians 3:13-14; Matthew 6:34; I Thess. 5:16; and many, many more verses that have become instrumental to my walk, such as Galatians 2:20 and 2 Corinthians 5:17.

What He taught me was, "I want this second." I understood now that in a day of 86,400 seconds only one has been given to me. It is the talent I can hide or invest; and in the day I stand before Him, He will ask me what I did with my second (my talent).

For you see, the other 85,399 seconds have already been used or have not been given. Those that have been used are His, never for me to have again. Those that are His I have no ability to use, only that one

second that He gives to me each day. What makes me well pleasing to God, what makes me a good and faithful servant is where I am residing. If I reside in the past I am a pauper; if I reside in the future, I am a fool. However, if I reside in the now, what a rich, rich man I am.

When someone asks me how I am doing, my answer is, "Any better and I'd be in Heaven." For Scripture tells me that as long as I abide in the flesh, Christ walks with me. And when I die, I walk with Christ. So how can I be any better? That's what living this second for Christ has taught me.

I don't care that I'm in prison, and I don't know if I'll ever catch parole. I don't know if I'll ever see my out date of July 20, 2022. I only know one thing for sure: Christ saved my family and Christ saved me, and He's with us now until that second when we are with Him – a most precious second indeed.

God bless you (this second) Daniel

From: Gregory J.

Groveland Correctional, Sonyea, NY

Dear Sister Griffiee; Praise God! I pray this letter finds you, your husband, and your whole ministry in the best of health, as well as good spirits and in God's protection as always. I am doing okay and feeling so blessed thanks to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Sister Griffiee, it's really been a blessing to have you, your husband, and your ministry in my life to share God's word. You all drew me closer to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Your Newsletters, Word Study and Spiritual Growth Lessons were always inspirational to me and kept me focused on our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Plus, they helped me to change for the better.

I have been corresponding with your ministry for over the past seventeen years and you've been a very strong inspirational force in my life. Now I can honestly say that I have a relationship with my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and I constantly talk to Him daily and read His Word. Thank you so much!

God is good all the time and it took me many years to realize that. Your ministry has stood by me through all the bad times as well as the good times, and even the times when I felt like giving up. Your ministry helped me to make it through all these years, plus it

helped me to grow in the Lord and build a strong relationship with Jesus.

I love your newsletters and all the inspirational poems I read in them from other inmates. I love your Word Studies and Spiritual Growth Lessons, because they always seem to speak directly to me and convict me if I'm losing sight of my Lord. Now I know the way to righteousness, even in this environment (prison). No matter where we are at, or what we go through, we must always stay focused on Jesus and meditate on things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, and of good report and virtue.

See Sister Griffee, though I'm in prison I can renew my mind so that I don't conform to the evil habits of this world. I thank God and you for helping me realize this.

I would like to share something with my brothers and sisters in Christ who are in prison. I'm so glad to have the knowledge of Christ with obedience to His Word, because I'm more blessed and happy today since I've ever been while I am in prison. I feel that it's better to know the way of righteousness, be obedient to it and live it, instead of knowing it and not being obedient to it. (See: 2 Peter 2:20-21)

Since I'm in Christ, I have the ambition to please Him. I strive to please the Lord not only because I know that I will be with Him, but also, I know that He will evaluate my work whether good or bad and reward me accordingly. (2 Cor. 5:10)

As a result of being obedient to God's Word, doing His will and following Jesus Christ, I was blessed to leave the Maximum Correctional Facility after twenty-four years, and move to a Medium Correctional Facility. God is really good, and my next step will be home, because I trust my God and I have great faith that He will open doors for me. It's because of His grace and mercy that I'm able to write you today.

Your brother in Christ, Gregory



***Forgiveness in Action –
Grace Personified***

By: Larry A. Thompson,
Buena Vista Correctional, Buena Vista, CO

The unspoken testimony of a man's life is revealed through his actions when dealing with strangers.

The truest testimony of one's life is demonstrated in how they treat others who have mistreated them; therein lies the true test of integrity.

The ultimate testimony of my life, the measure of my worth will be weighed and accounted for in the words and memories of others when they speak of me...For it is written,

“The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, and a man is valued by what others say of him.” (Proverbs 27:21 - NKJV)

In this world so full of selfishness, where the welfare of the fatherless, the widows, and the stranger is sacrificed for the wants of treasures that have no eternal value, I wonder; what will the final testimony of this, and the future generations be? For I truly believe that the testimony of our lives is defined by our capacity and our willingness to love, unconditionally; because unconditional love is, Forgiveness in Action: unconditional love is, Grace Personified.

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Honoring Billy Graham – 1918-2018

Alan and I each have many fond memories of Billy Graham. Growing up, our families would gather around the T.V. when a Billy Graham Crusade was scheduled to air on T.V. We looked forward with anticipation to his powerful messages, bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ, larger than life into our living rooms. We hung on every word he spoke, knowing he would cut to the heart of the matter; no guesswork here. When Billy stood to speak we were immediately struck by the seriousness of his message. There was urgency in the tone of his voice – he was calling for a decision; a decision that must not be put off. It was a matter of life or death.

Billy Graham was a personal representative of Jesus in every way, and he represented Him well. He was a true ambassador for Christ, sharing the love of Christ with people from all walks of life. Prison inmates, incarcerated at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, hand crafted the simple plywood casket, and inscribed their names on it. Their action touched our hearts in a personal way.

Because he humbled himself under the mighty hand of God, Billy Graham and Jesus were inseparable. He taught us how to have that kind of relationship with Jesus.

“Your yearning for God must supersede all other desires.

It must be like a gnawing hunger and a burning thirst.” – Billy Graham

Our prayers are with Billy Graham's family, as they boldly proclaim the Gospel.

In Christ's Love, Sharon & Alan Griffiee

My Brother's Keeper

Vol. 23, No. 2, Second Quarter, 2018

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Inspirational articles and poems, especially from current or former prison inmates, are invited and will be prayerfully considered for publication. **Please request a copy of the publication guidelines before submitting an article for consideration.**

Vision Statement – Christian Ambassadors exists to bring the ministry of Jesus Christ into the lives of people, demonstrating how the gospel teachings can help a person live a more abundant life, filled with joy, hope, and purpose.

If you, a member of your family, or a friend, are imprisoned, wanting to find new hope, purpose and direction in life, please contact us at Christian Ambassadors. Our website can be visited at:

<http://www.christian-ambassadors.org>