

***BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST — SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2019 THROUGH SUNDAY NOVEMBER 24, 2019
PENTECOST 12 THROUGH CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY***

SEPTEMBER 01, 2019 — PENTECOST 12

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

— Hebrews 13:8

Everything in our life changes constantly – the world around us, circumstances, people, and we ourselves. Some changes are good; others not so much. Sometimes, we work to make changes in our lives; other times, they happen when we least want them. Yes, change is inevitable...at least here on earth. But not so with Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, who promised to be with us always, to the end of the age (*Matthew 28:20*). He is the same today as He was when He appeared to the disciples and following His resurrection 2000 years ago. His promises to us haven't changed. That means we can always count on Him watching over us, even when we doubt it. It means we can always depend on Him and can always know His love for us is unwavering.



Thoughts to Ponder: *Isn't this verse one of the most reassuring things you've ever read? Perhaps you already knew the verse, or maybe it's the first time you really thought about it. As you go through the coming week, you may want to make it the verse you meditate on, the one you memorize, so you can recall it whenever you need reassurance. Try taking this a step further; use the Word to remind you of Christ's constant presence with and within you.*

Resources: Lutheran Study Bible

SEPTEMBER 08, 2019 — PENTECOST 13

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

“He is no longer like a slave to you...for he is a beloved brother, especially to me. So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.”

— Philemon 1:16-17

Life has many walls and fences that divide, separate, and compartmentalize. Not made out of metal, concrete or wood, but by personal obstructions, blocking us from each other and from God. As in Roman, Greek and Jewish cultures in A.D. 60, barriers exist that society assigns people to and expect them to stay there, whether it be gender, race, social status, ethnic background, political label or religion.



Paul's letter to Philemon deals with this issue. It is a plea for a slave who at the time of the writing was from a class of people who were expected to stay in their place. Onesimus 'belonged' to Philemon, who stole from him and was on the run. While Onesimus was on the run he had become a Christian. Paul's plea was to remind Philemon that both he and Onesimus now had equal status in God's family. They are no longer master and servant, but brothers in Christ. In Christ, all stand before God as equals. A Christian's identity as a member of God's family overrides all other distinctions.

Thoughts to Ponder – *What prejudices do you harbor? What separates you from fellow believers? How can you treat your fellow Christians as the equals they are?*

Resources: NIV Bible and Through the Bible Devotional

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SEPTEMBER 15, 2019 — PENTECOST 14

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

“Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.”

— Luke 15:6

Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep when he is criticized for welcoming and eating with tax collectors and sinners. The sinners gather gladly to hear Jesus, but the religious authorities respond to Jesus with grumbling. Both the tax collectors and the religious authorities are sinners, but the religious fail to recognize their sin and repent. The lost sheep represent the sinners as they depart from God not seeming to understand or care of the dangers that await as they leave the protection of the Shepherd. Yet the Shepherd leaves his flock to seek out the lost to bring them home under his protection.



Jesus loves and cares for each of us and saved us from our own destruction. He delivered us from the penalty and power of sin through his own death. By believing this, God declares us righteous, as if we had never sinned at all. We are saved by God’s gift of undeserving Grace!

Thoughts to Ponder: How do we recognize sin in ourselves? Do we understand the word of God to know what sin really is? Through self-examination we know that we are straying from God like the sheep and are in danger. How do you acknowledge and confess your sin to receive His forgiveness that you can rejoice at being welcomed into His flock?

Resources: biblehub.com

SEPTEMBER 22, 2019 — PENTECOST 15

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

“And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.”

— Luke 16:9

Disciples listen carefully to Jesus. They hear His words, not just read them. Today’s Gospel is misunderstood because sarcasm is hard to communicate in writing. Most read the parable and Jesus’ comments as though He was commending the dishonest manager. However, note that the parable ends in verse 8a, and Jesus’ comments begin at 8b. Read the Gospel out loud. When you get to verse 9, speak it with the most dripping sarcasm you can express.



Jesus wasn’t commending the dishonest steward. He was ridiculing him. The sons of this world may be shrewder than the sons of light, but not one of them can receive anyone into an eternal dwelling. Hearing Jesus’ sarcasm opens us to hearing His explicit condemnation of our pitiful attempts to serve two masters and justify ourselves. Jesus’ final words in the passage drive home His sarcasm – “For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”

Thoughts to Ponder: In your daily devotions or in a group Bible study, slow down and listen carefully to Jesus. Read Scripture out loud to yourself and to each other with inflection and emotion. Neither God the Father nor Jesus speak in a dull monotone. Their voices are literally the most creatively expressive voices in the world.

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SEPTEMBER 29, 2019 — PENTECOST 16

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! ² I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being. —Psalm 146:1-2

The Lord brought ‘praise’ to my mind a great deal recently. By reading Scripture and learning more about praise, we learn it’s a key component of worship and in every relationship in Christ. The New Century Version reads, “*Praise the LORD! My whole being, praise the LORD. ² I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praises to my God as long as I live.*”

Compare that with Psalm 103 which came to my attention in 3 different ways in 3 succeeding days. That Psalm begins exactly as Psalm 146 does... “*My whole being, praise the Lord*” (NCV).



Going deeper to understand the words of this text, our whole being is to praise our God who created our bodies, our life. With our every breath, our body’s living substance, the soul of the inner man we are to praise Him. The more one praises our almighty God, the more His joy and peace enter our soul...Christ’s joy and peace that come because we praise Him.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER: *Would you consider praying Psalm 142 every day for a week, or a month? Or, pray Psalm 103 letting the words penetrate your heart. Share what comes to mind with someone, maybe someone who does not know the Lord.*

Resource: Biblehub.com

OCTOBER 06, 2019 — PENTECOST 17

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

“So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’” — Luke 17:10

If we sat down and shared stories with each other about pursuing the American dream, we would hear a lot about hard work. We would share inspiring stories of starting from scratch, owning maybe just a couple of outfits, having a family to feed, and working hard all day. We live in a society where hard work is usually rewarded, which is positive as it provides many opportunities for success. On the other hand, “being busy” has become a status for some folks, something to brag about, and an excuse to avoid connection with others and our own feelings. This is when a sense of entitlement starts growing in our pride and hard work starts demanding rewards. Being a disciple is the opposite. We are to be humble and not expect praise. While the work we do as servants is valuable, we are to focus on knowing that God is the one that has called us and equipped us. We have only done what was our duty. To Him be the glory.



Thoughts to ponder: *What’s challenging to you about this verse? How can a humble attitude help you grow in Christ as His disciple? Take time to pray for those brothers and sisters who serve the Lord daily, humbly and quietly “behind the scenes.”*

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OCTOBER 13, 2019 — PENTECOST 18

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

On the way to Jerusalem He was passing along between Samaria and Galilee.¹² And as He entered a village, He was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance¹³ and lifted up their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” — Luke 17:11-13

Because leprosy was contagious, people having leprosy were required to remain at a distance from others. If they needed to come near they had to announce themselves from a distance. Leprosy would sometimes go into remission. In that case the individual would need to go to a priest who would then declare him clean. In these verses Jesus sent these lepers to a priest *before* they were healed. They went and along the way were healed. They responded in faith and Jesus healed them, yet only one returned to give Him thanks.



Thoughts to Ponder: *When someone does you a favor, especially if your life is saved, how would you respond? Would your trust in God increase? Would your faith grow? Here Jesus healed 10 lepers, but only one returned to thank Him. That one man was the only one who learned his faith played a role in his healing. God does not demand that we thank Him for His gifts to us. However, He uses our responsiveness to teach us more about Himself. This week make a list of your gifts from God and how you respond to Him.*

References: Life Application Bible; The Living Bible Encyclopedia.

OCTOBER 20, 2019 — PENTECOST 19

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

— 2 Tim 4:3-4

Nothing can be more expressive than these words. For by saying “they shall accumulate (or heap up) for themselves teachers,” Paul shows the indiscriminate multitude of teachers that are chosen by their disciples, their followers. “Having itching ears” – seeking for those who speak to gratify and delight those followers want to hear.



When our NALC supports the five solas (Sola Scriptura...Scripture Alone; Sola Fide...Faith Alone; Sola Gratia...Grace Alone; Solus Christus...Christ Alone; and SoliDeo Gloria...to the Glory of God Alone) it is guarding against the warning that Paul gives to Timothy and therefore to all Christians. In many ways, the NALC was formed because of the words to Timothy coming true.

Thoughts to ponder: *This week, practice testing all things being said or written against Scripture. How many times do you find things people are saying or writing that would fail a test against Scripture.*

Resources: Lutheran Study Bible, Biblehub.com, Christianity.com

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OCTOBER 27, 2019 — REFORMATION SUNDAY

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

³¹ So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”
- John 8: 31-32

In these verses, Jesus explains that discipleship means accepting all His teachings and remaining faithful to them. Judaism taught that simply studying God’s word and striving to follow the law made a person free. However, Jesus taught that only by believing in Him and His teaching will anyone truly hear God’s Word and also be free from sin, death, and Satan’s rule, and thus free to serve God with a pure heart.



Since Adam, all people are sinners and enslaved to sin, bound to self-centeredness, doomed to death, and blind to their slavery. However, in baptism we have been made free again. Therefore, we are not only able to hear the Word, but also free to accept it, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Thoughts to Ponder: *Do you truly “abide in His word” by accepting the authority of Holy Scripture and try to follow Jesus’ teachings? Or, do you let others, including churches that let secular sources influence what they believe replace the authority of Scripture? To be truly free will you accept the authority of Scripture and what it teaches, even if it means exposing yourself to ridicule or persecution from those around you?*
— Resources: The Lutheran Study Bible

NOVEMBER 03, 2019 — ALL SAINTS SUNDAY

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

“Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the godly!”
— Psalm 149:1

The new song, the salvation of God’s people through the savior we know to be Jesus Christ, is our new song. May this new song always be on our lips in worship, praise, and glory to God. May we also carry it with us in our daily living to share with family, friends, and neighbors.



Philip Melancthon is quoted as stating, “*there is no greater or better work of man than to have true knowledge of God, to pray to Him, and to proclaim Him.*” True knowledge we acquire through the Word as we gather with all the saints to joyfully praise the one true God, using His Word; the two-edged sword, the law and gospel. We pray to a God who is alive and active, and praise Him in all His glory.

Thoughts to Ponder: *Psalm 149 reminds us to praise the Lord as an assembly, a congregation, but also on our bed. This is a call to exult the Lord and His Word by prayer and praise wherever we may be and to all peoples. Will you take the new song to others this week?*
— Resource: The Lutheran Study Bible

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NOVEMBER 10, 2019 — PENTECOST 22

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

— Exodus 3:6

This is what God speaks to Moses when He calls Moses from the burning bush. At first glance, we may think God is just reminding Moses of these patriarchs who were Moses' forefathers who trusted in God's promise to His people, Israel. However, this means more. Jesus, in the passage from Luke 20:37 today, also refers to the above passage in Exodus. These patriarchs are not dead, as we may think, but Jesus is saying that they are alive, that their souls are with Him and their bodies will be raised on the last day. Jesus then says in Luke 20:38, "*Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.*"



What wonderful news -- this is the Gospel. We have a living God who has conquered death. We do not rely on a memory of a god; our God is alive, walking with us, sending His Holy Spirit to comfort us through His Word, making us His children in Baptism and sharing His Holy Supper with us. Let us praise the Lord for His wonderful gifts!

Thoughts to Ponder: *Do you take for granted that we have a living God who is walking with us, calling us to Him? In what ways can you be open to His call?*

Resource: Lutheran Study Bible

NOVEMBER 17, 2019 — PENTECOST 23

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

"Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us."

— 2 Thessalonians 3:6

In this verse Saint Paul admonishes those who profess belief in Christ but do not act accordingly. Specifically Paul mentions idleness. Whether or not these early Christians decided not to do the work of their calling in anticipation of Jesus' second coming is not clear or it could be they were simply lazy. Nevertheless Paul instructs them later in the chapter to use himself as an example because he (Paul) imitates Christ. Paul actually worked night and day to support himself in his ministry so as not to create a burden on those he was ministering to. Each of us has a job which we are called to do in Christ's church. Idleness is not in accord with the tradition that was handed down by Paul to us. This tradition applies both to the young and elderly alike. There is always work for everyone to be done within the body of Christ.



Thoughts to ponder: *Think about your congregation. What opportunities exist for you to continue a life of service in Jesus' name? Already feeling overburdened? Reach out to others in Christian love for help. It is their obligation to Christ to be involved in our mutual ministries.*

Resource: The Lutheran Study Bible

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NOVEMBER 24, 2019 — CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

Psalm 95:1-2

Psalm 95 is a call to worship the Lord, a call to praise the Lord of all the earth. “Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout in triumph to the Rock of our salvation.” This is an invitation to each of us. Here “Rock” is a common poetic figure for God, symbolizing His unfailing strength as a refuge.



The call to offer God joyful thanksgiving is made to everyone, without qualification or limitation. The common duties of thanksgiving rest on all humanity- the claims of the God of providence and mercy should be felt and should be responded to by every man made in His Divine image. Every man is invited to praise God as well as he can. It does not matter how imperfect the praise if it is sincere. Being a general call, comes to worship God with thanksgiving, which every man may be expected to sense, not with any unhappiness but with heartfelt joy.

Thoughts to ponder: *We are exhorted to praise God for his greatness and goodness. Since the Lord is a great God and therefore is greatly to be praised, how can you daily stir up others to the same blessed work?*

Resources: NIV Study Bible & biblehub.com