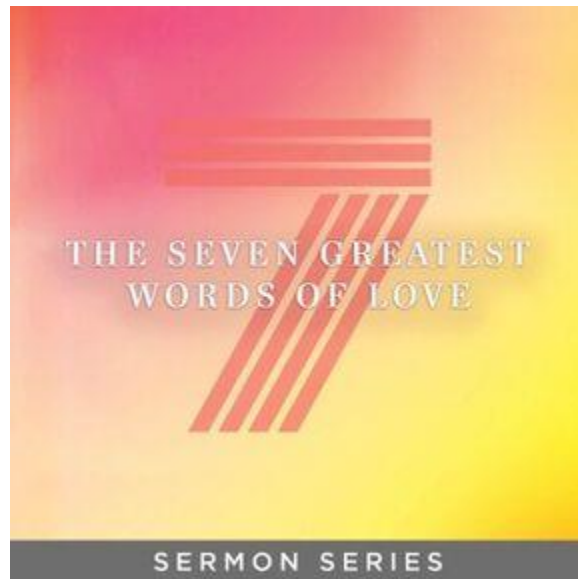


THE SEVEN GREATEST WORDS OF LOVE

Part 3: THE WORD OF LOVE
John 19:25-27

Written by Pastor Steve Norman
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Words of Encouragement Days 183-188



THE SEVEN GREATEST WORDS OF LOVE

Jesus walked this earth teaching about God's LOVE. But do you know what that kind of love really means? Discover anew the meaning behind the last seven words Jesus spoke during his final hours on the cross. These powerful words of Jesus, full meaning and amazing blessing, are His message to us before His resurrection — words of forgiveness, assurance, love, trust, and so much more.

This Week's Memory Verse:

**“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, . . .”
Philippians 2:5-7**

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 183

[For 21 days, our focus is to enable you to take a pause from your busy schedule and routines to reconnect with God through prayer. As you read today, may this spiritual journey strengthen and fill you with God's presence, and renew, refresh, and restore you in the purpose God has for your life.]

"Jesus replied, 'If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water.' . . . 'Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.'" John 4:10-14 NLT

REBUILD STRENGTH: RESTORED FROM SHAME

WHEN Jesus met with the Samaritan woman at the well, it was about noon (John 4:7), the hottest part of the day. The Samaritan woman was considered immoral, had had five husbands, and now lived with a man who was not her husband. She may have experienced shame and rejection by others because of her actions. Knowledge of customs of that time suggests that she was at the well at this time of day to avoid the respectable women who would normally go to get water at sunrise or sunset. Although she is unnamed, she was not unimportant to Jesus. He spent time talking with her and even revealed His true identity as the Messiah to her (John 4:26). This woman went on to witness to those in her town, telling them she had met a man who told her “everything she ever did”. She invited them to hear what Jesus had to say, and many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of her testimony (John 4:39).

We are all likely to have experienced a time of shame because we have all sinned and done things we regret. Perhaps we may have hurt others or not lived lives as God would want us to live, much like the woman at the well. In the same way Jesus had time for this woman, He has time for us. Jesus meets us in whatever our circumstance and knows all the details of our lives, “everything we ever did”. He longs to restore us and help us see the future and hope He offers.

Jesus offers a restored life to all. To anyone who believes in Him, He promises rivers of living water will flow within them, (John 7:38). In John 7, Jesus later explained what He meant by streams of living water - the living water was the Holy Spirit whom those who believed in Him were to later receive (John 7:39). Jesus still offers living water, the Holy Spirit, to anyone who believes in Him. Just like the woman and many of the Samaritan's from the woman's town who believed in Him, if we have a thirst for Jesus in our lives, we, too, can be restored by the Holy Spirit from the feelings of shame and experience the spring of water welling up in us.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank You that You can restore me from feelings of shame. Thank you that you always have time for me and desire to teach me more and more about You and Your plans for my life. Today, I want to thank you that through the power of Your Holy Spirit, I can be changed. Give me a constant desire to live my life in a way that pleases You. Help me to thirst for You and may Your Holy Spirit fall afresh on me today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 184

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“When Job prayed for his friends, the LORD restored his fortunes. In fact, the LORD gave him twice as much as before! Then all his brothers, sisters, and former friends came and feasted with him in his home. And they consoled him and comforted him because of all the trials the LORD had brought against him. And each of them brought him a gift of money and a gold ring. So the LORD blessed Job in the second half of his life even more than in the beginning.”
Job 42:10-12a (NLT)

RESTORE STRENGTH: RESTORED THROUGH LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

YOU may have read the story of Job found in the Old Testament. Job was a "blameless and upright," man who "feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:2). Not only was he righteous, he was also wealthy, being richly blessed and protected by God. There came a day when Job was tested by God and, except for his wife, he lost all his possessions, his children, his wealth, his servants, and his health. His friends came to console him, but instead of consoling and comforting, they blamed him for his problems. Even his wife became discouraged and despised him (Job 2:9). In time, after a few interactions with God, Job was directed by God to pray for his friends, pleading for God to forgive them. In Job 42:10, we are told God heard his prayer for his friends, forgave them and restored all of Job's possessions. Through all of this, Job remained a faithful and righteous man before God. His story inspires many and is a profound influence in the lives of God's children everywhere.

A gentleman named David, was a follower of Christ who worked in an international company. His manager displayed

anger toward David most of the time. In response to this treatment, David started to pray for his boss every day. When his boss arranged a party at his home for all his employees, David attended. He was shocked to see that his boss's son was sick and in bed. With compassion, David started praying for his boss's son and the son totally recovered. This compassionate act of David touched the manager's heart, and he started behaving kindly towards David and his fellow workers.

We can learn much from the example of the prayers David said for his manager's son and those Job spoke on behalf of his friends. We may be experiencing difficulties in different areas of our lives for many reasons. It is a great comfort to know we can also be blessed and be restored by our Lord if we show love and kindness to others, forgiving each other just as God in Christ forgave us. (Ephesians 4:32). Mother Teresa expressed the idea in this famous quote, "Let us not be satisfied with just giving money. Money is not enough, money can be got, but they need your hearts to love them (poor / those in need of love). So, spread your love everywhere you go". This week, may your eyes be open to the ways God will use you to help restore others to Himself as they see your willingness to reach out in love and forgiveness.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Father, Thank you for the unconditional love and forgiveness you have shown me. Loving and forgiving those who treat me well comes easy. Loving and forgiving those who are unkind to me is much more challenging. Today, I ask you to give me a heart to love and forgive others as you love and forgive me. Help me to reach out to the hurting world around me and point others to You through my words and actions. In the loving and gracious name of Jesus, I pray, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 185

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“Jesus said to the people who believed in him, ‘You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’” John 8:31-32

REBUILD STRENGTH: THE RESTORING POWER OF THE BIBLE

ONE night, John sat in his hotel room. He felt defeated by self and sin. Through his excesses in life, his health was deteriorating, his family was falling apart, and his business was in ruins. In his loneliness and desperation, he picked up a Bible that had been placed in the nightstand drawer by The Gideons, a Christian association which works to distribute Bibles free of charge. He started to read the Bible, and the Spirit of God used the Word of God to bring him to a place of repentance and faith. John had entered that hotel room totally defeated, but he left the next morning wholly delivered by the grace of God as his old life was replaced by a brand new life in Christ. John went on to become a Bible teacher and later, God called him into ministry with Gideons International.

It is not the arguments of scholars that transforms lives, but the availability of The Bible to seekers. John's life was restored completely overnight. He had not heard the gospel from a pastor or a Christian, he simply sat down, alone, and read the powerful Word of God. Through the Holy Spirit, he was convicted of his wrongdoings and came to a point of repentance. Paul writes that the scripture is

directly from God and helps in changing and training us for God's Will for our lives (2 Timothy 3:16 & 17).

Nothing can change the lives of people like the Bible. Alcoholics and drug addicts have had their lives become sober and clean because they started reading the Bible. God's Word can change the most ungodly individuals into godly people who become upstanding citizens in the community. Human hearts are not changed or set free by earthly things. Only God and His Word can change hearts. Even when obeying the Bible is hard and uncomfortable, it will set you free. The Bible tells you how you can be saved. It tells you that your life isn't an accident. The Bible tells you how to be forgiven. It tells you how God can use you for good in the world.

Do you regularly read the Word of God so that your life can be restored? Read it and discover God's will for your life!

TODAY'S PRAYER

Father God, Thank You for Your life-changing power and for the Bible, Your Word, that You use to change and direct my life. Help me to spend time in Your Word each day. As I read it, teach me more about You and how I can live my life so it pleases you. Instruct me through Your Word so I know what I should do in each situation, and realign my priorities as needed so all that I do and all that I look forward to falls in line with Your plan for my life. Thank You for using Your Word to change me to become more like Jesus. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 186

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"I [King David] will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters. I will praise you among your assembled people. Praise the Lord, all you who fear him! Honor Him, all you descendants of Jacob! Show Him reverence, all you descendants of Israel!" Psalm 22:22-23

RESTORE STRENGTH: RESTORE YOUR WORSHIP

PSALM 22 is the perfect sound of a person who feels a desperate need for restoration in his life. Here, we find David crying out to God to draw near to him in his desperate moment. David, in this highly anxious state, is trying to hear from God, and as he cries out, he calls on God to save him.

We all face such moments in our lives when we, too, are not able to handle the uncertainty in our lives; instead, we focus so much on the situation that we are filled with anxiety. Even Jesus experienced a desperate and anxious moment when he was on the cross. While he was hanging in agony on the cross, having been beaten, stripped of his clothes, crown of thorns on his head, Jesus cried out, "My Father, my Father, why have you forsaken me?" That was a moment in history when God, who became man, felt God-forsaken. But Jesus also knew there was to be a resurrection after the crucifixion. Death was not the end of the story of Jesus. Instead, the restoration of mankind through the resurrection of Christ was the plan of God throughout all of history.

One of things I love about David is that in his moments of desperation, he still kept an understanding of who God was which, in turn, helped him convert his desperate moment into a moment of worship. In Psalm 22:22-23, David prepares himself to declare the praises of the Lord in any given circumstances, and he is not afraid to worship Him when and wherever he can. We, too, when we face incredibly desperate and anxiety-filled moments, need to remember to worship God in the midst of the storm. At these difficult moments, we restore our worship through the help of the Holy Spirit, who can help us refocus our thoughts on God. As you pray today, try staying a few extra minutes in God's presence, and worship Him in truth and in spirit. It will make all the difference to your day!

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, You are worthy of worship. Give me a heart to worship you today. If I have let worship fall by the wayside in my times with you, restore unto me a heart that desires to worship you. If I have allowed my worldly worries and situations to set the tone of my worship, help me to change that, and may my worship set the tone of my response to the present situational problems in my life. As it says in 1 Chronicles 29:11-12, "Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. Everything in the heavens and on earth is yours, O LORD, and this is your kingdom. We adore you as the one who is over all things. Wealth and honor come from you alone, for you rule over everything. Power and might are in your hand, and at your discretion people are made great and given strength." Come and reign over my life! In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 187

[Through my many years working in youth ministry, I have often used stories to help teach and encourage us in the values that God holds true in His heart. For the next seven days, I will be sharing scripture and stories to encourage kids, young and old, to focus on God's blessings and turn grumbles into gratitude.]

"My dear friends, . . . continue to live in a way that gives meaning to your salvation. Do this with fear and respect for God. Yes, it is God who is working in you. He helps you want to do what pleases Him, and He gives you the power to do it. Do everything without complaining or arguing so that you will be blameless and pure, children of God without any fault. But you are living with evil people all around you, who have lost their sense of what is right. Among those people you shine like lights in a dark world." Philippians 2:12-15 ERV

THE GRUMBLING GAME

"DECLAN," said Mom, "will you come and dry these dishes, please?"

"Can't Dara do it?" Declan asked. "I'm sick of drying dishes!"

Dara rolled her eyes. "You're always sick of one thing or another."

Dad looked up from his computer. "We seem to get the 'sick of something' illness too often around here," he said. "We're about as bad as the Israelites, who complained constantly in spite of all the good things God did for them."

Mom nodded. "I have an idea for a game we can play to help us learn to stop grumbling and complaining. When one of us is caught saying we're sick of something, we have to say one thing we're thankful for about that same thing."

"Okay," said Dara. "You won't catch me!"

But all Declan said was, "Huh!"

The next day, Dara walked in from school with a bulging backpack. "I'm so sick of all this homework!" she said.

"Oh really?" Declan replied. "And what about your homework are you thankful for?" he asked with a grin.

"Oh no!" Dara smiled and shook her head. "I guess I'm thankful it helps me understand more of what we're learning at school."

A bit later, Dara bumped into her brother as he was walking to the table with a glass of milk. "You never watch where you're going!" he said, grabbing a napkin to wipe the milk off his shirt. "It makes me sick!"

"I'm sorry, Declan," Dara said. Then she grinned. "But what about me are you thankful for?"

Declan looked startled for a moment. "Well, I guess I'm thankful you're not twins," he finally said.

Dara sputtered and started after him.

"Okay, okay," Declan said with a laugh, halting their chase around the kitchen table. "I'm thankful you're always willing to take over my chores when I'm sick."

Dara smiled. "That's better."

"You guys seem to be getting the hang of this," said Mom, who had overhead everything from the living room. "I think this grumbling game is helping you see the blessings God has put in your lives. When we focus on all He's given us--and all Jesus has done for us--we may soon find there's really nothing to complain about."

HOW ABOUT YOU?

Do you have a habit of grumbling and complaining? God was not pleased when the Israelites complained instead of trusting Him to care for them, and He's not pleased when His children complain today. When you catch yourself grumbling, stop and remember all God has given you—including His own Son to die for your sin. Then, think of a reason to thank God for the thing you were complaining about.

TODAY'S PRAYER

"Lord, I have so much to be thankful for. Sometimes I lose sight of all Your blessings and forget to be thankful. I want to live with a heart full of gratitude. Your Word instructs me to, "Do everything without complaining or arguing so that you will be blameless and pure, children of God without any fault." (Philippians 2:14-15). Help me to turn complaints into thanks and help me to start a habit of giving thanks today. In Jesus name, Amen.

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 188

[Through my many years working in youth ministry, I have often used stories to help teach and encourage us in the values that God holds true in His heart. For the next seven days, I will be sharing scripture and stories to encourage kids, young and old, to focus on God's blessings and turn grumbles into gratitude.]

"Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever." Psalm 136:1, NKJV

GIVE THANKS FOR STARS

"**OUR** room is going to look so cool!" Molly said as she set her brush down and took a seat on the floor. She and her twin sister, Elinor, had just finished painting their room completely black. After it dried they were going to put star-shaped glow-in-the-dark stickers all over the walls.

"It's going to be like sleeping outside!" Elinor said.

"Okay, now we need to decide how we're going to put the stickers up," said Molly. "Do we want to do some sort of pattern or just put them up randomly?"

Just then Mom walked in. "The walls look good, girls." She turned on the overhead light. "I'm glad you're going to add the stickers, though, otherwise it would be pretty dark in here."

"Thanks, Mom," said Elinor. "That light helps--it's only three in the afternoon and it's already getting hard to see in here!"

"Yeah," said Molly. "Can you imagine what it would be like if God had made the sky completely black, without any stars or light?"

"That would be pretty dark," replied Elinor. "Do you remember when we first moved here, and we'd try to find the bathroom in the middle of the night with no lights on?"

"I do," said Mom. "You girls got so many bruises from running into things that we finally had to get a night light."

"Yes--and we were sure thankful for that night light!" said Elinor. She picked up a star sticker from the floor. "I'm thankful God gives us night lights outside, too. The stars are so beautiful to look at."

"And so bright," added Molly. "When the sky is clear and the moon is full, we don't even need the house light on to play basketball."

Mom nodded. "Sometimes we take for granted all that God has created and provided for us. It's important to remember to stop and thank Him for all He has given us."

Molly sat up. "Elinor, that gives me an idea for how we should arrange the stickers! Let's scatter them around, but in the center of one of the walls, let's have them form the words Give Thanks."

"Let's do it!" said Elinor. "That will be a good reminder to thank God for everything He's given us."

HOW ABOUT YOU?

Do you remember to thank God for everything He's given you? When was the last time you thanked Him for the stars or your family or your clothes? Don't forget to thank Him for all He has done for you and the things He provides for you every day. What can you do to remind yourself to give thanks to God?

TODAY'S PRAYER

Dear God, Thank You for Your amazing power and work in my life. Thank You for Your goodness and for Your blessings over me. Thank You for Your great love and care. Thank You for Your sacrifice so that I might have freedom and life. Forgive me for when I don't thank You enough for who You are, for all that You do, for all that You've given to me. Help me to set my eyes and my heart afresh on You. Renew my spirit, fill me with Your peace and joy. I love You, and I need You today and every day. I give You praise and thanks, for You alone are worthy! In Jesus' name, Amen.

Pastor Steve