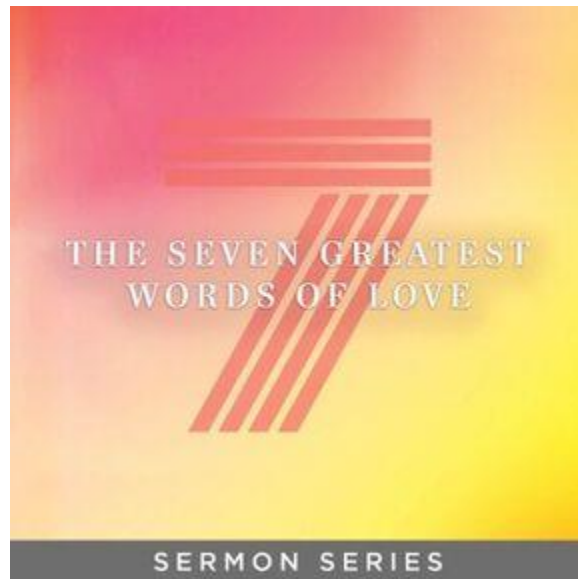


THE SEVEN GREATEST WORDS OF LOVE

Part 2: THE WORD OF ASSURANCE
Luke 23:30-43

Written by Pastor Steve Norman
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Words of Encouragement Days 177-182



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:

**"Jesus answered him, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'"
Luke 23:43**

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 177

[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.]

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon Me, for the Lord has anointed Me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent Me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed.” Isaiah 61:1

REBUILD STRENGTH: REBUILDING THE BROKENHEARTED

IT is quite likely that everyone you meet will have experienced a broken heart at some point in their lives. When our heart is broken, it can feel like we are held captive to a crushing darkness in our minds and a heavy feeling in our hearts. There could be many causes for the heartache such as a break in a relationship, bereavement, or ill health in yourself or those you love. Heart break, it seems, is a part of this life and has been ever since the first sin that brought about the fall of man.

The theme of the latter chapters of Isaiah is a message of comfort and hope for the exiles in Babylon. Isaiah 61:3 describes the comfort God gives to “those who mourn” and “those who grieve”, “instead of ashes...joy” and “instead of mourning...praise”. When we are brokenhearted, we need to feel comfort and hope. At times, however, we may be so brokenhearted that we may believe others cannot fully understand our distress, that unless they have experienced the same heartache, they cannot truly know the depth of our pain. During those times, we need assurance that our broken hearts can and will become healed and renewed. Fortunately for us, God fully knows

our pain. Through His Holy Spirit, He uses compassion as a means to help us help one another in time of need. Compassion helps us rebuild what is broken and regain a sense of freedom and peace in our minds. God does not want us to remain living in darkness and distress. He wants us to feel joy and to praise Him.

During His first sermon in His hometown of Nazareth recorded in Luke 4:16-21, Jesus read part of this passage and interpreted it as a reference to Himself. This passage also reveals the positive nature of the ministry the Lord wants His people to perform. In our times of pain and distress, we can turn to God and He will help us to rebuild and recover. We can also turn to each other, to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, to show and receive God's love. When we reach out to others with Christ's compassion, we follow His example and demonstrate God's love to those in need.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Father, Thank You for Your great compassion. Thank you that in times when my heart is broken, I can turn to You and You promise to help heal and comfort my heart. Thank You that You free those who are in darkness and distress so they can again live in your joy and peace. As Jesus had compassion on those He met as He walked here on earth, so I ask you to give me a heart filled with compassion toward others. Give me a desire to comfort those around me who are brokenhearted, and give me words of hope to share with them. Thank You for each opportunity You will bring my way to reach out to those who are in need of Your touch and Your compassion today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 178

[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.]

“Just then a woman who had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding came up behind Him. She touched the fringe of His robe, for she thought, ‘If I can just touch His robe, I will be healed.’

Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, ‘Daughter, be encouraged! Your faith has made you well.’ And the woman was healed at that moment.”
Matthew 9:20-22

REBUILD STRENGTH: REBUILD YOUR FAITH IN JESUS AND HE WILL REBUILD YOUR LIFE

AS Jesus walked on this earth, He healed people in many different ways. The woman in today's reading was healed instantly by touching Jesus' cloak, a way that is not mentioned any other time in scripture. For twelve years, this unnamed woman had spent much of her money and energy in search of a treatment for her condition. Due to her illness, we know she probably would have been left alone by her family, and she would have experienced a lot of pain and suffering. Given the continuous nature of her situation, it would be easy to surmise reasons why she may even have lost all hope of recovery. That all changed, however, when one day she heard about Jesus and believed she could be healed. Matthew's account indicates she lacked the courage to ask for healing publicly and instead touched His cloak and received immediate healing. What a great miracle she experienced!

Damien lived in Georgia, USA. His parents misused alcohol, and his mother was associated with the Mafia. He lived in a poor neighborhood and grew up seeing his parents fight all the time. At the age of 17, his mother said, “I hate you! I wish I

never had you! You should've died!” When he heard this, his heart was broken, and he was devastated. The bitterness he experienced showed itself as anger toward everyone and as a result, he developed bad relationships, turned to drugs, lost hope for the future, and came to believe he would never have a good life. As time went on, Damien was driven out of his home by his mother and started living on the streets. He attempted suicide many times, believing no one cared about him. Eventually, he ended up in prison where he heard about Jesus. Soon, God opened his eyes to the change He could make in Damian's life, and Damian prayed and asked Jesus for a sign: If Jesus was indeed God, would He deliver him from prison. The Lord Jesus intervened in his life and proved that He is God. He delivered him out of prison, Damian committed his life to Jesus, and his life was transformed. He is now a living testimony for Jesus.

Dear friend, you may be in a similar situation as Damien faced. You might have gone through failures and you may find yourself alone. The same living God who rebuilt Damien's life and healed the woman who touched Jesus' cloak, can heal and transform your life. All you need to do is put your trust and faith in the one Living God, commit to following in Jesus' footsteps, and He will rebuild your life. (Proverbs 3:5-6). If you have already done this and know God's promise to be true, is there someone in your world who needs to hear this message of hope?

TODAY'S PRAYER

Heavenly Father, Thank You for Your great rebuilding plan. Today, where my faith is weak, I ask you to rebuild it. Strengthen my faith where it has become weakened by broken relationships or situations that seem impossible. Heal my life so that I can serve you faithfully, and help me to reach out to others in need of this same message of faith in You and the hope that comes from knowing You. In the gracious name of Lord Jesus, I pray, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 179

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“Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, ‘Go back, each of you, to your mother’s home. May the Lord show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.’

Then she kissed them and they wept aloud and said to her, ‘We will go back with you to your people.’

But Naomi said, ‘Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me?’ . . .

Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her. . . . Ruth replied, ‘Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.’” Ruth 1:8-17

REBUILD STRENGTH: REBUILDER OF LIVES

TODAY we consider the life of a young woman who lost her future and how God rebuilt it. Naomi was an Israelite from Bethlehem. Due to famine, she, her husband, and their two sons relocated to the nearby country of Moab, where her husband eventually died and her two sons married Moabite women. In time Naomi’s sons also died, and she was left with her two daughters-in-law in a foreign country. As Naomi faced many hardships, she decided to return to her hometown, Bethlehem. One of the young widows, Ruth, chose to go with her mother-in-law. At that time, she did not know that God had a plan to rebuild their lives.

Once in Bethlehem, Ruth set about to find food for Naomi and herself, and she eventually found work gleaning heads of grain after the reapers. Gleaning was God's provision for the poor (Leviticus 23:22) and it was hard work. As they gleaned, the poor worked to pick up spilled grain left behind in the fields by the workers after they had reaped the grain sheaves. Ruth happened to gather grains in fields that belonged to Boaz, a distant relative of Naomi who was a righteous and wealthy man. Because of the grace of God, Ruth found favor with Boaz. Ruth 4 describes how Ruth obeyed the instructions of her mother-in-law, became the wife of Boaz, and they were blessed with a son. The women of Bethlehem praised the Lord that Naomi was restored through Ruth and Boaz’s son, Obed (Ruth 4:14-15). Obed was the father of Jesse who was the father of King David.

When Ruth moved back to Bethlehem with Naomi, she did not know that she would one day be the great grandmother of King David and become a part of the genealogy of Jesus Christ. What a great blessing! When we continue to do the right things even in the times of difficulties, God will fit us into His great plan. It does not matter to God where we are from or where we currently live. Ruth was a Moabite, people who were far from God due to the actions of previous generations. But what she did was pleasing in the sight of God.

Dear friend, you may plan good things for your life and for your children, but God has plans not only for you but also for the generations to come.

TODAY’S PRAYER

Dear Lord, Thank you for Your story of redemption and hope found in the life of Ruth. Ruth was kind, obedient, and continued to do good for others, and as she did, You rebuilt her life. Lord, there are areas in my life that need to be rebuilt. I bring those areas to You and ask You to begin Your rebuilding process. As You do, grant me wisdom to make good choices and to serve others well so that I may live a life that is pleasing to You. In Jesus name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 180

[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.]

"The Lord took hold of me, and I was carried away by the Spirit of the Lord to a valley filled with bones. He led me all around among the bones that covered the valley floor. They were scattered everywhere across the ground and were completely dried out. Then He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones become living people again?" "O Sovereign Lord," I replied, "You alone know the answer to that." Then He said to me, "Speak a prophetic message to these bones and say, 'Dry bones, listen to the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Look! I am going to put breath into you and make you live again! I will put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'" So I spoke this message, just as He told me. Suddenly as I spoke, there was a rattling noise all across the valley. The bones of each body came together and attached themselves as complete skeletons. Then as I watched, muscles and flesh formed over the bones. Then skin formed to cover their bodies, but they still had no breath in them. Then He said to me, "Speak a prophetic message to the winds, son of man. Speak a prophetic message and say, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, O breath, from the four winds! Breathe into these dead bodies so they may live again.'" So I spoke the message as He commanded me, and breath came into their bodies. They all came to life and stood up on their feet—a great army. Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones represent the people of Israel. They are saying, 'We have become old, dry bones—all hope is gone. Our nation is finished.' Therefore, prophesy to them and say, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I will open your graves of exile and cause you to rise again. Then I will bring you back to the land of Israel. When this happens, O my people, you will know that I am the Lord. I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live again and return home to your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done what I said. Yes, the Lord has spoken!'" Ez. 37:1-14

REBUILD STRENGTH: RESTORED LIFE IN CHRIST

DURING the scene in today's passage, the Prophet Ezekiel is shown a vision about the spiritual state of the people of Israel. The people of Israel felt that they were disconnected from God and stood in a place where they felt dry and hopeless. It was here that God called Ezekiel to speak to a message. Don't you love the visual effects of His message! It's a message of restoration, of life, of renewed hope, and, as He is the Great I AM and promise keeper, it is a message of certainty.

Most of us can relate to the feelings depicted in this scene as we may have gone through a similar journey in our lives. The journey ultimately may have led us to a point when we felt hopeless, dry, and cut-off. But just as the Lord sent a word to His people through His prophet, so as you are reading this passage, this word might be your prophecy. In the same way that God restored the future of the people of Israel by sending His breath of life and resurrecting all the dead, dry bones through His Spirit, God can do the same for you. God can resurrect your dead finances, your dead marriage, your dead family relationship, your dead situation at work, wherever you feel is completely lost, and wherever you feel there is no hope.

As you spend time in prayer today, think about any areas that you would like to have renewed or even brought back to life. Ask the Holy Spirit to resurrect your faith, and then trust God completely to send His Holy Spirit to move and work in your life. God is our God of restoration and He promises you will see restoration taking place in your life. As the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:11, the same Spirit that resurrected Christ from the dead is alive in us. Let us live out the resurrection power in our life, and experience restoration in the name of Jesus.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank You for being a God who restores. Today, I bring before you the areas of my life that feel like they are lost and need Your touch to be restored. Just as You promised to the people of Israel, "I have spoken, I have done it", help me to hold on to Your promises and to Your word that You will bring about restoration. Today, I accept Your restorative work in my life and thank You for Your promise to complete the work You have begun. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 181

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"Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven. Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results."

James 5:13-16 (NLT)

REBUILD STRENGTH: RESTORE THROUGH PRAYER TOGETHER

HOW often should you pray? When should you pray? What should you pray for? How should you pray? We often have many questions about prayer. James 5:13-16 addresses some of these questions. In this passage, James speaks about offering prayers of faith and the need to pray in all situations whether they are good or bad, happy or sad, in sickness and health. These words are true and necessary for us today as well. Paul echoed this when he wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, "Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Whatever happens, give thanks, because it is God's will in Christ Jesus that you do this."

James also states that we are to confess our faults to one another and pray for one another. Confessing our faults to someone else keeps us accountable for our actions. We need to confess our sins to a trusted Christian brother or sister so they will then know how to pray for us and be more stirred up to do so. This means we will need to be vulnerable,

something that for most of us can be difficult to do, but God set it up this way for a reason - so others could pray for us in faith so that we can experience the fullness of God's healing. God wants us to pray together for one another. Prayers prayed together are a wonderful blessing and hold incredible power. As we share our needs with each other, we can agree together about them and bring them to the Lord who is able to bring the healing, restoration, and intervention needed to us. We also will find encouragement and help as those we share with may have had the same or similar experience and, therefore, are able to offer understanding and support to us for the situation we are going through. The second part of today's verses brings real encouragement as well. "The prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results." Prayer can be powerful and effective in all situations and trials we may be experiencing.

Take some time today to check your prayer life. What can you do to improve it? One way to strengthen it is to develop and nurture a network of trusted Christian friends around you so that you can pray together for those needs that come into your lives. This, in turn, will bring comfort and support to the one in need. Tremendous power from our Lord is available as we pray with hearts in one accord. So reach out to someone this week and pray together. Then watch to see how God answers your prayer.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You that You have given me the ability to pray to You. Help me to not underestimate the power and privilege I have to pray with and for others in their time of need. Give me courage to reach out to someone with whom I can be vulnerable and confess my sins, sharing the need I have for strength in the areas of my weakness. Thank You for Your grace that covers those sins, the restoration prayer brings, and the strength You give to overcome sin patterns in my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 182

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“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’

‘Well,’ they replied, ‘some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.’

Then he asked them, ‘But who do you say I am?’

Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’

Jesus replied, ‘You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.’ Then he sternly warned the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.” Matthew 16:13-20

REBUILD STRENGTH: GOD RESTORES MINISTRY

WHEN people fail and recognize their part in that failure, God loves to restore them back to ministering to others. Today we take a look at a great example of this from the Bible. Simon Peter, also known as Cephas in the Bible, was an ordinary fisherman but Jesus chose for him for an extraordinary ministry. After experiencing the miracle of Jesus which caused him to catch plenty of fish, Peter acknowledged his sin (Luke 5:8). Jesus said to him, “... Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men” and he became one of the first followers of Jesus Christ. When Jesus walked on water, Peter was the only disciple who climbed out of the boat to walk to Jesus. He was an enthusiastic, strong, and outspoken disciple. But for all his

strengths, he had several failings in his life. Still, the Lord chose him and continued to shape him into exactly who He intended Peter to be.

Later in Jesus' ministry, Peter boasted and said to Jesus, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!” (Matt. 26:33). Shortly afterwards at Jesus' trial, when Peter was confronted, he denied knowing Jesus (Mathew 26:74). However, when Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken about him just hours before the trial, he was repentant, went out, and wept bitterly (Mathew 26:75).

After Jesus' resurrection, Simon Peter went back to his old business of fishing. But Jesus showed up again, repeated the miracle of the large catch of fish and fed him with love (John 21). Then Jesus asked Peter, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?”, Peter answered, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed My lambs”. Jesus asked the question three times and helped Peter to understand the confirmation of his ministry for Jesus. Peter went on to become a powerful leader and performed great miracles in the name his Lord Jesus.

Jesus forgave and restored Peter and re-commissioned him as an apostle. When we honestly accept our weakness and ask His strength, God is faithful to forgive our setbacks and restore us. That, my friend, is good news!

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Thank you for sharing through Your Word about imperfect people. One such person is Simon Peter. I understand that though Peter wanted to stand for You, he denied You at a time of trouble. He also deeply repented for it, and You graciously brought him back onto the right track and restored his ministry with the help of the Holy Spirit. I, too, need Your strength and the power of Your Holy Spirit to stand for You and follow Your plan in my life. Please restore my spiritual life where it needs to be restored, and help me to become all You see in me and have planned for me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve