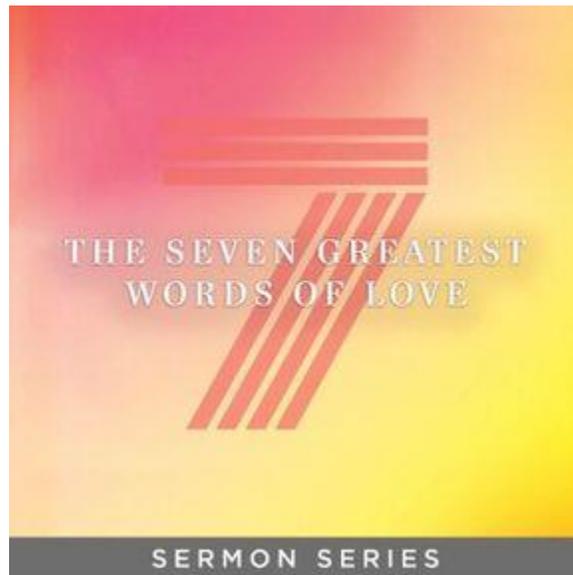


THE SEVEN GREATEST WORDS OF LOVE

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

Written by Pastor Steve Norman
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Words of Encouragement Days 185-191



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 185

[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 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

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 189

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“For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to harvest. A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to tear down and a time to build up. A time to cry and a time to laugh. A time to grieve and a time to dance. A time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones. A time to embrace and a time to turn away. A time to search and a time to quit searching. A time to keep and a time to throw away. A time to tear and a time to mend. A time to be quiet and a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war and a time for peace.” Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

FATHER TIME

ZAYDEN looked upset when Grandpa came in to tell him goodnight. "Is something wrong?" Grandpa asked.

"I hate being a kid," Zayden said. "Spencer and Tessa can stay up and watch TV, but I have to go to bed. I wish I was older so I could do whatever I want!"

Grandpa sat down on the bed. "How about a bedtime story before you go to sleep?"

Zayden was about to say that bedtime stories were for little kids, but he wanted to hear the story, so he nodded and got into bed.

"There was once a young boy who wished he was older--just like you," Grandpa began. "One night, he heard footsteps in his room. 'My name is Father Time,' a shaky voice said, 'and I can make you older.'

"The boy couldn't believe his ears. 'I want to be twenty-five!' he said. Immediately he found himself in an office, surrounded by piles of work to be done. 'This is no fun. Make me a different age--like forty!'

"The office faded away, and the boy looked around. Tears sprung to his eyes when he realized he was at his mother's

funeral. 'This is awful! Please, Father Time! Please let me move on!'

"Father Time continued to make him older and older, but with each age the boy found something he didn't like. Finally, he found himself lying in a bed, sick and dying. 'Please, Father Time!' he begged. 'Make me a different age!'

"Father Time sadly shook his head. 'I'm sorry,' he said, 'but you have no more ages left.' Then he smiled. 'But you can go back to the one where you started.' And with that, the boy woke up to his mother telling him to get ready for school, and he'd never felt so happy."

Grandpa smiled at Zayden. "My father told me that story when I was your age. I wanted to be older than too, but eventually I learned that every stage of life has its own joys and sorrows. That's why we need to enjoy the blessings Jesus has for us today and trust Him to help us through hard times, whenever they come, knowing He'll use everything that happens in our lives for good."

Zayden smiled as Grandpa turned out the light. "Thanks, Grandpa. I'll remember that."

HOW ABOUT YOU?

Are you eager to grow up? To be on your own and make your own decisions? Don't be in such a hurry. God has many things for you to learn and enjoy at the age you are right now. There will be good times and hard times throughout your life, and Jesus will be with you for every single one. Trust Him to lead you through each stage of your life when the time is right, and enjoy the blessings He has for you today.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Help me to say along with the Psalmist that "This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118:24, NKJV). Help me to choose each day to rejoice and be glad in the day regardless of what is happening around me. You design each day for my enjoyment and to challenge me. I trust You to help me to make it through each and every day. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 190

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Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise Him in His mighty heaven! Praise Him for His mighty works; praise His unequalled greatness! Praise Him with a blast of the ram's horn; praise Him with the lyre and harp! Praise Him with the tambourine and dancing; praise Him with strings and flutes! Praise Him with a clash of cymbals; praise Him with loud clanging cymbals. Let everything that breathes sing praises to the Lord! Praise the Lord!" Psalm 150:1-6

THE PRAISE DAY

"WHAT'S all the racket about?" Mom came out of her office and stood in the doorway of the living room. "You two have done nothing but fight and complain all day."

Christian and Bria glared at each other silently.

"Praise the Lord!" Mom suddenly shouted. Christian and Bria jumped in surprise. Mom smiled as the kids looked at her curiously. "You were yelling and complaining in loud voices, so I thought I'd praise the Lord in an equally loud voice." She raised her voice again. "I'm thankful for the rain, aren't you? It's been so dry lately!"

"But Mom, when it rains, there's nothing to do," Christian said.

"I have an idea." Mom went into her office and came back out with paper and pencils. "Why don't you make a praise list by writing down all the wonderful things God has done for us? Let's have a praise day instead of a complaining day. Now, I have some work to finish up, but you can show me your lists before dinner tonight."

Christian sighed as Mom went back into her office and shut the door. After a moment, he wrote, "God helped me get my homework done."

Bria took a sheet of paper and wrote, "God gives us food every day."

After working a little while, Christian said, "Hey, let's tape our pages together to make one long sheet. Let's see how long a list we can make." The list was still growing when Dad got home.

"How was your day?" Mom asked him as she pulled a chicken pot pie out of the oven.

"Terrible," he said. "First, the rain got my clothes all wet, and then--"

"Praise the Lord!" Christian shouted. Dad looked startled, and Christian grinned. "Mom says this should be a praise day."

"Come on, Dad," said Bria. "Praise the Lord for something. We'll add it to our list."

"Well, I praise the Lord for creating your mom," Dad said with a grin. "I love her, and she teaches us to count our blessings--and blesses us with good food for dinner!"

Mom smiled. "And I praise the Lord for the best thing of all--dying on the cross for our sins!"

HOW ABOUT YOU?

Do you complain when things don't go your way? Sometimes difficult things happen that you need to talk about with someone, but there's a difference between sharing struggles and complaining about everything you don't like. Instead of complaining, look for the good things God has blessed you with and the people He's put in your life—and most importantly, how He's given you eternal life through Jesus!

TODAY'S PRAYER

Dear Lord, I praise You today with my heart and song, I praise You for Your faithfulness, I praise You for Your great power and love. I confess my need for You. Without You, my life does not go so well, and I just spin around on my own. I struggle and worry, get weary and worn. Yet You never leave me. Thank You for Your presence. Thank You for Your care over me, and thank You that You breathe renewal right into my soul. I ask for Your spirit to fill me, to draw me close to Yourself, and to work Your purpose through me as I set my eyes on You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 191

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“Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need. So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.” Matthew 6:33-34

TOMORROW'S TEARS

MOM found Becca crying in the backyard, watching her dog, Sheba, paw at leaves in the flower bed. "What's the matter, honey?"

"I don't want Sheba to get sick," Becca said. "I know the vet took that lump off her leg, but she said it could come back."

"It could, but maybe it won't," said Mom. "It may never come back."

"But what if it does?" Becca sniffed. "I don't want Sheba to die."

"Of course you don't," said Mom, offering Becca a tissue. "But worrying about that is keeping you from enjoying her. You look just as sad now as you would if she died." Mom bent down to pet Sheba. "Do you remember what happened to Job?"

"Job?" asked Becca. "You mean the man in the Bible?"

"Yes," said Mom. "He had plenty to be happy about--a big family, lots of money. Then he lost everything. After Job's problems started, he said, 'The thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me.'"

"That doesn't make me feel better," said Becca.

"Wait! I have a point." Mom dried a tear from Becca's cheek. "All those years, he had his family with him. He had prosperity and success. But do you think his worrying helped him enjoy those things?"

"No," said Becca, petting Sheba's head.

"And did being afraid of losing everything stop it from happening?"

Becca hugged Sheba. "No. But what can I do about being sad? It doesn't have an off button."

"No, but we have a choice when it comes to worrying about sad things that might happen," said Mom. "We can worry, which doesn't help anyway, or we can choose to thank Jesus for all He's done for us and the good things we have today--like Sheba. We can talk to Him about troubling things and then trust Him to work them out. Job did that. He continued to love and believe in God."

Mom picked up a ball and looked at Sheba, who wagged her tail. "I think she needs a playmate," said Mom, throwing the ball.

Becca took off running. "Come on, Sheba!" she called. "I bet I can get to that ball before you do." Sheba quickly caught up with her, and together they raced across the lawn.

HOW ABOUT YOU?

Do you worry about what might happen tomorrow? If worrying keeps you focused on what might go wrong, you can't enjoy what you have right now. When you start to worry, pray about the problem, and talk to a parent or another adult about it. Then choose to thank Jesus for the many blessings you do have and enjoy them as you trust Him.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, I admit that I often forget You are with me, and I often forget what You are like. Would You please forgive me for the times I forget to acknowledge You? No matter how little or long I have known You, I want to get to know You better. I need to know Your Word more and Your promises better. Help me to put You first in every area of my life. Help me to live one day at a time, and learn not worry about tomorrow but instead focus on what You are doing in my life right now. Help me to worry less and trust more in Your promise to take care of every one of my needs — financial, relational, physical, social, spiritual, and emotional. Thank You for taking care of all of my needs. In Jesus' Name, I pray, Amen.