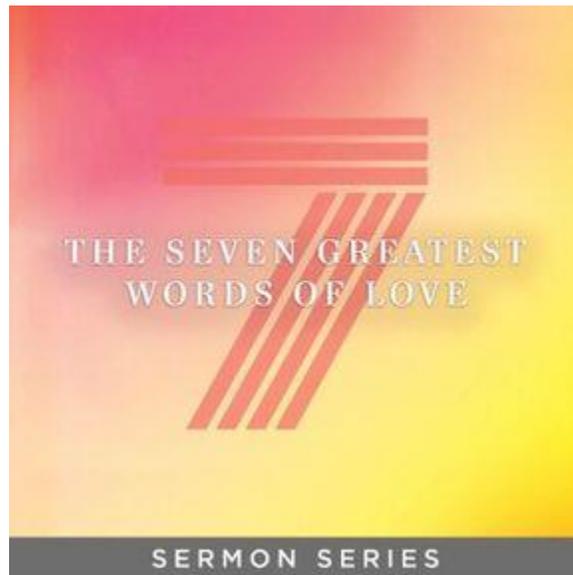


THE SEVEN GREATEST WORDS OF LOVE

Part 4: THE WORD OF SUBSTITUTION
Matthew 27:45-46

Written by Pastor Steve Norman
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Words of Encouragement Days 189-194



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:

**“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us,
so that in Him we might become the
righteousness of God.
2 Corinthians 5:21**

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 189

[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.]

"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

[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.]

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.

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 192

"I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob's descendants, 'Seek me in vain.' I, the Lord, speak the truth; I declare what is right. "Gather together and come; assemble, you fugitives from the nations. Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save. Declare what is to be, present it--let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me." Isaiah 45:19-21

SUPER-SAWYER PRAISE

SAWYER was kicking the soccer ball around in the front yard when his dad drove up.

"Hey, Sawyer-man," Dad said as he got out of the car. "How's it going?"

Sawyer shrugged. "I don't think I did a very good job on my spelling test at school today. And it was supposed to be my turn to feed the class hamster, but Ross said it was his turn. Then I spilled my milk all over the lunch table. And I have tons of homework!" He sighed. "So, not that great."

"I'm sorry you had a rough day," Dad said. "But did you know that even on the tough days, God wants you to say thank you?"

Sawyer wrinkled his forehead. "He does?"

Dad nodded. "Sometimes you may not feel like it, but that's when you need to do it the most," he explained. "Because you trust in Jesus, He will help you be thankful, even when things are difficult. And reminding yourself of all He's done to save you and everything He's blessed you with so you can thank Him for it will make you feel better and give you strength. Start by talking to Him--just like you're talking to me. Tell Him how you're feeling and why, and then start saying thank you to Him."

Dad scooped up the soccer ball. "Time for some Super-Sawyer praise!" he exclaimed as he pretended to flex his muscles. "Ready?" He tossed the ball at Sawyer. "I'm thankful you're my son!" he shouted.

Sawyer caught the ball. "I'm thankful I'm your son too!" He tossed the ball back to Dad.

"Is that a smile I see?" Dad asked with a grin as he threw the ball to Sawyer.

Sawyer knee-bumped the ball back to Dad. "I'm thankful I can play outside."

"I'm thankful we can talk to Jesus anytime," Dad said, stopping the ball with his foot and then kicking it back to Sawyer.

Sawyer and Dad kept the ball going back and forth as they shouted out things they were thankful for. With each toss and kick of the ball and each thank you to God, Sawyer started to somehow feel lighter. He decided he was going to start saying thank you to Jesus a whole lot more.

HOW ABOUT YOU?

Have you ever had a day when things just didn't seem to go right? Get out some colored markers or crayons and start making your own thank-you list. When you're finished, post the list where you can see it every day. This will help remind you that there is always something to thank Jesus for. Whenever you see your list, thank Him for everything He has given you.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank You that no situation is too far out of Your control. You can provide for every need I have, for You are Jehovah-Jireh, the God who provides. Thank You that You own it all, hold everything in Your hands, and know my needs even before I ask and even before I come to You. You are aware of all that concerns me, and You have a plan. You hold the provision, You have the solution, and You alone can move mountains to make a way for me, as your child. I ask for Your answer, in Your timing, in Your plan to be given for every need that weighs down my heart. Forgive me for doubting You, for worrying, and for trying so hard to work everything out on my own. Help me to trust You more, and help me in my unbelief. Today, I choose to recognize and to believe that You are able to accomplish far more and to do far greater than I even thought possible. I thank You in advance for Your miracles, for paving out pathways, and for Your provision for those who love You. Thank You for the abundance of blessings and goodness You have already stored up. I trust You this day, and every day, and am so grateful for Your power and joy that fills my life. Thank You for teaching me to be content in all circumstances. I love You Lord, and am leaning on You, In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 193

"Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength." Philippians 4:11-13

UDDERLY CONTENT

MOOOOOO.

"Whoa!" Jordan shouted. He'd been so deep in thought that he almost plowed right into a large brown cow standing in the middle of the path.

Uncle Paul appeared in the doorway of the barn. "Oh good, you found Clarice!"

"Well, we kind of found each other," Jordan said. "She wouldn't mooove."

"Good one!" Uncle Paul grinned. "So tell me, how was your first day? I know it had to be tough changing schools in the middle of the year."

Jordan shrugged. "It was okay. I hope Dad's job lets him stay here longer. We've lived in three different states in four years!" He sighed. "I don't know, maybe I'll be happy once we get settled."

Leading Clarice into her milking pen inside the barn, Uncle Paul said, "One thing about feelings, Jordan--you can't always depend on them to make you happy. There's feeling happy and then there's being content."

"Aren't they the same thing?" Jordan asked.

Instead of answering, Uncle Paul pulled up a milking stool and wiggled his finger in the air. "Come on over here and I'll show you the fine art of milking a cow!"

After a quick demonstration, Jordan was milking Clarice.

"You're a natural," Uncle Paul said over the ping-ping sound of milk hitting the metal pail. "And to answer your question, feeling happy and being content are not always the same thing. The apostle Paul learned that as he traveled from place to place."

"Hey, he traveled from place to place like me!" said Jordan. "So how did he learn the difference?"

"Paul learned that when you put your faith and hope in Jesus, He'll help you learn to be content in any situation. That's different from feeling happy all the time. Contentment is a peaceful feeling that only God can give you."

He patted the side of Clarice, who was slowly chewing her supper. "Kind of like Clarice here. Looking at her, I'd say she lookd udderly content."

After laughing together at the silly joke, Uncle Paul prayed out loud that Jesus would help Jordan learn to be content. Even before Uncle Paul said amen, Jordan felt the deep soul-peace that only God can give.

HOW ABOUT YOU?

Do you find it hard to be content? Do you wish things were different in your life? Even people in the Bible, like the apostle Paul, had to learn to be content when they faced difficult circumstances. When you trust Jesus and focus on the hope you have in Him, He'll help you learn to be content with the life He gave you.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, You are my Shepherd and Your Word says I should not be in want, but so often I struggle to be content and do want as I forget that You have graciously provided me with every spiritual blessing in Christ and everything I need for life and godliness. Thank you for not always giving me what I want because my desires would draw my heart away from being satisfied in You.

Help me to be content in You with what You have given me and not to be focused on what my flesh wants or the world tells me I should have. Protect me from coveting possessions or people, talent or influence, relationships or prestige.

Keep my heart from being anxious for what I don't have, and make me thankful for the numerous gifts that You have already given me. According to Your Word and steadfast love, fill me with the joy and satisfaction of contentment in Christ. Help me learn to be content in any situation like Paul and to quickly reject the idolatry that dwells beneath the surface of my coveting.

Finally, may I be learn from and spend my days following the ultimate example of contentment - of Christ who became poor in order that I could become rich, and who was content to go to the cross to fulfill the Father's will to rescue a people for Himself so I can be free from discontent and zealous for good works. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 194

“And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow Him. Let your roots grow down into Him, and let your lives be built on Him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.” Colossians 2:6-7 (NLT)

GRATITUDE IS GOOD FOR US

STATISTICS show an attitude of gratitude can pave the way for better health, deeper relationships, and increased productivity. One study showed that a five-minute a day gratitude journal can increase your long-term well-being by more than 10 percent. ***Psalm 116:17 (NIV)*** says, ***“I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the Lord.”*** In this passage the writer is responding to all that God has done. In his response, he doesn't know how to repay God for what God, in His goodness, has done for him. His response is genuine, a thank offering is what he has to offer God.

Have you ever stopped to think of your prayers fueled by gratitude as a thank offering? Sure, we can give our tithe to the church, financially give to the needs of those around us, and serve with the talents and gifts we've been given, but a “thank offering” is a sweet sound to our Savior and costs us nothing but time. When we purpose in our hearts to live thankfully and cultivate gratitude in our lives, it is a worthy response to the faithfulness of our loving Father.

REFLECT: Here is Colossians 2:6-7 today's verse from the New International Version of the Bible. ***“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”***

Take a minute and meditate on this verse. Overflowing means full to the top and spilling over. How can we live full to the top and spilling over with gratitude? By expressing to God what we are thankful for and the people around us we are thankful for. What does a sacrifice of thanks look like for you?

RESPOND: Grab your journal, notebook or piece of paper from yesterday, and begin to add to the list. Write out five things you are grateful for. Try not to write the obvious ones like your favorite people or things. Then, take a moment to offer a sacrifice of thanks to God for your list.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, I am truly thankful for all You have done and continue to do for me. The free gift of life You have given me did not come easy, and, in response, I want to offer a sacrifice of thanks to You. I've made a list of some of the things that I am thankful for. I thank You and praise You for _____ (read each one aloud). Accept my sacrifice of thanks today, and help me to continue to grow in ways that I can offer a sacrifice of thanks to You. Give me a heart that is genuinely grateful and thankful for all You have given me. Help me to see even the smallest things in my life as opportunities to say thank You to You and may my sacrifice of thanks become contagious to everyone around me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve