

Magnetic Attraction

“Who has woe? Who has sorrow?” (Proverbs 23:29)

Scripture: Proverbs 23:29–35

Song: “I Need Thee Every Hour”

Teaching is full of magical moments when children discover something new. Take, for instance, magnets. Kids are spellbound when they inch a paperclip toward a magnet, jumping in surprise when it’s suddenly snatched. They *ooh* and *aah* as a magnet hanging from a string lifts a nail without ever touching it. Magnets affect objects at a subatomic level, realigning electrons, creating predictable reactions.

The verses in Proverbs discuss another kind of magnetic attraction and its consequences. Though the topic is drunkenness, the truths apply to any temptation. The more enamored we become, the more power temptation has to realign our thoughts and distract our attention from God. If we give ourselves over to it, the writer warns of the woes and sorrows that follow.

The force exerted by a magnetic field drops off with increasing distance. It’s also repelled by another magnet. Through prayer and reflection, we can identify and move away from temptations that pull our focus from God. Then we can ask Him—a force far more powerful—to repel temptation’s control and draw us close.

Father, save me from the pull of sin, align my thoughts with Yours, and hold me near. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

October 13–19. **Cindy Peavy**, an Alabama teacher and writer, explores the miracles of creation while hiking and kayaking across the country.

All Your Might

“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.” (Ecclesiastes 9:10)

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 9:4–10

Song: “Rise Up, O Men of God”

Late nineteenth-century India was no place for an orphaned girl. Societal tradition discouraged the education of women, considered conversion to Christianity a betrayal, and condemned widows to a life of poverty. Yet holy men granted Ramabai Dongre the title *Pandita*, “the learned one,” for her reading and teaching of Hindu holy texts. She became a Christian when she read of Jesus’ compassion for women and witnessed nuns caring for prostitutes. She built a shelter where widows and children could be educated, a haven that ignited revival in India. Whatever her hands found to do, Pandita Ramabai did with all her might.

Today’s Scripture encourages us to get busy, to see what wrongs need righted, which people crave love, what needs must be filled. As long as we’re alive, we have hope that these things can change. We’re instructed to enjoy the present; but knowing that it’s going to end, we should put all we’ve got into doing what needs done. There’s a time coming when there will be no time left.

Knowing all that Pandita Ramabai accomplished intimidates me. But *why* she did it inspires me. Because she was an orphan and a young widow, her hands touched injustice and she worked to change it. What’s close enough to touch in our lives? Where can we make a difference?

Father, when I reach out my hands, may I find the work that so urgently needs done. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Lessons in Contrasts

“Be very careful, then, how you live.” (Ephesians 5:15)

Scripture: Ephesians 5:11–19

Song: “Shine a Light”

To kayak in Alabama is to enter a world of green. The alligator-colored river serpentine through the scene. Trees stretch toward the sun, their leaves the colors of parakeets, pears, and pickles. Even the ground appears green, teeming with scrubby growth. Paddling in this green, I once spotted a distant scarlet tanager (a kind of bird), its bright red body a flashy contrast to the verdant backdrop.

Contrasts help us notice things we might otherwise miss, and Paul uses this device to teach us. He cautions us to avoid the darkness of sin, which is exposed by its opposite, the light of God. He advises us to live as wise followers and to seek understanding of God’s will, contrasting the wise with the unwise and foolish, who miss opportunities to fulfill His design. And he warns us not to get drunk, to be Spirit-filled instead, so our hearts and voices are prepared to worship and serve God.

Through these contrasts, Paul teaches us how to live a testimonial life. Not only does the light of God expose the darkness, but our lives can too. When we live carefully, allowing ourselves to be filled with the Spirit, we have greater protection from temptations, greater knowledge of God’s will, and greater awareness of moments to testify or serve. As a result, our lives may cast light upon the darkness in others’ lives, and the awareness of this contrast may encourage repentance.

Father, may Your Spirit help me live my life carefully so I can be a light to those around me. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

The Domino Effect

“Throughout the period of their dedication, they are consecrated to the LORD.” (Numbers 6:8)

Scripture: Numbers 6:1–8

Song: “I Surrender All”

As soon as I could count, my grandfather taught me to play dominoes. I'd place a tile, and inevitably, he'd explain how I could've scored more in a different spot. But he never allowed me to change my move, insisting that “a domino laid is a domino played.” At eight, when I finally beat him, I felt the pride of a well-earned win. After he died, my grandmother asked if I wanted anything of his. I didn't hesitate. Those worn-out dominoes became a treasured possession.

Today's passage shows a similar transformation from common to significant. The Lord tells Moses that consecration can take place through everyday changes in what we eat or drink, how we look, or with whom we associate. These common changes don't have inherent value any more than old dominoes. Their worth comes from their meaning, the holy purpose of drawing us to God.

No matter how much we sacrifice, we can't earn the right to come before God's throne. That right comes only through Jesus. But if we desire to consecrate ourselves so we can draw even closer to God, our sacrifices gain significance. We can offer time for worship and prayer, income to help others, or a change in our diet or appearance to express our love and devotion to God. Like treasured dominoes, even common things become holy when we dedicate them to God.

Father, may my everyday sacrifices serve the holy purpose of drawing me closer to You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Pleasing God

“Live in order to please God.” (1 Thessalonians 4:1)

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4:1–7

Song: “To Be Pleasing You”

Sergei Rachmaninoff towers among classical musicians, not for his imposing 6'6" height, but for his virtuosity as a composer and concert pianist. His success wasn't accidental. After his early training, Rachmaninoff maintained a practice schedule of at least four hours daily. As a result of this rigorous routine, his fingers—which spanned 12 keys—flew flawlessly in emotional, breathtaking performances. Even just months before his death, despite suffering from arthritis and exhaustion, Rachmaninoff delivered a performance so moving that the audience gave him a prolonged ovation that thundered through Carnegie Hall.

Rachmaninoff never settled for being good. He wanted to become even better. In today's passage, Paul encourages the young church in Thessalonica to do the same. He praises them for living in order to please God, while urging them to “do this more and more” (v. 1). One way to please God, Paul says, is through purity, learning to control the impulses of the body.

The goal is sanctification. But holy perfection is impossible! Knowing we can't reach the goal could be discouraging. However, Paul's use of “more and more” shows us that it's an ongoing process. It reminds us to keep moving forward, to make daily choices in favor of holiness. Even after we are forgiven by God, we can keep growing through the help of the Holy Spirit.

Father, help me practice making pure choices today so that I can compose a holy life that pleases You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Watchfulness

Let us be awake and sober. (1 Thessalonians 5:6)

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:1–10

Song: “Will Jesus Find Us Watching”

Once called “Eternity’s Timepiece,” Yellowstone’s famous geyser is now known as Old Faithful. Though not quite like clockwork, Old Faithful’s daily eruptions can be accurately predicted within 10 minutes 90 percent of the time. Because visitors know when to expect an eruption, they wait on benches, watching for signs of increased bubbling and playful spouts of water hurled higher and higher until the geyser reaches its full 180-foot height. Yellowstone’s less-predictable geysers don’t draw the crowds that Old Faithful does. When the time is unknown, people are less likely to wait and watch.

Paul—the writer of 1 Thessalonians—understands this tendency. Because believers don’t know the time or day of Christ’s return, he warns that they could be pulled away from waiting and watching. Just like unbelievers who go about their lives unprepared, believers can be lulled into carelessness and temptation. Paul encourages the Thessalonians to be alert and exercise self-control by protecting their hearts and their minds.

If we knew when Jesus was coming, we’d want to be ready. We might pray more fervently, repent more fully, live more purely, and pursue the lost more urgently. We’d wait on the benches, watching for signs, knowing that soon we’d experience the comfort of Jesus’ presence. That day *is* coming. Let’s be watchful and ready.

Father, help me live today like it is the day of Your return. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

The Power of Obedience

“We have obeyed everything our forefather . . . commanded us.” (Jeremiah 35:8)

Scripture: Jeremiah 35:5–11

Song: “Teach Me to Obey”

Routines and rituals help to form our families. Decades of research show that positive routines foster an emotional connection, develop a group identity, and create a sense of belonging. From family meals and chores to Sunday church and birthday parties, these moments of connection forge strong family bonds. Through the right kind of routines, marriages and family ties grow stronger, and children learn from their parents’ example of peace and emotional wellbeing.

The Rekabite family illustrates a united family. Out of honor for their ancestor, they practiced a different way of life. They lived in tents, drank no wine, and didn’t farm. Their traditions defined them as a group, preserving their family, teaching them to live as a community, and arming them against temptations. The prophet Jeremiah held up the Recabites as an example of obedience at a time when Israel struggled to obey God.

We can learn much about obedience from the Rekabites as well. Like them, we have a Father who loves us. He has asked us to love Him, to abide in Him, to pray, to be baptized, to repent and forgive, to love and serve others, to make disciples of the nations. Like the family of Jonadab’s descendants, obeying God’s commands knits us together as a family of believers and connects us to God, our heavenly Father.

Father, I’m so thankful to be part of Your family. Help me find joy in following Your traditions, participating in Your rituals, and obeying Your commands. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.