

COME
TO THE
WATERS

DAILY BIBLE DEVOTIONS FOR
SPIRITUAL REFRESHMENT

JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE

COMPILED BY D. MARION CLARK



P U B L I S H I N G

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To him whose Word is able to make us wise for
salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Let the one who is thirsty come. (Rev. 22:17)

Come to the waters, whoever is thirsty;
Drink from the Fountain that never runs dry.
Jesus, the Living One, offers you mercy,
Life more abundant in boundless supply.

Come to the River that flows through the city,
Forth from the throne of the Father and Son.
Jesus the Savior says, "Come and drink deeply."
Drink from the pure, inexhaustible One.

Come to the Fountain without any money;
Buy what is given without any cost.
Jesus, the gracious One, welcomes the weary;
Jesus, the selfless One, died for the lost.

Come to the Well of unmerited favor;
Stretch out your hand; fill your cup to the brim.
Jesus is such a compassionate Savior.
Draw from the grace that flows freely from him.

Come to the Savior, the God of salvation.
God has provided an end to sin's strife.
Why will you suffer the Law's condemnation?
Take the free gift of the water of life.

JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE

INTRODUCTION

“STUDY OF THE Bible must be the consuming passion of a believer’s life,” James Montgomery Boice exhorted worshipers in one of his fourteen sermons through Psalm 119. His congregation at Tenth Presbyterian Church, which sat under his thirty years of expositional preaching, would attest that such was the consuming passion of his life. He preached systematically through twenty-seven books and extensively through another five.

There is a plaque at Tenth Church commemorating Boice’s life and ministry. It presents the passage considered the theme of his life work, Romans 11:33–36, which extols the glory of God. That is an accurate summary of his aim in ministry, to which he pointed those under his teaching ministry—to give all glory to God. But if that was his aim, the means by which he most believed in achieving that aim was to know and to obey God’s Word.

I have two purposes in compiling this yearlong devotional from Boice’s sermons and writings. I hope this collection will keep his legacy alive for a new generation of Christians. Most of these devotions are culled from his published sermons. They give but a taste of his fuller exposition of the texts. A number of selections come from unpublished material. All but one of the Revelation devotions come from the last series of sermons he was preaching when he died. A few come from messages given in his early life before coming to Tenth, so that the body of work covers his full span of ministry.

The second purpose is the one that James Boice himself would have had for such a work, which is to aid readers in studying *the* most important book—the Bible. As helpful as the words of the expositor may be, he would have had you value much more highly the Word of God. With that in mind, each reading not only includes a Scripture text, but cites the fuller Bible reading that should go along with the devotion. Take time with each devotion to open your Bible.

An added feature of the devotional is a topical index. Boice was an expository preacher who preached through whole books of the Bible. As every preacher who

follows that system knows, it led him to cover a wide variety of topics. Note also a Scripture index, which lists primary Scripture references and others included in the devotions.

Though the devotional is laid out in order of the books of the Bible, you need not read them in succession. There are fifty-two psalms included, so you might read one each Sunday. Using the topical index, you could arrange a reading schedule that takes you through events of the church year.

A word about the title, *Come to the Waters*. It comes not from a devotion but a hymn written by Boice in partnership with Dr. Paul Jones, Tenth's Music Director. (The hymn and its music are included following the December 31 reading.) The "waters" are the waters of life, the gospel of Jesus Christ. As you will see time and again in the devotions, it is knowing Jesus Christ that matters above all else. Yes, we are to live with the aim of glorifying God, but that cannot be done without being cleansed by the blood of Christ and then living in Christ. Yes, the means to glorify God is to know and to obey his Word, but we will not understand the Word of God if we do not see that it is leading us to the "waters" of the gospel—to the person and work of Jesus Christ. These devotions are not intended simply to make you a better person. They are to lead you again and again to your only hope—Jesus Christ—for glorifying God.

I wish to thank Linda Boice for granting permission and providing support for the first edition, as well as the second. Terri Taylor came up with the devotional's title. Jessie Taylor compiled the topical and Scripture indexes, and Sarah Brubaker supplied the bibliography and references. My wife, Ginger, was my most fervent encourager. This second edition of *Come to the Waters* is made possible by P&R Publishing, which is giving new life to other Boice titles as well, and I am thankful for Amanda Martin's work in overseeing the final product. In particular I must thank Robert Brady, executive director of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, for his tireless efforts in making this rebirth take place. Without his behind-the-scenes work, we would still be scavenging the Internet and used bookstores to find a copy.

D. Marion Clark

GOOD CREATION

GENESIS 1:1-26

And God saw that it was good.

GENESIS 1:21

THE VALUE OF CREATION, declared good by God, brings us to a natural conclusion: if God finds the universe good in its parts and as a whole, then we must find it good also. This does not mean that we will refuse to see that nature has been marred by sin. But even in its marred state, it has value, just as fallen man also has value.

First, we should be *thankful* for the world God has made and praise him for it. In some expressions of Christian thought only the soul has value. But this is not right, nor is it truly Christian. The Christian view is that God has made all that is and that the material world therefore has value and should be valued by us because of this origin.

Second, we should *delight* in creation. This is closely related to being thankful but is a step beyond it. It is a step that many Christians have never taken. Frequently, Christians look on nature only as one of the classic proofs of God's existence. But instead of this, the Christian should really enjoy what he sees. He should appreciate its beauty. He should exult in creation even more than the non-Christian, because in the Christian's case there is a corresponding knowledge of the God who stands behind it.

Third, we should demonstrate a *responsibility* toward nature, meaning that we should not destroy it simply for the sake of destroying it but rather should seek to elevate it to its fullest potential. Men and women together should seek to sanctify and cleanse the earth in order that it might be more as God created it, in anticipation of its ultimate redemption.

Finally, after he has contemplated nature and has come to value it, the Christian should turn once again to the God who made it and sustains it moment by moment and should learn to *trust* him. God cares for nature, in spite of its abuse through man's sin. But if he cares for nature, then he also obviously cares for us and may be trusted to do so. This argument occurs in the midst of Christ's Sermon on the Mount in which he draws our attention to God's care of the birds (animal life) and lilies (plant life) and then asks, "Are you not of more value than they? . . . But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" (Matt. 6:26, 30).

IMAGE OF GOD

GENESIS 1:27-31

So God created man in his own image.

GENESIS 1:27

TO BE MADE in God's image means that men and women possess the attributes of personality, as God himself does, but as the animals, plants, and matter do not. To have personality, one must possess knowledge, feelings (including religious feelings), and a will. This God has, and so do we. We can say that animals possess a certain kind of personality. But an animal does not reason as men do; it only reacts to certain problems or stimuli. It does not create; it only conforms to certain behavior patterns. It does not love; it only reproduces. It does not worship. Personality, in the sense we are speaking of it here, is something that links man to God but does not link either man or God to the rest of creation.

A second element that is involved in man's being created in the image of God is morality. This includes the two further elements of freedom and responsibility. To be sure, the freedom men and women possess is not absolute. Even in the beginning, the first man, Adam, and the first woman, Eve, were not autonomous. They were creatures and were responsible for acknowledging this by their obedience in the matter of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Since the fall, that freedom has been further restricted so that, as Augustine said, the original *posse non peccare* ("able not to sin") has become a *non posse non peccare* ("not able not to sin"). Still there is a limited freedom for men and women even in their fallen state, and with that there is also moral responsibility. In brief, we do not need to sin as we do or as often as we do. And even when we sin under compulsion, we still know it is wrong and, thus, inadvertently confess our likeness to God in this as in other areas.

The third element involved in man's being made in God's image is spirituality, meaning that man is made for communion with God, who is Spirit (John 4:24), and that this communion is intended to be eternal as God is eternal. Although man has a body, as do other forms of life, and a soul, as do animals, only he possesses a spirit. It is on the level of the spirit that he is aware of God and communes with him.

Here lies our true worth. We are made in God's image and are therefore valuable to God and others. God loves men and women, as he does not and cannot love the animals, plants, or inanimate matter. Moreover, he feels for them, identifies with them in Christ, grieves for them, and even intervenes in history to make individual men and women into all that he has determined they should be.

A LIVING BEING

GENESIS 2:4-7

*The LORD God . . . breathed into his nostrils
the breath of life, and man became a living creature.*

GENESIS 2:7

THE PHRASE TRANSLATED “a living creature” (actually, “living soul”) in Genesis 2:7 is also used in Genesis 1:24 of the animals. But as a result of the particulars of man’s creation given in the second chapter, a distinction is undoubtedly implied. Not only is man alive, he knows he is alive. Even more important, he knows from whom that life has come and of his duties to the God who breathed his own breath into him.

Man also knows that he depends on God for physical life and that he must come to him for spiritual life, as Jesus indicated (John 3:5-6). Isaiah teaches the physical dependence of man on God in a fascinating verse. It plays on the idea of man’s breath by saying, “Stop trusting in man, who has but a breath in his nostrils. Of what account is he?” (Isa. 2:22 NIV). We might paraphrase Isaiah’s command by saying, “Why trust in man who is able to take only one noseful of breath at a time? Trust God, whose breath is inexhaustible.” The breath of God in us may be our glory, but it is still received by us only one breath at a time. We breathe in. We hold our breath. We breathe out. But then we must breathe in again or die. Nothing could better characterize our utter dependence on God.

And what if God should withhold his breath? Job answers by saying, “If he should set his heart to it and gather to himself his spirit and his breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust” (Job 34:14-15).

First Corinthians 15:45 presents this same contrast between the first Adam in his littleness and Christ in his greatness. Paul writes, “Thus it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.” Adam existed by breathing in, and the breath he breathed in was from God. He could not sustain himself. Christ, on the other hand, is the One who breathes out, for he is “life-giving spirit.” We are to live physically and spiritually only as we turn to and are united to him.

I conclude with the challenge presented from the little known book of Ecclesiastes: “Remember your Creator . . . before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (12:1, 6-7). When death comes, it is too late. Now, while you still have life, come to him who is able to give eternal life, and find yourself accepted in the Savior.

THE FALL

GENESIS 3:1-7

She took some and ate it. . . . And he ate it.

GENESIS 3:6

EVE SINNED BY being deceived; Adam sinned in utter rebellion. Both sinned out of pride. What lay at the root of the woman's determination to eat the forbidden fruit and give some to her husband, Adam, if it was not pride? What lay at the root of Adam's determination to go his own way rather than adhere to the path God placed before him, if this was not pride? In the woman's case it was the conviction that she knew what was better for herself and her husband than God did. God had said that the eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would bring death. But she was convinced by her own empirical observation—after Satan had raised the doubt—that the tree would actually be good for her and that God was mistaken. In the man's case, pride is also present, for he repeated the sin of Satan, saying in effect, "I will cast off God's rule. I am too great to be bound by it. I shall declare myself autonomous. I will be like the Most High" (see Isa. 14:14).

How terrible pride is! And how pervasive; for, of course, it did not vanish in the death of the first man and woman. Pride lies at the heart of our sinful race. It is the "center" of immorality, "the utmost evil," that which "leads to every other vice," as C. S. Lewis warns us. It is that which makes us all want to be more than we are or can be and, consequently, causes us to fall short of that truly great destiny for which we were created.

This brings us back to the teaching that we are fallen beings. We are not on the way up, as today's optimistic humanists would indicate. We are not sinful by the very nature of things, as the ancient Greeks would argue. We are not even machines, as if we could be excused on the grounds of such an analysis. We are fallen. We are faithless, rebellious, filled with pride. As a result, our only hope is in that grace of God by which he sends a Redeemer, who instead of being faithless was faithful, instead of being rebellious was obedient, and instead of being filled with pride was one who actually humbled himself to "even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8).

JUDGMENT AND GRACE

GENESIS 3:8-19

He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

GENESIS 3:15

GOD PASSES SENTENCE, beginning with the serpent through whom the sin originated: the serpent will crawl on its belly and eat “dust,” i.e., the dust of frustration. We do not know what the serpent looked like before this judgment, though he must have been a beautiful and upright creature. Nor do we know precisely when the judgment here pronounced was executed, though it was probably at this point. What we can know is the horror of Adam and Eve as they heard the voice of God and witnessed the terrifying transformation of this once beautiful creature into the hissing, slithering, dangerous creature we know as a snake today. They must have recoiled in mortal fear, recognizing that God had every right to pronounce this same or even a more terrible judgment on them. They must have expected that he would do so, and the devil must also have expected this judgment. It was for this that he had tempted the man and the woman.

But instead—how unsearchable are the judgments and ways of God—grace intervenes. It is true that there is judgment, of a sort. The woman is given pain in childbearing; the man is to gain a livelihood through the sweat of his brow. But immediate physical death is postponed. And before even these more limited judgments are pronounced, God speaks the promise of a coming one who shall be the deliverer: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

It seems to me that the fact that God does not actually say “guilty” in his words to Adam and Eve is of great importance. Had he declared our two parents to be guilty at that point, judgment in its fullest form must inevitably have followed. The man and woman would have suffered immediate banishment from God to hell, and their torment would have been endless. But God did not pronounce that verdict. He postponed it, as courts sometimes do. And when he pronounced it later, he did so not on Adam and Eve or their descendants, but on Jesus Christ who bore the punishment for all who would believe on him as Savior.

If you are in Christ by saving faith, the verdict of guilty that should have been pronounced on you has been pronounced on Christ. He bore your punishment. He “descended into hell” in your place. If you are not in Christ, that verdict remains to be spoken and indeed will be spoken against you at the final judgment.

CAIN'S CURSE

GENESIS 4:1-16

And now you are cursed.

GENESIS 4:11

IF YOU HAVE never come to the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, then you are somewhat like Cain. You are in danger, and you must flee from it. The Navy in wartime uses an expression of ships that sail into danger. They are said to be “in harm’s way.” That is an expression for you, if you are apart from Christ. You are in harm’s way and you must get back into the safe way before you are lost forever.

There are things that will keep you from it. One is your *pride*, the very thing that got Cain into trouble in the first place. Perhaps you turn up your lips in scorn, thinking such persons weak who would cast everything aside to obtain God’s kingdom. You would rather go to hell than bow like that. But that is precisely what you will do if you do not lay your pride aside and come to God on God’s terms.

You may also be held back by *hate*, though you might not call it that. You think you are a paragon of virtue, but the very fact that you think so poorly of Christians should be a warning that all is not right with you and that you are encumbered with far more irritations and animosities than you imagine. Hate is a terrible thing. You do not possess it; it possesses you. It is truly the sin crouching at the door that desires to master the home’s inhabitant.

Again, there are *resentment and self-pity*. No one likes these things in others, but no one is so blind to anything as these when they occur in himself or herself. Cain had killed a man, his own brother. But he was so possessed with resentment against God and others that he could not see the enormity of his crime and so actually felt sorry for himself when God punished him with far less of a judgment than he deserved.

Can you not see this? Can you not sense your danger? Sin is driving you from God, whom you think to be the cause of your misery. You are failing to see that he is actually being good to you and that his goodness is given precisely so that it might lead you to repentance.

Cain, we are told, “went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden” (v. 16). Do not let it be true of you that you “went away from the presence of the LORD.” Flee to him and find in him the One you have needed all along.

GRACE FOUND

GENESIS 6:5-8

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

GENESIS 6:8

NOT ONLY IS sin internal as well as external; not only is it pervasive in that it affects everything we can possibly think or do. It is also *continuous*, for in God's judgment we all do "only evil *continually*" (v. 5). From our perspective a statement like that is almost beyond belief. We would not make it of other people, even the worst of people. We certainly would not make it of ourselves. But this is God speaking—God who sees all things and sees the heart—and God is truthful.

Could a blacker picture of the utter depravity of man in his rebellion against God ever be painted? It is hard to think so. Yet just at this point, when the black thunderclouds of God's wrath against human sin are at their most threatening, a small crack appears. Grace shines through, and the promise of a new day dawns.

The older, Authorized Version says, "Noah found grace." But whether the word "grace" or the word "favor" is used to translate the Hebrew term *hēn*, the significant thing is that this is the first appearance of the idea in the Bible. It is true, of course, that Adam and Eve also found grace when they sinned; justice alone would have sent them into outer darkness forever. Seth and Enoch and all the others found grace. But here for the first time, grace is explicitly mentioned. Since this is said of a time when the evil of a degenerate race was at its zenith, it indicates that so long as life lasts, regardless of the extent of the evil, there is always opportunity to find God's grace where alone it can be found, namely, in the work of Jesus Christ in dying for his people's salvation. Noah may not have known details about that future work of Christ. But he looked forward to the deliverer and ordered his life accordingly.

Notice that Noah did not earn grace. Noah found grace. He was willing to accept God's judgment on his sinful and rebellious nature and place his hope in the Savior. It is the same today. We have no claim on God. We have not earned anything but his just wrath and our eventual destruction. But we can find God's grace in Christ.