

# **Gentle Rain on Tender Grass**

Daily Readings from the Pentateuch

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# Introduction

When Moses came to bid farewell to the people of Israel, he summarized God's message to them in a song, opening with the words:

May my teaching drop as the rain,  
my speech distil as the dew,  
like gentle rain upon the tender grass (Deuteronomy 32:2-3).

Grass needs regular rainfall, not just the occasional torrent. And so it is with us. Saying, 'I don't have time to study the Bible each day,' is saying, 'I don't want to listen to the voice of God.' When we hear the Word preached it can be like a torrent, drenching our spiritual lives. But 'gentle rain on tender grass' is steady, non-dramatic and refreshing. It is a lovely picture of continual, persevering study of the Word of God. There is no substitute for exposing ourselves daily to God's own infallible, authoritative Word.

These studies in the first five books of the Bible are designed for daily devotions. The most important thing is to read the Bible passage first, before reading the accompanying devotion. It is helpful then, if possible, to take time to look up the other texts referred to. A basic principle of interpretation is to 'let Scripture

interpret Scripture.’ The first five books of the Bible are foundational to understanding the story of salvation as taught in the rest of the Bible. They are only fully appreciated as the light of the gospel shines onto them; hence the many New Testament cross references.

The first five books form about one sixth of the length of the Bible. I have divided the material so that it can be covered in 123 days. The main themes are emphasized, and not every chapter is included. The most natural way to read the narrative portions is fairly quickly and in longer sections, whereas some passages, such as the Ten Commandments, demand verse-by-verse treatment. You may want to spend more than one day on some of the longer readings.

David testified: ‘O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch’ (Psalm 5:3). The best way to start the day is by reading God’s Word, and then committing the day to him. It is even better if, after reading a section of God’s Word, we can focus on one verse of Scripture sufficiently to take that truth into the day with us. In our hurried lives, meditation is something of a lost art. But at the end of each daily study there is a ‘text for the day’. I have found it enormously helpful to take a verse with me into each day, and then bring my mind back to that verse during the day.

It is also helpful if our prayers arise naturally out of our reading of the Word. Each day I have suggested just one prayer, focused on the study. To focus private prayers there are various helps available, and I would especially commend *The Valley of Vision* (Banner of Truth), and *Operation World* (Paternoster/WEC International). For some days I have provided a hymn or psalm as a ‘springboard’ for prayer and praise.

Unless otherwise indicated, I have used and quoted from the ESV.

May my teaching drop as the rain,  
my speech distil as the dew,  
like gentle rain upon the tender grass,  
and like showers upon the herb.  
For I will proclaim the name of the LORD;  
ascribe greatness to our God!  
(Deuteronomy 32:2-3).



Paul speaks of Christ as the one through whom and for whom all things were made, and the one who sustains all things. He not only created the physical universe, but all spiritual powers and authorities:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Colossians 1:16–17).

In Genesis 1 we glimpse the mysterious activity of the Holy Spirit (1:2). The psalmist expands on this: ‘When you send forth your Spirit they are created, and you renew the face of the ground’ (Psalm 104:30).

The creation demands that we honour the triune God as our Creator, and give him praise (Romans 1:19–21). Failing to worship our Creator is the sin of sins. The gospel summons us back from the dead end of worshipping created things (idols) to ‘worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water’ (Revelation 14:7).

*Prayer: Triune God, forgive me for my failure to praise you as my Creator and my Lord. May the glory of your creation draw out my worship today.*

*Text for the day: All things were created through him and for him (Colossians 1:16).*

## **‘In the image of God he created him’**

It is part of being human to want assurance of meaning and significance. Why am I here? What is the point of my life? In a modern scientific age, we have been told that we are ‘free’ from being accountable to a creator. But that ‘freedom’ has resulted in the despair of meaninglessness.

This passage tells us that we are not an evolutionary accident. We have been created by God. Thus every single human life is to be respected. That is why wherever Christianity has spread there has been an improvement in the status of women. The places in the world today where there is most oppression of women are places where there has been least exposure to the gospel. Historically, the major advances in terms of concern for the poor and oppressed and underprivileged have been driven forward by Christians. William Wilberforce was convinced that slaves also were made in the image of God: therefore the slave trade had to be challenged. Elizabeth Fry believed that prisoners too were made in the image of God: therefore inhumane prison conditions had to be opposed.

Man and woman were both equally made in the image of God. This language would have been familiar in the ancient world. Rulers often placed images of themselves in prominent places to represent them. Sometimes they appointed a vicegerent to rule on their behalf. God is invisible. He placed man and woman as his representatives on earth to rule on his behalf and to represent him. If you asked, ‘What is the invisible God like?’ the answer should be: ‘Look at man—that points to what God is like!’ Unlike all the other creatures, humans were given souls that would never die, the capacity for reason, the capacity to communicate and the capacity to relate to their Creator. They were able to create life—to have children who would in their turn fulfil the creation mandate. The other creatures, by instinct, would provide food and shelter for themselves. But men and women were not just to labour for the benefit of self and family. Rather they were to work to serve the greater good of others. Supremely, God created man and woman in his image to be holy. We were ‘created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness’ (Ephesians 4:24, NIV).

The first man and woman failed miserably. And so have all their



offspring. The rest of the Bible points to the sending of Christ as the ‘true image’ of the Father, the last Adam, who would succeed where the first Adam failed. But Adam’s failure does not negate the truth that humans are made in the image of God. We are still given the creation mandate to fill and subdue the earth. So you are here today for a reason. God created you. Everything you do today is to bring glory to him. This can give purpose to the most mundane chores. As I prepare a meal for my family tonight, I can do that for the glory of God. As I work to keep my home well-ordered and comfortable, I reflect something of the orderliness and love of beauty of my Creator God. If I am in paid employment I strive to reflect the character of God and work hard to bring order out of whatever chaos may exist in my workplace, playing my part in ‘subduing the earth’.

This world is God’s arena; he made it ‘very good’. He gave us the task of managing it. We are to be aware of, and concerned for, environmental issues and issues of social justice and world poverty. God has supplied our world with abundant physical resources. Greed and mismanagement mean that the vast majority in our world lack the very basics of clean water and sufficient food. If we are truly convinced that every human being is made in the image of God, surely we will care about these things.

*Prayer: Lord, forgive me if I have despised any human beings made in your image. Help me today to live and work as accountable to you, and for your glory.*

*Text for the day:* So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27).