

Living Words

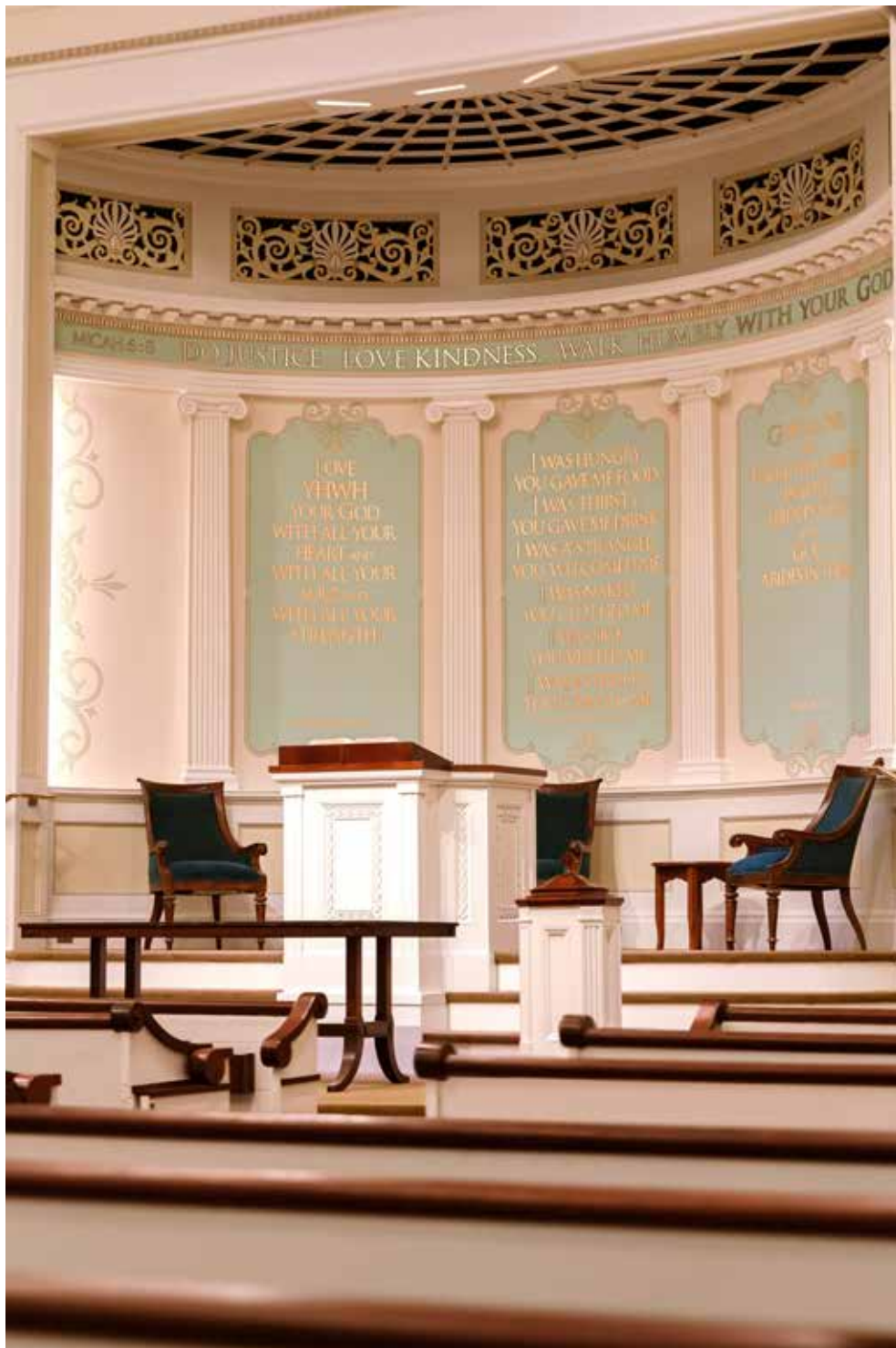


Photo: ©2025 LEWONO PHOTOGRAPHY

New Chancel Texts Devotional

NASSAU PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Glossary of Bibles

NIV New International Version

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

RSV Revised Standard Version



Introduction

In every generation, God's people have turned to Scripture for guidance, comfort, and challenge. In 2025, Nassau Church inscribed four biblical texts in our renovated sanctuary as visible reminders of the Word at the center of our life together. They call us to love God, love our neighbor, and walk humbly in God's ways.

This booklet offers reflections on each text, written by members of our congregation and community. Alongside the commentaries, you will find prayers, questions for contemplation, and connections to our mission partners. Together, these pages invite us to see how God's Word speaks in worship, in daily life, and in our shared ministry.

May God shape us as individuals and as a congregation, renewing us in faith, hope, and love, as we make these words come to life through our life in the world.

How to Use this Guide

This devotional guide invites you to dwell with the new chancel texts now adorning our sanctuary. Each section includes the biblical text, a short commentary, questions for reflection, and a prayer.

You may wish to read one text each week, or linger with a single passage for a season. Take time with the questions, write your own reflections and prayers in the space provided, and consider how God is speaking to you through these words today.

Each passage is also paired with one of Nassau's mission partners, as Scripture reminds us that part of worship is action in God's world.

Adult Education Committee, September 2025



FRIEZE

"Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with your God."

Micah 6:8b (RSV)

Commentary

Micah's prophetic ministry took place during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah in the eighth century B.C.E. From the perspective of contemporary prophets—Hosea, Isaiah, Micah—the crisis of economic exploitation and leadership failures had become acute. Corruption was pervasive in Judah and Israel. Judges took bribes for favorable verdicts. Landowners bought up vulnerable neighbors' homes and fields, and merchants traded with dishonest weights and measures. Religious leaders preached an easy "all is well" message that ignored the suffering of poor people and foreigners.

The prophet imagines God entering into a dispute about Israel and Judah's failure to observe the covenant. Long ago, their ancestors had agreed to walk in God's ways, and God would bless them in order to be a blessing to others. Micah recalls God's faithfulness and provision in the stories of the Exodus, the Wilderness, and the Promised Land. The people respond with a rhetorical question, "What more do you want from us?" More pious worship? Greater sacrifices of harvests or livestock from their households, even to the point of offering up their firstborn child?

No, that's not what God wants. God does not want restitution for breach of contract, or worship that is transactional. God wants restored relationships where people live together with justice, kindness, and humility. Civil rights leader John Lewis described this vision as the Beloved Community, "a nation and world society at peace with itself." The prophet's question comes to each of us and to our congregation in this generation: What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God?

Questions for Contemplation

- * The philosopher Cornel West says that justice is "love lived out in public." Where do you see communities living out love in public today?
- * Consider a time when someone showed you kindness that felt unearned and generous. Did their word or gesture transform the way you treat others?
- * Jesus told his followers that he is gentle and humble in heart, and he spoke up passionately about justice for hurting people. How does humility before God and others invite us to be involved in the world around us in a manner that's oriented to the welfare of our neighbor?

Prayer

Loving God, you spoke through your prophet Micah long ago, but your question comes to us today. Help us live out our days together in justice, kindness, and humility, trusting that your Spirit works among us to accomplish more than we can imagine. We ask these things in the name of Jesus, who leads us into your Beloved Community when we answer his call to follow him.

Author

Andrew Scales is a Chaplain and Executive Co-Director of Princeton Presbyterians of the Westminster Foundation with his spouse, Lenore Turner Scales. Micah 6:8 was his grandmother Jean Rankin Scales' favorite Bible verse, and it has been the motto of Princeton Presbyterians since Fall 2016.

Mission Partner: Westminster Foundation at Princeton

The Westminster Foundation oversees the ministries of Princeton Presbyterians and UKirk Ewing, nurturing inclusive and faithful discipleship among undergraduate and graduate students in the Princeton area and at The College of New Jersey. Nassau Church helped to establish Princeton Presbyterians at Princeton University over a century ago and continues to support this work in partnership with other congregations in the Presbytery.



LEFT PANEL

"Love YHWH your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

Deuteronomy 6:5 (NIV)

Commentary

YHWH

These four consonants are the personal name of the God revealed to Moses (Exodus 3) and worshiped by ancient Israel, Jews, and Christians. It may be pronounced "Yahweh," but since ancient times Jews have expressed their reverence by not pronouncing the name. Instead, they say "Adonai" ("Lord") or "Hashem" ("The Name") when reading scripture or speaking of God. Vowels for one of these words are printed in the Hebrew text wherever YHWH appears. "Adonai" became "Kyrios" ("Lord") in Greek translations of the Old Testament and in the New Testament Greek as well. Translations of the OT generally use "LORD" in all caps where YHWH occurs, to distinguish from the ordinary word "Lord."

Background

Our text is the second part of the Jewish "Shema," meaning "hear/listen/pay attention," which begins "YHWH is our God, YHWH alone." This God, the only true God, is the One we are commanded "to love with all our heart and soul and strength." Jesus declares the centrality of this text in Mark 12:32 (also in Matthew 22:37), quoting it in answer to a question about which commandment is the first and greatest of all. Jews place it in a tiny scroll inside a mezuzah on their doorposts.

Here the command to "love" signifies much more than just emotional attachment. The ancient context makes clear that it involves obedience – conformity day by day and moment by moment to the way of life that this God of justice, kindness, and grace requires of us, to "walk humbly" before our one and only God.

Although it might be tempting to parse out individual meanings for heart, soul, and strength, a more fruitful approach is simply to take the three words together to mean the totality of our being, our everything, our ultimate and only commitment: “You shall have no other gods...”

Questions for Contemplation

- * What in my life is holding me back from this total commitment?
- * What in my life is helping me to deepen my commitment?
- * How might those helps support me in small steps to overcome what holds me back?

Prayer

O God, my Rock and Redeemer, thank you for the gift of your command to love you. Help me to perceive this command as a gift, as the way to a blessed life. And help me to grow in faithfulness and obedience to you. Amen.

Author

Kathie Sakenfeld taught Old Testament at Princeton Seminary from 1970 to 2013, where her teaching and research focused on texts about women and the great variety of images for God in Scripture. She is an ordained PCUSA clergywoman and has served the denomination at local, national, and international levels. She is grateful to have participated in the life of Nassau Church since 1970.

Mission Partners: Westminster Presbyterian Church in Trenton & Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church

Nassau Church gives thanks for our deep relationship with these two historic congregations, our neighbors in the Witherspoon-Jackson community and in Trenton. Their vibrant witness enriches our shared ministry and reminds us that we better reflect God’s kingdom when we journey together as a connectional church.



CENTER PANEL

"I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."

Matthew 25:34b-35 (RSV)

Commentary

These verses come from the story of the sheep and the goats, the last parable that Jesus told the disciples in Matthew's Gospel. It culminates a group of parables that teach about the realm of God, what it will be like when the Christ returns to establish God's realm in this world.

Set in the time after the return of the Son of Man or Human One, we would do well to pay close attention to its message and definition of righteousness. The parables that precede it—about faithful and unfaithful servants, ten bridesmaids, and the servants given valuable coins—provide clues to how Christians are to live as they prepare for the coming of God's realm, but none of them is as explicit as the parable of the sheep and the goats.

Nothing in these verses is particularly Christian. Caring for people who are poor or vulnerable is a consistent theme of both testaments. Similar expectations can be found in many religions and benevolent organizations. But what keeps this parable from being a moralistic teaching is that neither group knew that in those simple acts of love and caring, Jesus was present and being served.

This parable provides a perfect transition to what follows in Matthew: the events of Passion Week and the Resurrection. This is how we are to live when Jesus is not physically among us. We are still to find Jesus in our midst, in those who require our acts of love and caring. This is also how we love God, how we abide in God's love. Thus, these are appropriate words for us to take from the sanctuary and from our worship together to go into our individual worlds.

Questions for Contemplation

- * Read Matthew 25:31-46. How does reading the entire parable help you understand the meaning of the two featured verses?
- * When have you recognized Jesus in someone you have helped?
- * At session meetings, the elders are sometimes asked some version of this question, “Where have you seen God at work in the world during the past week?” These two verses are central to pondering that question. How would you answer it today?

Prayer

God of all creation, keep us ever alert to the needs of others as we encounter strangers, friends and family members. Remind us that we can be cared for as well, showing others Jesus as we are served by them. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Author

Carol Wehrheim, clerk of session at Nassau Church, was on the editorial team for the Common English Bible, and is the writer or editor of numerous Christian formation resources, such as *Giving Together*, *A Stewardship Guide for Families*, and *Growing in God’s Love, A Story Bible*.

Mission Partner: Arm in Arm

Founded by Nassau and Trinity Churches in 1980, Arm in Arm responds to food and housing insecurity in Mercer County. Through groceries, housing, and support services, it embodies compassion and dignity for neighbors facing economic hardship.



RIGHT PANEL

"God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God,
and God abides in them."

1 John 4:16b (NRSV)

Commentary

God is love. The simplicity of the sentence hides the complexity of the confession. God is love. To abide, to dwell, to live in love is to abide, to dwell, to live in God.

Love is so simple a matter and yet so complex because love is at the core of who we are. Love shapes our lives before we can articulate what love is. As children, we are loved at our most vulnerable. Before we can speak or feed ourselves or soothe our cries, someone else steps in with love. Only later do we come to understand that that love required someone else to put our needs before theirs. Love is a form of grace, a gift we did not know we needed but without which we would be lost.

Later in life, we come to know the love of good friends, friends that become like family. Friends who help us move from home to home, friends who remain unruffled by a late night phone call. We know the love of compassion. When we encounter those in need, our hearts reach out and cross the boundary of language and culture. When complete strangers help us at our worst moments, we taste love at its purest. In those singular moments when we are far away from home, helping others or being helped, we find out something vitally important about love. We find out that love knows no bounds. Love is not a zero sum game. Love never runs out. Love never tires. Love is infinitely patient. Love is inexhaustible.

As children of God, we are wired for love; if we inherit anything from God, it is this central characteristic. And so, maybe the challenge for us today is that we are simply incapable of reducing love to a single sentence, that love, if it's God's defining characteristic, is far beyond our comprehension, a gift we receive and give without really understanding it.

It may be that such is the heart of faith in a God whose love we know yet can never exhaust.

Questions for Contemplation

- * In your life, when have you felt most loved? How have you found yourself loving others? What do these moments teach you about love and about God?
- * How do you define love? What does that definition suggest about who God is?
- * There are intellectual and affective dimensions of love. That is, love is something we can ponder but also something we feel. In what ways do you experience the intersection of knowing and feeling love?

Prayer

God, your love is inexhaustible. Your promises sustain us. Your grace frees us from our fears and fills us with your love. For this love, for these promises, for your grace, we give you thanks. Lead us onto your holy paths, roads that lead to places we would rather avoid and people we would rather not encounter. Help us see our neighbors as you see them: beloved children. Teach us to love. Teach us to hope. Teach us to trust. Amen.

Author

Eric Barreto is Weyerhaeuser Associate Professor of New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary. His recent walk on the Camino de Santiago with Elena and Nico will always be a Nassau highlight.

Mission Partner: Monthly Hunger Offering

Since 1975, Nassau Church has shared Christ's compassion through the Hunger Offering, collected on the last Sunday of each month. Gifts currently support five mission partners—Send Hunger Packing Princeton, Trenton Area Soup Kitchen, HomeFront, the Presbyterian Hunger Program, and the Uniting Reformed Church of Stellenbosch, South Africa—extending care locally and globally.

Reflections

Prayers



Photo: ©2025 LEWONO PHOTOGRAPHY



CLOSING PRAYER

Gracious God,

You call us to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you.
You command us to love you with all our heart, soul, and strength.
You remind us that in feeding, clothing, and welcoming others,
we meet Christ himself.

And you assure us that in abiding in love, we abide in you.

Let these living words shape our life together.

Bless our mission partners near and far,
that your compassion may be made visible through their work.
Send us from this place renewed in faith, hope, and love,
to serve you in this world you so dearly love.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Nassau Presbyterian Church

Go in peace to do justice, love kindness,
welcome the stranger, and abide in God's love.
And may the grace of Christ, the love of God,
and the friendship of the Holy Spirit
go with you this day and forevermore.

For more information about the
highlighted mission partners and others visit:
<https://nassauchurch.org/outreach/partners/>



61 Nassau Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08542
609-924-0103 nassauchurch.org

