

Devotionals from God's Daily Word Ministries

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Our Privileged Responsibility

2-1-07

God has always set aside a select group to carry forth His Word and to help guide His people. In the Old Testament times God designated the descendants of Levi to be priests. The priests were to perform the various sacrifices, give instruction regarding God's Law, and be the general interface between God and man. Since the priests were accountable to God for maintaining His standard, this great privilege also carried an enormous responsibility.

Malachi served as a prophet of God approximately 900 years after the Levitical priesthood had been established. The priests had once held a deep reverence for God, but they now ceased to teach the truth and lost all sense of their calling. Through Malachi, God sent the priests a sharp rebuke.

Malachi 2:7-9

"The lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction - because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty. But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble...you have not followed My ways."

In one regard, this speaks directly to those called into Church leadership - those who are given the responsibility for leading a congregation in the way of truth. But it also speaks to ALL who now believe in Jesus Christ and are committed to following His ways. We must not cause others to stumble!

When Jesus came to earth and gave Himself as a sacrifice for our sins, a new covenant was established. No longer would there be only a select group of priests who had access to God. Now, all believers are "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (1 Peter 2:9).

The primary duty of a priest was to seek God's will and effectively communicate the truth of God's Word to those placed within his care. As members of God's royal priesthood, we all have this same responsibility - this same privilege! We must seek His will and speak truth to whoever God places in our path. We do not have the option of watching others wander from God. Allowing someone to destroy their life and their intimate relationship with God through a life of unbelief and sin is neither gracious nor loving - it's cruel and irresponsible!

We are never held accountable for the response of others, only for our presentation of the truth. We must now become faithful to our calling. We must become a priest within our family, at our work, among our friends, and even within our church. We must diligently seek His will and not stray. We must learn His truths and live by them...and speak His truth with grace and compassionate love. Let's give thanks for the opportunity to serve and for being allowed to lead others to a closer relationship with our Heavenly Father. Let's praise Him and faithfully accept our privileged responsibility.

Have A Great Day!

John 7:40-44 - Lesson #80
2-2-07

On the last day of the Feast Jesus stood and cried out to those who were gathered; "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). John then helps our understanding by writing that Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit who would be given, to all who believe.

John 7:40-44

"Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, 'Truly this is the Prophet.' Others said, 'This is the Christ.' But some said, 'Will the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?' So there was a division among the people because of Him. Now some of them wanted to take Him, but no one laid hands on Him."

The crowd would not have understood that Jesus was speaking of the Holy Spirit, but they had a sense His words were claiming He was someone special. We have seen people wrestle with the identity of Jesus before. After witnessing the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, many said; "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world" (John 6:14). Now, because of His words, many said the same; Jesus was the Prophet greater than Moses as promised by God (Deuteronomy 18:18).

But others argued that Jesus was not the Prophet but the Christ, which means God's Anointed (Psalm 2:2) and refers to the promised king from the line of David; "I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom forever" (2 Samuel 7:12). This was to be the Messiah who would free God's people from oppression. But Jesus was known to be from Galilee and the Messiah was to come from Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Jesus did not fit neatly into their predefined box so some tried to arrest Him.

Today we know that the promised Prophet and the promised King were both fulfilled in Jesus. But when Jesus walked the earth the Jewish people were looking for two different people - one who would speak for God and one who would establish the kingdom. Today, with all the written scripture we can see that Jesus was indeed from the line of David, born of a virgin in Bethlehem, and One who truly spoke the words of God. And yet even today many reject Jesus as the One who came to die for the forgiveness of sin because He does not fit into their predefined box.

The issue of trying to fit Jesus into our idea of who He should be - stuff Him into our box - is more of a problem than we realize. There are many who are making themselves available to help you create a box and then affirming you when your Jesus fits so neatly. We gather together, all carrying the same box. We smile, sing, and then we go home to put our box on the shelf until next week. But this is not the Jesus of the Bible! Jesus is not in the box!! Let's stop trying to package Him and carry Him around. Let's accept and seek to understand the complete Jesus of God's revealed Word, the Son of God who gave His life so we can live.

Have A Great Day!

An Unblemished Sacrifice

2-5-07

During the days of Moses, God established specific laws for sacrifices. God called for animal sacrifices to teach His people the seriousness of sin and to prepare the way for Jesus. God taught that when a sacrifice was offered, it was to be pure and without blemish: "If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect. He must present it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the Lord" (Leviticus 1:3).

Approximately 900 years after the sacrificial law was given to Moses, God used the prophet Malachi to call the people back to a true heart of worship. Since the time of Moses, the people of Israel had gone through many highs and lows in their worship and were currently on another downward spiral. The priests had become very casual with the sacrifices - they had lost all sense of reverence and had ceased to offer God their best.

Malachi 1:7-8

"You place defiled food on My altar. But you ask, 'How have we defiled You?' By saying that the Lord's table is contemptible. When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong?"

With the perfect and acceptable sacrifice of Jesus, the need for animal sacrifice has ended; "He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood" (Hebrews 9:12). Through faith in Jesus, our sins are completely forgiven; "By one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy" (Hebrews 10:14). Faith in the sacrifice of Jesus has become our final sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin - we have been perfected by His blood.

Each of us who have experienced God's mercy and grace are now urged "to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God" (Romans 12:1a). We offer this sacrifice not to earn or even maintain our Salvation; we offer this sacrifice because "this is our Spiritual act of worship" (Romans 12:1b). A true understanding of God's grace in granting us eternal life ought to compel us to a life of thanksgiving and holy worship.

But when we leave His presence for the pleasures of this world, we create blemishes on our heart; and when we practice or give approval to sin, we become Spiritually crippled and diseased. We must present ourselves to God and allow Him to use us for His glory. But He deserves our very best! We should offer ourselves with a pure heart, without selfish ambition or pride, and free of worldly compromise.

God has given us all we have, made us all we are, and is leading us to all we will become. Let's worship and serve Him with the best we have to offer; let's present our lives to Him as an unblemished sacrifice.

Have A Great Day!

Run Within His Plan

2-6-07

In basketball, the team with the most points at the end of the game wins. But if we attempt to apply basketball rules to the game of golf, we will lose every time. Golf is played with different rules and requires a different strategy. Needless to say, it's critical to understand the rules and values of the game in which we are competing.

A rich man came to ask Jesus how to get eternal life. He had been a good citizen, treated others well, and accumulated much wealth; but Jesus gave an unexpected answer: "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven. Then come, follow Me" (Matthew 19:21). The rich man failed to see the connection and went away very sad.

Matthew 19:30

"But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."

Jesus came with a message that the rules of life are not as they seem. The first, by the world's standard, does not automatically win. When the clock of life ticks its last, it will not be the one with the biggest bank account, biggest house, or nicest car who will stand victorious - it won't even be the one who pastors the largest church, feeds the most hungry, or tells the most about Jesus. Rather, it will only be those who do the true work God requires; "The work of God is this: to believe in the one He has sent" (John 6:29).

Have we completed the work of God? Do we even value this "work"?

When Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment, He said; "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30). The greatest commandment ought to be our greatest priority and the foundation on which we build our life, our family, and our ministry. Though other things may be enjoyable, important, or even necessary, they must never be allowed to occupy the throne of our life.

Many of us feel like we're falling behind because of our decision to follow Christ. We see others prosper and start to believe we must compromise in order to keep pace - but the game rules have changed! God has a different plan!! The world around us has the wrong uniform, wrong equipment, and wrong play book. The great deceiver would like to fill us with doubt, but we must not be swayed.

No matter how loud the competition yells that we're going the wrong way, we must boldly continue on the path of truth. The final victory has already been won and we are on the winning team! When God gave His Son and told us to believe, He turned the rules of the world upside down. Let's never forget we now live and breathe according to a new set of rules. Let's forever follow our Coach and steadily run within His plan!

Have A Great Day!

Let it Die

2-7-07

During the three short years of Jesus' earthly ministry, He performed many miracles and preached to crowds large and small. But the moment of greatest acceptance came the week before Jesus was crucified as He entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. A large number had gathered from all over Israel in preparation of the Passover: "They took palm branches and went out to meet Him, shouting 'Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!'" (John 12:13).

Many would view this as the high point of Jesus' ministry. He had gained a great following and the people even hailed Him as the new King of Israel. But Jesus knew this was not His Father's will. Jesus came for a much greater purpose than to be a temporary king; He came for an eternal glory which required His death.

John 12:24

"I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."

Jesus spoke these words in reference to His sacrifice on the cross which would occur in a few short days, but His message of death was also intended for us today. Obviously He's not saying we should all be physically crucified, but Jesus IS saying we must experience a death; "whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will find it" (Matthew 16:25). Paul explains this even more directly; "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature" (Colossians 3:5).

Our earthly nature is home to all our sinful desires, but it's also the source of all the ambitions and dreams not formed by God. When we tightly hold to our dreams and are driven (or drive others) by our own ambitions, we choke what God desires to accomplish and never see the full potential of Christ - never see the abundant life God desires us to live.

We have a tendency to dream and make plans, and then spend our time and energy pursuing the dream rather than truly pursuing Christ. Our dream may even appear very Godly - we may strive for a dynamic ministry or children who love and follow God - but until we allow EVERYTHING within us to die and be replaced by the love of God, we will never experience His very best nor witness His most beautiful fruit; "and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

Let's allow the plans of Christ to reign absolutely supreme. We were created for so much more than we can imagine! Let's cast off all sin and leave ALL we hold dear at His feet. He will raise up what He desires to use for the glory of His name, but first we must resolve to let it die.

Have A Great Day!

Run With Perseverance

2-8-07

Our life can be a long and sometimes difficult race. We often grow weary and are in great need of rest. But this race is not like any we have ever run before. We do not compete against the other runners, nor do we all even run the same course. We run the race marked out by our Heavenly Father; and yet, we ALL must strive toward the same finish line.

Hebrews 12:1-2

"Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith."

Perseverance means "to persist in spite of opposition or discouragement." But the original Greek includes the idea of patience and a determined endurance. We are being told to patiently run the race - and to keep on running with determination and endurance - in spite of opposition or discouragement. We are to rid our life of things that would slow us down and continue forward with our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus.

The weeds along our path often try to wrap around our legs and pull us down. This "sin that so easily entangles" can be difficult to even recognize. We may be running a clear path without even a hint of weeds. Everything has been going well and we feel immune to the temptations of this world. But without our eyes fixed on Jesus - without our heart fully trusting Him for every step - our path can become covered before we even realize there's a problem.

We must maintain an acute awareness of the condition of our path. Weeds are not acceptable and must be cleared away (the word of God and prayer is an excellent weed killer!). There are no circumstances where weeds add beneficial "flavor" or excitement - they ALWAYS hinder, steal and destroy!!

Our race is a long marathon, not a quick sprint. In order to persevere, we must prepare for many hills and valleys (and weeds) along the way. We must have a burning desire to one day boldly say; "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). Jesus endured the cross (finished the race) because of "the joy set before Him" (Hebrews 12:2). And as we keep our eyes on Jesus as our eternal joy, we "will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:3).

No matter what this day may bring, we must persist with our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus until we hear Him say: "Well done, good and faithful servant....Come and share your Master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:23). Some days we may only be able to take small baby steps, but that's alright - we must continue and stay in the race! We must run with the sole purpose of bringing Him glory and honor in ALL we do. Our race can be filled with joy and peace, but we must commit to a life of absolute trust and run with perseverance!

Have A Great Day!

John 7:45-53 - Lesson #81
2-9-07

Talk about Jesus can cause division quicker than any other subject. Perhaps this is because the message of Jesus draws a clear line and requires a choice: "Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division" (Luke 12:51). The Pharisees understood Jesus' message and were consistently angered because Jesus said the way to eternal life was not through their religious system. They had made their choice and would no longer be swayed by words of truth. When they heard Jesus was speaking during the Feast, officers were sent to arrest Him.

John 7:45-53

"Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, 'Why have you not brought Him?' The officers answered, 'No man ever spoke like this Man!' Then the Pharisees answered them, 'Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.' Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, 'Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?' They answered and said to him, 'Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.' And everyone went to his own house."

The officers failed in their task of bringing Jesus, but it's interesting to note the courage in their report. Failure in arresting Jesus could have severe consequences and would certainly justify making excuses - perhaps He was gone before they arrived, or maybe the crowd assisted in His escape. But these officers simply said they didn't arrest Him because of the power of His word.

The anger of the Pharisees rose to the surface, as did their pride. Ever notice how often pride is at root of anger? The Pharisees claimed to know every detail of the Law - both the portion given through Moses and the many additional laws created through their religious system. And no one of such superior understanding would be deceived by Jesus - Jesus was only for those less educated, less trained, less religious.

But the same Nicodemus who had talked with Jesus about being born again (John 3), brought forward a finer point of the law which said they couldn't yet judge Jesus without finding out more about Him. This can't be said to be a defense of Jesus, but Nicodemus supplied just enough confusion to disperse the group - for now!

Before anything is accepted as truth it must first pass through the filter of our world view. The Pharisees had a world view of self righteousness - self-earned eternal life - and it was nearly impossible for the truth of righteousness as a gift from God through Jesus to pass into their acceptance. What world view have we formed? What view are we teaching our children? His sacrifice was a wonderful gift for the forgiveness of sin. Let's allow this truth to pass through our man-made filter. Let's receive the truth and then live all the rest of our days giving glory to the truth of God.

Have A Great Day!

Increase The Light

2-12-07

In the physical world, there is no measurable quantity which defines darkness; dark is simply the absence of light. Therefore, the measure of darkness can only be in reference to the measure of light: less darkness is only achieved through more light.

In the Spiritual world, darkness represents the evil of the enemy and light represents the holiness of God. Though neither can be truly measured, the concept is the same: darkness only exists when there is an absence of light. Light and dark cannot exist at the same time; when light is increased, darkness must fade.

1 John 1:5-6

"This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth."

Salvation is by the grace of God through faith in Jesus and not through anything we do (Ephesians 2:8-9). But the purpose of Salvation is to walk in intimate fellowship with Jesus - the true and eternal Light. It is not possible to have fellowship with the Light of Christ and still live a life filled with the darkness of sin. Jesus purifies us from all sin (past, present, and future) in the sense of judgment before the Father, but He also illuminates the dark sin in our life and gives us the strength to gradually push it aside.

A life without the Light is in darkness and cannot even recognize true sin. If we attempt to remove sin without first shining the Light, we simply clean the outside but leave a heart which is dark and dead. Some outsides are dirtier than others; but no matter how filthy an outside may appear, we ALL need the Light of Christ in our heart before we can be clean; "First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean" (Matthew 23:26). The grace His Light is able to do in an instant what no amount of self effort can ever accomplish.

When our own Spiritual life becomes "dim," it usually means our time with the Light has begun to suffer - our discipline of prayer and reading His Word has been replaced with competing distractions. Where we once walked with clear vision, we now bump into walls and continually stub our toes. But God desires to light our path once again. He has "saved us and called us to a holy life" (2 Timothy 1:9), to a life filled with Light - a life of bold clarity in Him.

Let's share the true and eternal Light of Jesus Christ at every opportunity and refocus our priorities on the only sure way to restore our vision. Let's commune with Him in prayer and immerse ourselves in His Word. His path will once again be made clear and darkness will surely fade as we increase the Light.

Have A Great Day!

A Famine of Hearing

2-13-07

Like most of the Old Testament prophets, Amos was chosen by God to deliver a message of repentance and judgment; "Seek the Lord and live, or He will sweep through the house of Joseph like a fire" (Amos 5:6). God was calling His people to return, but they had wandered far from His presence and showed no interest in a life of worship. The economy of their day was thriving and the people had few needs which went unfulfilled; they were content and saw little need for God.

Through Amos, God sent a strong warning. Although He promises to answer all who respond to His call, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Joel 2:32), and He promises to be VERY patient, "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9), God also warns that the opportunity to hear His Word may not always be available.

Amos 8:11-12

"The days are coming,' declares the Sovereign Lord, 'when I will send a famine through the land - not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it.'"

When we hear the Word of God, the door is open and we are in the middle of a God-directed opportunity. At that moment we have the opportunity to respond to the truth and draw closer to our Heavenly Father. But when we reject His Word, we begin to close the door and harden our heart - the opportunity begins to fade: "So, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart'" (Hebrews 3:7-8).

We have been blessed to live during this time in history. Yes, we face the unrelenting pressures of an over-indulgent, self-consumed society; but we have also been blessed with a wonderful abundance of the Word of God. In most parts of the world we have the freedom to worship with other believers and full access to truth-filled teaching. In fact, God's Word has become so readily available that many of us take it for granted.

In the midst of our overflowing blessings, we are becoming complacent and no longer treasure His precious gift. But what would happen if His Word was taken away and no one was allowed to speak, no one allowed to hear, the Word of God?

Our Heavenly Father loves us dearly. He "wants ALL men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4); and He wants those who believe to be "conformed to the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29). Our Father continues to call us to know Him with a greater and more intimate love. Let's make the most of this awesome opportunity by receiving the Word of God, in all its forms, with a hungry anticipation, and then by obediently responding to His call. Let's shake off ALL forms of complacency and rejoice that we do not yet live during a famine of hearing.

Have A Great Day!

By Our Love

2-14-07

The Church in Ephesus was established by the Apostle Paul and became one of the most prominent churches in the early days of Christianity. Paul ministered in Ephesus for three years (Acts 19:1-20), and a few years later wrote the Church a special letter of encouragement and instruction (the book of Ephesians); "Ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers" (Ephesians 1:15).

The Ephesians were doing most things "right." They had strong programs, an acute awareness of sin, and a work ethic which should characterize any thriving church: "I {Jesus} know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for My name, and have not grown weary" (Revelation 2:2-3).

Jesus acknowledged the hard work of the Ephesian church; and yet, they had forgotten that "only one thing is {truly} needed" (Luke 10:42). Though they maintained an outward appearance of devotion, and may have actually accomplished many "Kingdom-driven" goals, Jesus saw that the once burning love in their heart had begun to fade.

Revelation 2:4

"Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love."

When we understand the ugliness of our sin, the death our sin deserves and how Jesus died to make us clean, when we first open our heart to receive Him in, we cannot help but be filled with thankfulness...and love. But sadly, in our attempt to "mature," we often shift our focus to the "doing" of outward activities and forget the love which once consumed our heart. We may study more, attend more, and serve more (all of which are good), but we have forgotten how to simply be still and worship at His feet.

As we mature in Christ, we must never outgrow our ability to love; "Repent and do the things you did at first" (Revelation 2:5). Dear Lord, forgive us for setting up barriers which keep us from truly loving others. Forgive us for being so busy that we forsake our intimate love for You. And forgive us for trying to work for what You so freely give. Help us to always remember the MOST important!

Let's return to the place of simple devotion - the place of true worship and all-consuming love. There will always be opportunities to express our faith in good works and service to God. These should not be neglected! But as we work hard, resist sin, and possibly endure great hardship, let's remember that what Jesus truly desires is our heart. In the end, when we see Him face to face, He will look deep within and He will know us by our love.

Have A Great Day!

Continual and Loving Communication

2-15-07

In the message "By Our Love" we saw how Jesus desires for us to mature in our love for our Heavenly Father and for others. But as we walk the path God lays before us, we soon discover many decision points where we must choose between God's path and the path of the world. At these critical moments, we must be able to recognize His leading; and if we have not spent time worshiping at His feet and communicating in prayer, we cannot expect to understand or even hear His guidance in our time of greatest need.

Communication is essential for maturing in any relationship. A marriage which lacks communication will slowly begin to drift apart. It's not uncommon for married couples to live together for the majority of their lives and yet feel like strangers because they have failed to spend the time required to really know and understand one another.

Our relationship with God is much the same. When we accept the gift of Salvation as offered through faith in Jesus, we begin a life long relationship of love - a relationship which must be nurtured through fellowship and prayer.

Psalm 5:1-3

"Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my sighing. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to You I pray. In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You and wait in expectation."

David states that the morning is his dedicated time for prayer; his time to be alone with God, to share his heart and expectantly await God's direction. But God has not specified a preferred time. In fact, Paul encourages us to maintain a constant state of communion with God when he says to "pray continuously" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). We ought to strive for communication which is regular and frequent; any time is the right time for prayer - any time is the right time to commune with the one you love!

Prayer must originate from a sincere heart, anything less becomes a ritual of meaningless words. We should be motivated by a desire to strengthen our relationship - to praise Him for His blessings and earnestly ask for His guidance - and to deepen the commitment of our love. We ought to value our time with God above anything else this world has to offer: "One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life" (Psalm 27:4).

Let's make sure our love doesn't fade. Let's set aside time each day to be alone with God - quiet time where we can hear His voice and begin to understand His character. Then, let's continue to commune and fellowship with Him throughout our times of busyness. Let's learn to dwell in His house all the rest of our days by maintaining continual and loving communication.

Have A Great Day!

John 8:1-8 - Lesson #82
2-16-07

Many doubt whether the passage contained in John 7:53-8:11 was actually in the original manuscripts of scripture. Many bibles include a note with this passage saying it is not found in the earlier manuscripts. In addition, several later manuscripts have this passage placed in different locations. However, references to this story are found in early Church writings and, since there is nothing found in the passage which contradicts other scripture, it is believed to be a true story from Jesus' life even if it was not part of scripture.

John 8:1-8

"But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?' This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, 'He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.' And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground."

This story represents a climax in the ongoing struggle between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. The Pharisees had consulted with the scribes and believed they had found the perfect way to get Jesus in trouble. This is the only time that the scribes are mentioned in the gospel of John. The scribes were considered to be the experts in the interpretation of the Law. We would consider them the lawyers of their day.

The plan was to bring forward a woman "caught" in adultery and ask Jesus what should be done. The case appeared to be clear, although their failure to also bring forward the man reveals their deception. But their question is regarding the woman, and the Levitical Law is clear; "the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death" (Leviticus 20:10). If Jesus went against the Levitical Law He could be accused as not upholding the Law of God and could Himself be condemned. If, on the other hand, Jesus upheld the death sentence, He could be reported to the Romans as carrying out an execution independent of the Roman authority. Either way, Jesus was trapped. The perfect plan!

But Jesus has never been (and never will be) trapped. We're not told what Jesus wrote on the ground - possibly the Ten Commandments, possibly specific sins of those who were gathered, or possibly nothing at all. The point is that when Jesus rose He spoke to the real issue of sin.

When we share our faith there will always be those who try to trap us with questions. But Salvation is not through answers to every question; rather, through the recognition of sin and the forgiveness from God. Let's not become trapped in non-essentials but let's remain focused on the issues of sin and our need for a Savior.

Have A Great Day!

Do What It Says

2-19-07

In the last two messages we've considered the importance of our love relationship with God; how Jesus desires our love much more than any of our works and how we must continue in prayer for our love to grow. ALL we do ought to be driven by love! When we study God's Word, we do so to understand His character, seek His direction, and then to obediently follow where His Word leads; "If you love Me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15). True love will always express itself in action.

As we continue to study God's Word, we must never stop with the simple accumulation of knowledge. Knowledge by itself will deceive us into a false sense of Spirituality; we must never equate an increase of knowledge with an increased closeness to God; "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know" (1 Corinthians 8:2). Knowing ABOUT God is only the beginning of the journey toward a closer relationship with Him. An intimate understanding is only gained through the loving application of what we know.

James 1:22-25

"Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the Word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in the mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it - he will be blessed in what he does."

We will never know the true meaning of faith until we step out and put our faith into practice. We cannot possibly know the peace of trusting God to work for the good in all things (Romans 8:28) until we love Him with all our heart, surrender our life, and allow Him to actually begin His work. Without allowing His words to cause action in our life, we become as the godless who are "always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7). Do we really believe His Word is true? True enough to trust and follow?

God has a message for each of us today, a specific truth He wants us to understand and apply. His message may be delivered through something we hear or something we read, but His words will never change our life and draw us closer until we put them into practice. We will never see the wonder of His truth until we apply His truth in our everyday life!

God is calling us today - He is calling us to know Him and walk with Him in love. The study of His Word (His entire Word from cover to cover!) should never cease, but we MUST take the next step. We must study with the great expectation of hearing His direction for our life. Then as we hear His Word, we must embrace it, step out in faith, and do what it says.

Have A Great Day!

Request A Prosperous Life

2-20-07

In the middle of a very long list of genealogies, recorded in the book of 1 Chronicles, there are a few short verses about a man named Jabez who was a descendant of Judah. We never read about him again, but it appears Jabez was included in this list because of his bold request...and God's gracious response.

1 Chronicles 4:10

"Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, 'Oh, that You would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let Your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.' And God granted his request."

Passages on asking and receiving can be difficult to teach. For example: "How much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:11). These passages are full of truth, but those who preach a "prosperity" gospel have abused the scriptures to say God wants everyone to be financially rich and all we must do is ask or repeat some special prayer. Although this type of prosperity teaching receives a wide following, it is far from God's truth.

But God DOES want us to prosper: "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (Jeremiah 29:11). And, He wants us to ask! "You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives" (James 4:2-3). God has a plan to prosper us, but we often do not receive His blessings because we are asking to satisfy our own selfish desires or cover worldly fears.

We also fail to prosper because we don't understand God's definition of prosperity. A Godly prosperity has little to do with finances or possessions, and a great deal to do with peace and contentment. A prosperous life is also one which bears much fruit and completes the work God has asked us to accomplish; "I have brought You glory on earth by completing the work You gave Me to do" (John 17:4). How petty to think that God's prosperity involves the riches of this world which rust and fade away.

A truly prosperous life begins by drawing near (and remaining near) to the presence of God. Without first abiding in His presence, we won't even know what will allow us to prosper; "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). As we draw near to God, He places the desires on our heart which lead to true prosperity - then we must ask. It's in the asking, and in the expectation of the answer, that we exercise our faith and prove it to be real.

Let's ask God to increase our territory - to increase our realm of influence in His Kingdom. Let's ask Him to keep us in His protective arms, give us His abundance of peace, and accomplish great things in and through our life. Let's draw near to God and boldly request a prosperous life.

Have A Great Day!

He is God 2-21-07

In the book of Job, we read of a man who came under severe attack by Satan. Within a short amount of time, Job went from a man of wealth, health, and large family, to a man who lost all his possessions, was near death, and childless.

In the early stage of his trials, Job demonstrated a deep commitment to God's sovereignty; "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised" (Job 1:20-21). Then when his wife told him to curse God and die, Job responded with: "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" (Job 2:10).

Job seemed to have a deep understanding of the verse we often quote in times of trial; "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him" (Romans 8:28). But at the same time, Job struggled with understanding why God would allow these things to happen. Yes, God is in control...but why!? When Job couldn't find an answer he began to feel terribly alone and abandoned.

Job 23:3-5

"If only I knew where to find Him; if only I could go to His dwelling! I would state my case before Him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would find out what He would answer me, and consider what He would say."

Our trials often cause similar concerns. We find ourselves asking where God has gone and why He is allowing such hardship. Even though we may believe God is "working all things for our good," we often search in vain to find something positive in our situation. And when we fail to see any possible good, we become frustrated and assume God has forgotten us, abandoned us in our time of need.

Finally, God responded to Job's cry for answers: "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!" (Job 38:4-5). God's response continued for almost four chapters: "Who has a claim against Me that I must repay? Everything under heaven belongs to Me" (Job 41:11). The Creator of the Universe - the One who formed every intricate detail of what we see and cannot see - the One who lifted us out of the slimy pit and set our feet on solid ground, spoke to Job and simply said, "I'm God!"

Our Heavenly Father loves us so very much; and He desires for us to know Him better and walk by His side with complete trust. But there are times when our trust must take comfort in accepting a difficult answer. Often, in the middle of our trials, we must continue to simply believe His Word is true. Though we may not understand, we must desperately cling to His promises and KNOW He will never leave us nor forsake us! Let's be at total peace and restore our hope by always remembering that He is God.

Have A Great Day!

Filled With Awe

2-22-07

After Jesus had risen from the dead and "was taken up into Heaven" (Luke 24:51), those who believed in Him "joined together constantly in prayer" (Acts 1:14), "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42), and "ate together with glad and sincere hearts" (Acts 2:46). The first believers did naturally what we try to implement in our churches today - they prayed, studied, and fellowshiped. But they had an additional characteristic of their gathering that no amount of programming will ever be able to produce.

Acts 2:43

"Everyone was filled with awe..."

Being "filled with awe" means to have an overwhelming sense of "reverent fear, wonder and amazement." This is the same meaning used by Solomon when he wrote: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). Our understanding of God begins with a reverent fear - an amazed and holy awe - which compels us to our knees in worship.

The early believers knew they were in the midst of God's Hand and were amazed; but today we often become complacent with His wonders. We forget the miracle of, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1); the marvel of, "So God created man in His own image...male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27), and the incredible wonder of His love, "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

These verses alone should inspire a lifetime of praise - but God has given us much more. He has given His Spirit to guide and comfort; and the entirety of His Word to reveal the fullness of His character and the grandness of His majesty. About sixty years after Jesus returned to Heaven, the Apostle John was given a vision of God's throne room in order to encourage us about the future glory we will one day see.

Revelation 4:2-8

"And there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it... A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.... Around the throne, were four living creatures.... Day and night they never stop saying: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.'"

Understanding the wondrous glory of Heaven can make our daily trials seem much less of a burden!

Let's reflect on the miracles of God's creation, His plan of redemption through Jesus, and the true majesty of His Kingdom. We will begin to experience all God has planned for our life, and the life of our local church, if we return to a true reverence and wonder of our Lord. Our lives can be made whole and our worship complete only as we approach our Heavenly Father, once again, filled with awe.

Have A Great Day!

John 8:9-11 - Lesson #83
2-23-07

The Pharisees thought they had conceived the perfect trap. They brought a woman caught in adultery and asked Jesus what should be done. They thought He would be condemned no matter how He responded. But after spending some time writing in the dirt Jesus said, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first" (John 8:7). He then returned to writing and let the accusers ponder His words.

John 8:9-11

"Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, 'Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said to her, 'Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.'"

Without insult or anger, Jesus had caused the accusers to examine their own heart and wrestle with their own sin. As each one considered what he saw buried deep inside, he was convicted and realized his hypocrisy. It's quite revealing that the older ones were the first to leave.

One of the unfortunate realities of growing older is that we have more sin we remember. I know my sins have all been forgiven, but each year (dare I say each day?) I have an increased list of the times I've fallen short of reflecting the character of God. So many words which I should not have spoken, so many times of silence when I should have opened my mouth to speak, so many times I acted without grace.

When Jesus rose, only the woman remained. There was no one left to restrain her. She could have departed with the others. But she stood before Jesus with no defense, with her spiritual need and sinful behavior fully exposed. She knew she was guilty. So why did she stay? Perhaps she knew more about Jesus than what we're told. It's doubtful she saw Jesus as the Son of God, but she was certainly drawn to His God-like compassion; "But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth" (Psalm 86:15).

It's difficult to read too much into the words Jesus spoke to this woman. His lack of condemnation does not necessarily mean Salvation, He didn't come to condemn; "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). Jesus spoke gentle, without condemnation, and yet spoke directly to the sin which was destroying this woman's life, "go and sin no more."

Perhaps it would do us all some good to remember our sin which has been forgiven, and perhaps the sin which continues to be forgiven each day. Perhaps a clearer picture of the grace we've been given would help us show more compassion and extend more grace to others.

Have A Great Day!

Reconcile With One Another

2-26-07

Malachi served as a prophet to Israel about four hundred years before the birth of Jesus. He brought a message from God which reminded the people of His love and rebuked them for their disrespectful worship. But through Malachi, God ended the Old Testament with a prophesy about future restoration.

Malachi 4:5-6

"I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

Just over four hundred years later, John the Baptist, "the Elijah who was to come" (Matthew 11:14), began to preach a message of repentance. The purpose of John's ministry was to prepare hearts for the coming of Jesus; "Prepare the way for the Lord" (Matthew 3:3). But according to Malachi, John would also cause the hearts of fathers and children to turn toward one another.

When the Spiritual fellowship between man and God was broken, a basic void was formed in man's heart which led to a breakdown in his earthly relationships. The moment we lost the ability to walk in perfect harmony with God, we also became filled with self-importance and pride, and lost the ability to truly love one another; "But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have {true} fellowship with one another" (1 John 1:7). Walking closer to Jesus allows us to walk closer with others; "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

God created us to be in fellowship with other people - even imperfect, hard to love people. Our quiet and peaceful times of study and prayer are essential for our Christian walk; but some of God's most important truths can only be learned as we stumble through difficult situations with others. Only there can we learn the difficulty of true grace and forgiveness; only there can some of our own deep sin (like pride, jealousy, and anger) be revealed.

Many relationships are filled with past pain - particularly the relationships between parent and child - but God's Word still stands as truth. He has provided the path to restoration; a path which begins with repentance, requires the cleansing of sinful pride, and leads to a heart filled with love and forgiveness.

Who do we need to reconcile with today? Full restoration requires the cooperation of both parties; but as a child of God, we can now cross the desert and begin to mend what is broken. Jesus died as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins in order that we may be reconciled with our Heavenly Father. He crossed ALL the way over and completely mended our shattered heart! Let's walk in the light of His love and take the necessary steps to humbly reconcile with one another.

Have A Great Day!

Cords of Encouragement
2-27-07

In the message "Reconcile With One Another" we saw how it's part of God's plan for us, through repentance and faith in Jesus, to be reconciled with our Heavenly Father, and then to mend and strengthen relationships with others. Not only do our relationships give us opportunities to express our love and gratitude to God, but they can also strengthen our faith and teach us about our weaknesses.

The importance of relationships is not a new concept which arrived with Jesus; rather, it forms the very essence of who we are, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). God could have created us to be isolated, but He didn't! We were created to actually need one another. Almost three thousand years ago, Solomon wrote of the importance of having encouraging relationships.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

As we look at the many believers scattered around the world, we notice the ways we are different as well as the many ways we are the same. We have different colors of skin and styles of clothes, different tastes in food and accents of speech; but we all have similar dreams, and all face the same kinds of trials and temptations. And we ALL need the same Savior!

God has taken a diverse group of people and formed us into the Body of Christ; "Though all its parts are many, they form one body" (1 Corinthians 12:12). But I'm afraid our selfish focus on satisfying our own needs and fulfilling our own desires has left us crippled and deformed. We must understand that as "one body" we desperately need each other; "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26).

We will never achieve our full potential in Christ until each member of the body is encouraged and being guided by the Spirit of God. When we see a Brother or Sister who is down, we must do all we can to help them up, dust them off, and point them to the Father. For the sake of our own Spiritual health we must return to a deeper understanding and commitment to His Family - this is how we were created!

Let's look with new and excited eyes at the Body of Christ. There are people all around who need encouragement; and there are also those who have the ability to encourage us. Let's identify the strands which God has placed in our life and then spend the necessary time to weave them into something strong and beautiful. Let's strengthen His Body today by building unbreakable cords of encouragement.

Have A Great Day!

Defeated Lions And Bears

2-28-07

In the message "Cords of Encouragement" we saw the importance - even the necessity - of encouraging one another. We have been joined together as the Body of Christ; and for this Body to function properly, we must all be encouraged to draw closer to God - to trust Him more and love Him with all our heart. One of the ways we encourage, is in sharing with one another how God's mighty hand has worked in our life. We have so much to be thankful for, but sadly we often simply forget.

In the book of 1 Samuel, we read of young David and the Philistine "Giant" named Goliath. Goliath was much larger than other people of his day; "he was over nine feet tall" (1 Samuel 17:4). For forty days he tormented the Israelites by challenging them to a battle, but no one would accept his challenge.

David was not a soldier, but his father sent him to the Israelite camp to deliver bread to his older brothers. When David heard the challenge by Goliath, he told King Saul; "Your servant will go and fight him" (1 Samuel 17:32).

Though David had never been in this type of battle, he had still witnessed the mighty power of God. As a shepherd, David defended the flock when a lion and a bear had come to carry away his sheep. David rescued the sheep by killing the lion and the bear. By witnessing God's hand in these past battles, David gained the necessary confidence to go into battle against Goliath.

1 Samuel 17:36-37

"Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear - this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

As we find ourselves battling our own Goliaths, we must remember how God has defended us in the past; and as a Family, we must share past victories with one another. God is faithful, and we need to remind one another of this simple truth. Our "Giant" circumstances may seem impossible to resolve, but the God who stood at our side during past battles (and stood at the side of our Brothers and Sisters) is the same God who stands with us today: "God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid'" (Hebrews 13:5-6).

God wants to draw us near and walk with us through each and every battle. This means we must trust He's working all things together for good...even when we can't see the good or understand His timing. Let's be encouraged by God's victories in our past and look for opportunities to share these victories as an encouragement to others. As each of us face our Goliaths today, let's go out with a thankful and trusting heart and always remember the defeated lions and bears.

Have A Great Day!