

Devotionals from God's Daily Word Ministries

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The Examined Life

3-1-06

We've heard it said and it proves to be true: the unexamined life is not worth living. If we flow through life without evaluating who we are and what we believe, we have not really lived. Deep down, we all desire to take a stand and live according to a consistent set of beliefs. This requires a boldness to go beyond the surface and into our very soul! Without this boldness we may give the appearance of living, and may even fool ourselves for a number of years, but there will always be an emptiness until we look deep within and deal with what we find.

God knows every detail of our heart; "Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13). But our Heavenly Father desires for us to know what we believe as we are being transformed; "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

As we seek to understand our heart - with all our hidden motives, pride, and selfishness - we find we're somewhat difficult to understand. Without the Spiritual help which God freely gives, there will be parts of our life which remain covered and dark. There may also be portions of our heart we would rather not face.

Psalm 139:23-24

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

It's foolishness to think we can hide anything from God! It's equally foolish to intentionally close areas of our heart from examination when we know what's inside is keeping us separated from God. What do we really believe? And are we living consistent with that belief?

We have been given God's Word as a guide; "a lamp to my feet" (Psalm 119:105). And as we dig deeper into His Word, we find the same lamp which guides our steps also reveals our heart: "The lamp of the Lord searches the spirit of a man; it searches out his inmost being" (Proverbs 20:27). Using God's Word to truly examine our heart can be painful. It seems we strip back one layer only to expose additional layers of sin we didn't even know we had; but this process must continue without fear!

If we desire to live in His presence and bring Him glory and honor in all we do, we must determine today to know ourselves. We must know what we believe, with all our strengths and weaknesses, and know our level of resolve to follow where He leads. Let's open our heart and allow His Spirit to search and wash us with His Word. Let's follow according to a consistent belief and commit to living the examined life.

Have A Great Day!

We Will Overcome

3-2-06

God's Word contains many passages which encourage us in our struggles. Paul tells us to "press on toward the goal" (Philippians 3:14), "run a good race" (Galatians 5:7), and "fight the good fight" (2 Timothy 4:7). Each of these acknowledge the struggle and exhort us to keep moving forward. But there are times we become weary and even the thought of pressing, running, or fighting becomes difficult. Yet, we know we must endure - we must overcome!

Revelation 2:7

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."

In the second and third chapters of Revelation, the Apostle John is simply dictating the words spoken by Jesus. In these two chapters, Jesus speaks seven times about "him who overcomes." Each time there is a gift or reward for the one who is "successful" and overcomes. This is certainly good motivation for us to endure, but the question still remains: How can we overcome as our strength begins to fade?

John knew what it took to overcome. Several years earlier, he had written a letter to encourage believers to stay committed and to give the assurance of eternal life. He also specified exactly who would overcome: "Everyone born of God overcomes the world... Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 John 5:4-5). Read this carefully and rejoice! Those who believe are those who will overcome!!

We must endure and overcome the world; but our faith in Jesus and NOT our strength is what causes us to endure. There are times we must run and times we must fight - times we will be called to be a mighty warrior for the Lord. But there are also times when we are terribly weak - times we must grab on to Jesus and allow HIS strength to carry us through the storm. These are times we will need to simply hold on!

When the battle seems unbearable, "Hold on to what you have - I {Jesus} am coming soon" (Revelation 3:11). When we feel surrounded by evil and the darkness is closing in, "Hold on to the good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). And when we become overwhelmed with doubt and fear, "Hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast" (Hebrews 3:6).

When we are weary in the storm, let's take comfort in the peaceful waters ahead. Let's fix our eyes on Jesus and hold on...He will never let us go. He has given His Children a wonderful promise: as we continue to believe and trust Him with all our heart, we WILL overcome!

Have A Great Day!

John 4:13-15 - Lesson #38
3-3-06

Jesus offered the woman at the well an eternal gift of living water - a Spiritual gift from above - but she questioned His sincerity and authority as her eyes remained focused on the physical; "Are You greater than our father Jacob..." (John 4:12). The woman has not been gracious with her words, but Jesus answers her question by continuing to explain the truth of living water.

John 4:13-15

"Jesus answered and said to her, 'Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.' The woman said to Him, 'Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.'"

The gift which Jesus brings cannot be compared to anything in the physical world. Those who drink from earthly wells can only be satisfied for a short while and then they thirst again, but those who drink the water of Christ are satisfied eternally. This comparison of thirst certainly speaks to the superiority of the gift which Jesus offers, but it also speaks to the absolute sufficiency. He is not simply saying we will be satisfied longer if we drink His water but that we will never need to drink from earthly wells again because we will never thirst! Old habits may bring us back to the well, but our dependent need has been removed.

Living water from Christ will become a fountain, springing up and bursting forth. When we drink of His water, there will be a new life which cannot be contained. The prophet Jeremiah understood this in relation to God's Word, "like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not" (Jeremiah 20:9). This is the life Jesus was offering and continues to offer today.

The woman asks for some of the water but with a complete lack of understanding - she may even be mocking Jesus with her reply. Even if she is being sincere, her only concern is her physical needs - take away my thirst and my need to keep coming to this well.

No eternal life can flow from a heart filled with selfish motives. Someone once told Jesus, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go" (Luke 9:57), but Jesus identified the selfish motives with His reply, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Luke 9:58). In other words, do not follow if you think that comfort and material gain are the result.

What is our motivation in following Christ? If we come for advancement or social acceptance, freedom from pain and sickness or even seeking excitement and change, then we are not prepared to drink. Let's take the time to truly understand His gift of living water. Let's empty ourselves before the One who is eternal and allow His life to fill us and then spring forth everlasting.

Have A Great Day!

Join The Battle

3-6-06

In the message "We Will Overcome" we were encouraged to hold on to Jesus when our strength fades and we become weary. We saw that our continued faith (not our strength) ensures we will overcome and receive the gift of eternal life. We can take great comfort in knowing Jesus will carry us and not let us fall; but we must also remember we were not born into His family to be permanently carried: "Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles" (Isaiah 40:31). As we draw near to God through dedicated quiet times of prayer, He WILL renew our strength; and when He does, we must once again march into battle.

We often forget there's a war being fought all around us. We tend to become passive because we don't actually see the fighting. There are no official announcements of enemy strength and no news flashes of casualties. But make no mistake...it's a war!

Ephesians 6:12

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

Just as surely as there is a God who gave His Son to die for our sins, there is also a devil and spiritual forces doing battle. The good news is that we know the final outcome of this war; "And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur" (Revelation 20:10).

The devil's end is certain; but in the meantime, he's on a mission to take as many with him as possible; "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was {also} thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15). The stakes of this war are high. The enemy continues to attack and rejoices when we think we're defeated.

But we are NOT defeated! We may lose our focus; we may stray from what's really important and trust in things which are fading; we may even experience times of fear and doubt; but we are definitely not defeated! The road to victory has been placed at our feet. It begins with our next determined step of drawing closer to God and loving Him with all our heart.

As our strength returns (and it will!) we must pick up the Word of God and become a soldier! There are many all around us with deep wounds who are literally dying for help. Let's not be content to sit on the sidelines or be forever carried. Let's present our lives to God and allow Him to work through us to encourage others in their walk and share the hope of Jesus with whoever crosses our path. Let's rededicate our lives to an uncompromising faith and, once again, join the battle!

Have A Great Day!

Know Him Better

3-7-06

When a child is born into a family, there is almost an instant bond of love. The parent and child spend LOTS of time together and truly begin to know each other. The parent knows the needs of the child, and the child knows the parent as the provider of comfort and security.

But as the child grows, other activities and friends begin to limit time with parents. In the search for independence, there is often rebellion toward parental instruction and counsel. Soon, the parent and child drift apart and no longer communicate as they once had - they sadly cease to know one another.

Ephesians 1:16-17

"I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better."

Notice this is Paul's continuous prayer; that we be given revelation and wisdom. Revelation is the unveiling of God's truth and wisdom is the application of His truth in our lives. Both of these are necessary and serve the single purpose of knowing Him better.

As we continue in our relationship with Jesus Christ, there is a tendency to hit those Spiritual teenage years where we have things pretty well figured out - or so we think. We begin to gain "self" confidence and trust in our own ability. We get more involved in activities (maybe even "good" activities) and with friends (maybe even "good" friends); but one day we wake and find we've drifted. We didn't intentionally walk away, but there's a definite loss of passion - we no longer really know God.

As a loving father longs to hold his children, our Heavenly Father longs for us to draw near and know Him; "Let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me" (Jeremiah 9:24). The Bible always speaks about knowing someone as a very personal and loving relationship: "Adam knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain" (Genesis 4:1 KJV). Jesus even defined eternal life as a state of knowing; "Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3).

The road back to a restored relationship begins with spending time together. No matter how busy we get we must continue to humbly come into the presence of God, confess the sin which causes separation, fellowship with Him in prayer and the quiet study of His Word, and listen intently for His direction. Let's commit (or recommit) to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; and let's be determined to take the necessary steps to draw near and know Him better.

Have A Great Day!

Always Seek His Counsel

3-8-06

As Moses was about to die, he transferred leadership of Israel to Joshua. God gave His approval of Joshua with the instructions; "Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go" (Joshua 1:7).

Initially, Joshua sought God's counsel for every step he took. Joshua received direction for crossing the Jordan river (Joshua 3), building a lasting memorial (Joshua 4), renewing the covenant of circumcision (Joshua 5) and defeating the fortified city of Jericho (Joshua 6). In all of this Joshua listened and obeyed; "So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land" (Joshua 6:27).

However, after the miraculous success at Jericho - after Joshua witnessed the city walls fall with the sound of a trumpet and a shout - Joshua's confidence began to grow. When it was time to attack the small city of Ai, Joshua relied on his own strength and the advice of men rather than seeking God.

Joshua 7:3-4

"Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary all the people, for only a few men are there.' So about three thousand men went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai."

Attacking the city of Ai seemed an insignificant decision. It was a small city and the Israelite army was mighty; and God had already given general instructions to conquer the entire land and an assurance of victory in battle: "I will give you every place where you set your foot...No one will be able to stand up against you" (Joshua 1:3,5). But, unknown to Joshua, there was sin in his camp - spiritual battles which would hinder any physical victory; "That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies" (Joshua 7:12). Our assurance of victory always assumes we are walking with God and in His strength.

When did we last seek and received counsel from God? If it's been longer than the time it took to take our last step, we may be attempting to fight a battle we cannot win. We must never presume to know God's specific plan without asking for specific directions. Just because He said "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19), doesn't mean we can presume on His method or His timing; "Apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

God will show us the way, but we must ask for His guidance; "I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken" (Psalm 16:8). Our battles are never won because of our strength or the enemy's weakness. They are won only as we allow God to guide our every step. No matter how insignificant the decision may appear, let's be sure to walk in His strength and always seek His counsel.

Have A Great Day!

Stand Our Ground

3-9-06

Our Christian walk of growing closer to God and becoming more like His Son involves a process of "renewing our mind" (Romans 12:2). Our mind is renewed as we begin to consider things of eternal value rather than the fading things of the world. But no matter how far we mature in our walk, distractions attempt to consume our thoughts and distance us from God.

These distractions always come in some form of temptation. There's the wide range of self indulging, flesh-filled desires and power hungry ambitions which tempt us at every turn, but there's also the more deceptive temptations like laziness, worry, pride, and overfilled schedules. Each of these are common tools of the enemy used to separate us from an intimate relationship with God. But God is not surprised by temptation - He understands and has provided a way out.

1 Corinthians 10:13

"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

In our fight against temptation, we must first understand that being tempted does not mean we've been singled out. Temptations are not an issue of Salvation, and they don't diminish God's love - our temptations are "common to man." Though we don't seem very good at talking about our struggles, we ALL face forms of temptation. We are a Family and have much more in common than we realize.

Since we know we will face temptation as part of our daily battle, let's start our day by getting prepared. No soldier enters war without the proper equipment. Neither should we enter a clearly hostile environment without making sure to get properly dressed; "Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground" (Ephesians 6:13).

The middle of a tempting situation is not the time to make decisions on how to react. Temptation decisions must be solidified in our heart long before the enemy attempts to pull us off God's path. Conquering temptation is only possible by growing deep roots of commitment and Godly character through daily studying His Word, praying for strength, and trusting in the Holy Spirit to guide our steps - by putting on the "FULL armor of God."

Our Heavenly Father has given us the tools, and He desires for us to live a victorious life. The attacks are going to come (and they will keep coming!) but our way out is to be prepared. If we will begin each day by getting fully dressed for battle, we WILL bear the temptation - we WILL stand our ground.

Have A Great Day!

John 4:16-19 - Lesson #39
3-10-06

We have witnessed Jesus offer a Samaritan woman the eternal gift of living water, but the woman has remained focused on her physical needs. Jesus continues by piercing directly into her heart.

John 4:16-19

"Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come here.' The woman answered and said, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You have well said, "I have no husband," for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly.' The woman said to Him, 'Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.'"

Jesus has known this Samaritan woman before the foundations of the earth. He has never been talking about mere water - He has been engaged in a battle for her soul. Changing the conversation by saying "Go, call your husband" was brilliant because it maintained proper custom. If the discussion was to become more involved, it would be proper for a man to request to visit with the husband. However, this shift was primarily designed to expose the one thing which was keeping the woman from seeing the Spiritual nature of the gift. The woman needed to recognize the sin in her life.

The gospel message is about the forgiveness of sin! Why has that basic message become so lost in our world today? We say things like, "Ask Jesus into your heart" or "Let Jesus fill that empty spot in your life." We have teachings about how to better cope in this world and live a "better" life, but if we do not talk about sin we have NO gospel message!!

Jesus came to earth to proclaim the glory of the Father and to die for the forgiveness of sin; "this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission {forgiveness} of sins" (Matthew 26:28). His death paid the penalty for sin, and belief in Jesus allows this payment to be applied to our account; "To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission {forgiveness} of sins" (Acts 10:43).

We will never believe in a Savior until we recognize we need to be saved. Without the recognition of sin, Jesus becomes optional - something helpful but not essential. Without an understanding of sin, Jesus is seen as a crutch for those not willing to work hard. The woman had all the facts, but her eyes were not opened until she came face to face with her sin, then she began to believe; "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet."

Our sin caused us to be enemies with God, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Let's recognize our sinful state without Christ and receive His eternal forgiveness. Jesus said; "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Luke 5:32). Let's present the true gospel message and call all sinners to Christ.

Have A Great Day!

The Mind of Christ

3-13-06

In the message "Stand Our Ground" we began with a statement that our Christian walk involves a process of renewing our mind. Paul wrote to the Romans about this renewal as an on-going process of transformation (Romans 12:2). He also wrote about a renewed mind as something which has already occurred; "But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16).

This is a consistent message through all the New Testament: through faith in Jesus we are given a new birth, with a new heart, a new Spirit, and a new mind. However, we are continually exhorted to live as a new creation, worship with a new heart, receive guidance and strength from a new Spirit, and make decisions and set priorities with a new mind. We must learn to walk according to the transformed life we have been granted.

Philippians 2:5

"Your attitude (or mind in the KJV) should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."

Many portions of Jesus' life were for the express purpose of giving us an example by which to live. With all the power of the Universe at His command, He humbled Himself and demonstrated the mind and attitude of a servant; "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Matthew 20:28).

He demonstrated a mind of obedience and lived to honor His Father in ALL He did - even though being obedient might result in discomfort or pain...or even death: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39).

As He obediently served, Jesus also demonstrated a mind void of all pride. With more abilities than we can possibly comprehend, Jesus still gave all the glory to His Father; "By Myself I can do nothing...for I seek not to please Myself but Him who sent Me" (John 5:30). His entire life became an example of how we are to be an empty vessel through which God may work.

And even moments before He died - even after being beaten, whipped, spit upon and nailed to a cross - Jesus demonstrated the mind of supreme forgiveness; "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Though we know we have far to go, the mind of Christ becomes our example. We must develop the mind of a humble servant, void of pride, who desires nothing more than for our Heavenly Father to work in and through our life. We must humbly submit and learn to forgive others as Christ first forgave us. Let's live as His Child. Let's continue to be transformed, and more fully develop the mind of Christ.

Have A Great Day!

So The World May Know

3-14-06

In the message "The Mind of Christ" we considered our call to walk according to the new life we have been given. We then looked at several aspects of Jesus' life as our solid example to follow. We saw His desire to serve and glorify the Father; but probably the most challenging aspect of Jesus' life was His ability to forgive; "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

The walk of a Christian is a life-long process of being transformed into the likeness of Jesus. This process brings us continually closer to God and tangibly shows the gospel message to the world. There is no clearer demonstration of a transformed heart and true love for Christ than when we forgive one another. The simple fact that it's so difficult makes forgiveness a blazing light into a dark and dying world. The unity obtained through forgiveness causes those in the world to be drawn closer to Christ.

John 17:23

"May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me."

Being united is never a call to compromise the essential truths of the gospel; but it's clearly a call to put aside quarreling over trivial issues and stamp out all jealousy, envy, and one of the greatest evils known to man...pride! Pride keeps more people separated from God and more relationships locked in unforgiveness than any other sin.

Continued forgiveness demonstrates the gospel because it requires us to honestly face our pride, place our trust in God, and walk in absolute humility. Forgiveness is not something we can do in our own strength. When we've been "wounded," unfairly treated and misunderstood, our pride wants things to be "even" - demands the other person to confess, repent, and bow to kiss OUR feet. True forgiveness of others brings us back to the cross where we must confess the ugliness of our heart, acknowledge our need for His forgiveness, and, once again, remove ourself from the throne.

Continued forgiveness requires a daily crucifixion of our fleshly, pride-filled self, a submission to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and a complete trust in our Heavenly Father to continue the process He has begun in our life and to fully work in the life of others (according to His perfect timing). This is a life which definitely shines and causes the world to notice.

Let's take a new look at any unforgiveness and determine once and for all to give it to the Lord. Let's glorify our Father and become a living example of the gospel - let's live in unity through love and forgiveness...so the world may know!

Have A Great Day!

The Watchman 3-15-06

Ezekiel was called to be a prophet after being taken captive to Babylon. Since the beginning of his ministry Ezekiel knew his path would be difficult - he knew the people would not be receptive to his message; "The people to whom I {God} am sending you are obstinate and stubborn" (Ezekiel 2:4). And yet, from the very beginning, God made it clear that Ezekiel was accountable to speak the truth.

Ezekiel 3:17-18

"I have made you a watchman; so hear the Word I speak and give them warning from Me. When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him...that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood."

God called Ezekiel and clearly gave him a message of truth that was expected to be shared; "whether they listen or fail to listen" (Ezekiel 3:11). Ezekiel was not responsible for how many people obediently followed God's Word; but he was definitely accountable for sharing the message God gave.

God's call is not reserved for pastors, missionaries, or ministry leaders. His call goes out to each of us who hear His message of forgiveness. Yes, the world is still full of "obstinate and stubborn" people (we probably need look no further than the mirror); but God's truth is good news which can save lives and give hope - it's a truth which must be shared.

Now here's the difficult part: Sharing God's truth is not an optional part of our walk. Each of us have been called and given a mission field in which to minister; and we are held accountable for our ministry into this field. Notice we're not accountable for the response, only for our action or inaction; "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins" (James 4:17). Failure to respond to God's leading is sin!

What field has God called you to today? What message has He placed on your heart? There are family, friends, and coworkers who desperately need to hear the gospel message. There are people all around us who need to be encouraged to draw closer to God; encouraged to forgive and restore relationships; encouraged to live according to who they are in Christ. This is our mission field and this is our message! We must obediently share, in love, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, even if no one listens.

We are God's watchman over whatever field He provides. Let's draw near and love Him with all our heart - so close to His side that His message and direction are absolutely clear. We must proclaim His truth wherever He leads. Let's accept the responsibility, and accountability, of the watchman.

Have A Great Day!

Give Him All The Glory

3-16-06

Joseph had some difficult times in his early years. His brothers tried to kill him and then sold him to the Midianites. The Midianites, in turn, sold him as a slave to Potiphar who was one of Pharaoh's officials. Joseph was then falsely accused by Potiphar's wife and thrown in prison where he sat for several years - things definitely weren't going very well.

Then one day Joseph got his opportunity to make a change. Pharaoh had some dreams that bothered him greatly. But when he sent for the wise men of Egypt, no one could help; "Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him" (Genesis 41:8). Pharaoh was told of a young Hebrew slave who was in prison, but had demonstrated a unique ability to interpret dreams.

Pharaoh quickly summoned Joseph from the dungeon; "I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it" (Genesis 41:15). Wow! This was Joseph's big chance - his opportunity to take matters into his own hands and shape his circumstances. He certainly deserved a break. And after all, doesn't God help those who help themselves?

Unfortunately, this is one of the biggest misquotes of the Bible - and a shameful misrepresentation of God. It's much more accurate to say God will faithfully work our circumstances to the good as we diligently seek Him and love Him with all our heart; and faithfully follow where He leads.

Joseph could have used this opportunity to bring glory and honor to himself. But He had learned the important lesson that ALL things come from God and should be used to glorify His name.

Genesis 41:16

"I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."

Joseph had been given a wonderful gift, but this gift would only produce fruit as God worked through Joseph's life. This was the same lesson Paul tried to teach the Church in Corinth: "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

It's by God's grace we accomplish anything; "apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). It's by His grace we have talents and abilities - it's by His grace we obtain direction and motivation. In fact, it's by His grace we take our next breath! If God provides all the tools, He certainly deserves ALL the praise. Let's never miss an opportunity to use the gifts God has provided. And when our lives produce fruit, let's never miss an opportunity to give Him all the glory!

Have A Great Day!

The Sin of Arrogance

3-20-06

In the message "Give Him All The Glory" we considered how Joseph recognized his ability to interpret dreams was only by God's grace; "God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires" (Genesis 41:16). We were also reminded of Paul's words to the Corinthians, "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7), and of the words of Jesus, "apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Giving all glory to God reflects an understanding of who we are in Christ and, more importantly, who He is in us!

As we see the multitude of sin in the world today, which cause others such pain, we must be reminded that all sin can be traced to pride and a lack of humility - to arrogance, a self-exaltation where we think of ourself and our abilities more highly than we should; and, in the end, attempt to elevate ourself above God.

James wrote about this arrogance when he said, "do not slander one another" (James 4:11). He said when we are unfairly critical of others we not only disobey God's law of love, but we are actually speaking against God's law and sitting in judgment over the law - and there is only one Judge! (James 4:11-12). Willful disobedience involves elevating ourself to the throne of God and judging which of His truths apply to our life. This is the ultimate arrogance!

Isaiah 14:13-15

"You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit."

This passage may be referring to Satan, or an earthly king in the time of Isaiah. Either way, it clearly details the true heart of pride as well as the end result for such a heart. Isaiah is warning us all about the danger of attempting to raise ourself to the level of God. After all, this temptation is what caused the fall of all mankind in the Garden of Eden; "when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God" (Genesis 3:5).

We must continue to examine our heart and aggressively cut away all areas of pride before they infect and contaminate our whole being. Can we ever rid ourself of all pride? Can we ever cease all sin? I don't believe we can! But I know that on the day we see Him face to face, we will be fully transformed, fully glorified, and fully able to praise Him for all eternity. Until the day He calls us home, we must continually say, "He must become greater, I must become less" (John 3:30). Until that day, we must diligently battle the sin of arrogance.

Have A Great Day!

A God of Convenience

3-21-06

Paul had been arrested and sent to Caesarea to stand trial before Governor Felix. During Paul's trial, he spoke of his worship of God and belief in His Word. Felix kept Paul in prison, but often talked with him about his faith.

Acts 24:24-25

"He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, 'That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.'"

Governor Felix had the ability to hear the gospel from the greatest theologian of all time and yet failed to act on what he heard.

Several years earlier, Herod had arrested John the Baptist for speaking against his marriage (Herod was married to his own brother's wife). Though Herod wanted to kill John, he also feared and respected him because he was a righteous and holy man: "When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him" (Mark 6:20). Herod liked to listen to John's uncompromising message of repentance, and yet he failed to act on what he heard.

When Jesus was arrested, Pilate came face to face with the Son of God. He heard Jesus calmly claim to be King of the Jews and to have special favor from God; "You would have no power over Me if it were not given to you from above" (John 19:11). Pilate listened to Jesus, found no fault, and tried to set Him free (John 19:12) - but in the end, Pilate failed to act on the truth.

Most of us experience a wonderful religious freedom today. We have free access to God's Word and can usually find a local church willing to preach the truth. Yet, how often do we fail to act on what we receive? How often do our religious activities become cold and mechanical, lacking any real interest? "These people come near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me" (Isaiah 29:13).

If our worship does not invade every area of our life, then God is not on the throne. We must trust Him in ALL things! We must have a passion for His Word as well as an uncompromising willingness to act. We must long for His presence each and every day - not just during our once a week worship.

Let's NEVER put God on the shelf or ask Him to be "on-call." He's the Creator of the Universe who has called us to a life of full time worship. Let's never treat our Heavenly Father as a God of convenience.

Have A Great Day!

Heart Full of Passion

3-22-06

In the message "A God of Convenience" we were encouraged to be true worshipers who walk with God every day and refuse to put Him "on the shelf." We must never become people who worship with our lips, but have hearts which are far from God (Isaiah 29:13). We must be careful not to stray from the path of devoted love to become entangled in the weeds and thorns of selfish convenience.

But how can we guard against such wandering? How can we recognize when we are beginning to stray? And how can we return to the place we truly desire?

The answer to these questions will always be found in a deep and passionate love! Our relationship with God is not based on an exercise of our intellect, it is based on a transformation of our heart. Our relationship began with a work of the Spirit as our heart became His. It must now continue as we walk so close that our only desire is to give Him ALL our heart - to give Him what is already His.

After years of successful rule, David's kingdom was now in total rebellion. His son, Absalom, was attempting to become the new king and had forced David to flee into the desert. With his life's work falling apart, and far from his home and place of worship, David turned to God and gave us a clear picture of Godly passion.

Psalm 63:1-4

"O God, You are my God, earnestly I seek You; my soul thirsts for You, my body longs for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen You in the sanctuary and beheld Your power and Your glory. Because Your love is better than life, my lips will glorify You. I will praise You as long as I live, and in Your name I will lift up my hands."

Although it may be difficult to maintain this level of passion every moment of the day, this IS the relationship to which we have been called. This is worship! We must realize that this world is a "dry and weary land" when compared to walking in His presence. We must long for God's love more than life itself and seek to glorify Him in all we do.

If this type of relationship sounds foreign - maybe even a little radical - then I invite you to "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8). He will pour out His blessings on those who step out in faith and truly give Him their heart. If you already understand this relationship but realize the passion has faded, then I boldly exhort you to return. Return to what you know will truly satisfy - to what you know is eternal, imperishable. Let's all return to the place of true worship. Let's all draw near and worship with a heart full of passion.

Have A Great Day!

Remember The Eternal

3-23-06

Heavenly Father, we pray for comfort and peace for those directly affected by the tragic events this week. For those who lost loved ones, we pray that You would become their refuge and source of strength. For the children who lost a parent, we pray their hearts would remain tender and receptive to Your Word. We pray for those searching for answers. Please reveal Your truth and help us all to understand that apart from You, there is nothing! In Jesus Name we pray, Amen.

This prayer was written after the tragedy with the Space Shuttle on February 1, 2003. But a similar prayer was distributed after September 11, 2001 because of the World Trade Center tragedy. And unfortunately, it could also be a prayer for every day of the year because of the thousands who die in automobile accidents, or as a result of senseless violence or disease; or those whose life ends because of starvation or addiction to drugs. These lives seem needlessly shortened, but even life which reaches its "full-potential" is incredibly short; "What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (James 4:14).

When tragedy occurs we ought to sincerely pray for those affected; it's not often the whole world can pray for a specific group of people. But we also should take a moment to consider the frailty and brevity of life, and how our priorities reflect this truth. We must strive for a firmer understanding that anything outside the will of God will one day fade away. Any other "god" who receives our worship in the form of excess time, thought, energy, or resources will most surely burn and be swept aside.

1 Corinthians 7:29,31

"What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on...those who use the things of the world, {use them} as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away."

No matter how many times I read these truths of God's Word, I know I don't yet fully understand. I know our time is short, but I continually gain my identity and become engrossed in my toys. Father forgive me!

If there is any good to come out of tragedy, it will only be as we resolve to "fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen" (2 Corinthians 4:18a). We must allow events such as these to firmly establish that "what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18b).

It's time we turn our heart to God in true revival and do ALL as unto the Lord. We can no longer give our lives to what is temporary and passing away. It's time we unashamedly worship Him and follow where He leads. It's time we draw close to His presence and remember the eternal.

Have A Great Day!

John 4:25-27 - Lesson #41
3-24-06

When challenged about the proper place for worship, Jesus replied that there was coming a time of new worship; and yet, that time is right now. What is this new worship? It's the worship where "the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4:23). Jesus makes His point even stronger by saying; "those who worship Him MUST worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

Is our worship spiritual and true? We should note that the words worship and worth come from the same root meaning. Worship then becomes acknowledging God's worth by acknowledging who He truly is; "Your word is truth" (John 17:17). We only know who God is by how He has revealed Himself in His Word.

But worship is more than simply a mental exercise. Study is important, but only as a beginning not as an end. Worship is entering into the presence of God and being in love with Who He is, with the overflow of our heart; "In Your presence is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11). This is how we must worship (or it is not truly worship) - and this worship is not determined by location or time, but by the condition of our heart.

John 4:25-27

"The woman said to Him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When He comes, He will tell us all things.' Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am He.' And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, 'What do You seek?' or, 'Why are You talking with her?'"

The Samaritans only recognized the first five books of the Old Testament. Their view of "Messiah" was the promised prophet spoken of by Moses; "a Prophet like me" (Deuteronomy 18:15). The woman says that when the anointed one comes, He will answer all questions - He will be the trusted authority.

Jesus' response was unusually direct. The time was gone for wordplay with debatable meaning. He simply says, I am the One you are looking for! This woman had made many bad choices and knew just enough about religious issues to create a wall to hide behind. But Jesus stepped into her world and said, I am He!!

We don't yet see the woman's response to Jesus because the disciples returned and "marveled that He talked with a woman." Sure they "marveled"! The Rabbis taught it was better to burn the Word of God than give it to a woman. It was not normal to be in a public conversation with a woman, and especially not about spiritual matters. But the disciples had learned to trust Jesus and knew He moved with purpose.

The promised one is here. He has made Himself clearly known and said the forgiveness and fulfillment we seek are found in Him. The question is the same as it is every time we're presented with His truth: How will we respond? Let's truly worship Him today. Let's place our trust in the One who came to say, I am He.

Have A Great Day!

What The Lord Has Provided

3-27-06

As a young teenage boy, David showed a deep understanding of God's strength as he prepared to fight Goliath; "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" (1 Samuel 17:37). The understanding that God was fighting the battle allowed David to confidently approach Goliath with nothing more than a sling and a few stones; "This day the Lord will hand you over to me" (1 Samuel 17:46).

After many years of being pursued by king Saul, David demonstrated his belief that every victory he enjoyed came as a direct result of God's hand.

The Amalekites had raided the village where David and his men were living. Under God's promise of victory, David set off with six hundred men to battle the enemy and take back their stolen possessions; but two hundred of the men were too tired to join the fight. After the victorious battle, the four hundred who fought wanted to exclude the two hundred who stayed behind; "Because they did not go out with us, we will not share with them the plunder we recovered" (1 Samuel 30:22). But David reminded them Who really won the battle.

1 Samuel 30:23

"No, my brothers, you must not do that with what the Lord has given us. He has protected us and handed over to us the forces that came against us."

David understood it wouldn't have mattered whether four hundred or forty, or even four, had gone into battle - it wouldn't have mattered whether the men were skilled or unskilled - the battle would have been won. The battle was won because of God's promise and His provision, not because of the men's ability.

As we see the battle approaching we must draw even closer to our Heavenly Father. He has given us abilities which we must use, but then we must place all our trust in Him for the results. If the battle appears to be a failure, we must trust that God is in control and working toward His good and perfect plan. When God is in control, there are no failures as viewed through His eyes. And if the battle appears to be victorious, we must not allow our pride to take credit for the work God has done - for this always results in failure, regardless of our view.

God owns ALL and provides ALL. He owns our possessions, our relationships, and our ministries. He owns our abilities as well as our lack - our successes as well as our failures. As we come through our next battle (and we will!) - in fact, even in the midst of the battle - let's return the ownership and give Him all the glory. We must never attempt to control or hold tight to what the Lord has provided.

Have A Great Day!

Our Spiritual Walls

3-28-06

Nehemiah lived in the days following Jerusalem's captivity in Babylon. The first captives had been allowed to return to Jerusalem and reconstruct the temple. However, those who returned had left the walls of the city in great disrepair. When Nehemiah heard this discouraging report, he asked permission of the king to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the once mighty walls.

Nehemiah's request was granted. He traveled to Jerusalem in the year 445 BC and motivated the people to rebuild the walls in record time. But Nehemiah discovered there was more broken in Jerusalem than just physical walls. It had been many years since the people truly worshipped God - Spiritual walls were now in desperate need of mending.

Nehemiah knew the only way toward Spiritual repair was through the Word of God. He gathered the people, and they wept as Ezra read God's Word "from daybreak till noon" (Nehemiah 8:3). For seven days, Ezra continued to read from God's Word. On the eighth day, walls began to mend as the people "spent another quarter {of the day} in confession and worshipping the Lord" (Nehemiah 9:3). True repair occurred as they recommitted their lives to following the commands of God.

Nehemiah 10:29

"All these now bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses...and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the Lord."

Our world continues to change. Nations continue to build physical walls and attack one another, but show little concern for the Spiritual walls which protect from the real enemy. Years of neglect, and large scale drifting from God's path, have left our Spiritual walls cracked and vulnerable. Our families are seldom led by God and our courts make laws without seeking His counsel. Attacks come from every direction and our defenses are weak!

The repair of our Spiritual walls will not occur at the national level. Governments have become too large and diverse to even recognize this need. But we have the opportunity all around the world to rebuild one individual, one family, one church, and one community at a time. We have the ability to repair the portion of wall within our circle of influence. Together, we CAN rebuild and strengthen!!

As in the time of Nehemiah, we must return to a passion for the Word of God. His Word reveals His plan through faith in His Son, and guidance and strength through His Spirit. Let's become people dedicated to study and prayer, and allow each day of our lives to be led by God's Spirit. Let's make a lasting commitment to focus on the eternal and rebuild our Spiritual walls.

Have A Great Day!

The True Peace of God

3-29-06

Each of us is striving toward the "successful" life, though our definitions of success may often differ. Many of us place our effort in obtaining more and better things, reaching a higher status, or building greater security; others, involve themselves in more "spiritual" endeavors with ministry activities and service projects. But the root motivation for all our effort is the same: we all are seeking a life full of peace.

Unfortunately, the world trains us to simply set and then exceed our goals without ever taking the time to examine what our heart really longs for - we all are striving for peace! I'm certainly not opposed to goals; but we must understand that meeting every single goal, by itself, will NEVER result in peace.

The lack of peace is, first and foremost, the result of our sinful condition. When Adam and Eve chose to place their will ahead of God's by eating the forbidden fruit, sin entered the world and true peace became illusive; "when you eat of it you will surely die" (Genesis 2:17). We will never obtain true peace through different governments; nor will we ever be able to purchase our peace or create peace by changing our surroundings. Peace begins with the forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus and grows as we live in submission to the Holy Spirit; "The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:6).

In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he said those who have placed their faith in Jesus now have a basic formula for a life of peace.

Philippians 4:4-7

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Our formula for peace is: 1) Rejoice, 2) Rejoice some more, 3) Be gentle, 4) Know God is near, 5) Remove all anxiety, and 6) Pray about everything with a thankful heart. Jesus promised that those who trust in Him will receive a peace beyond anything this world can understand: "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).

If our lives are lacking peace, the ONLY solution is to draw nearer to God, trust Him more, and rejoice (and rejoice and rejoice) as we are guided by His Spirit. Only then will we find the "success" we have been striving for - only then will we obtain what our heart longs for...the true peace of God!

Have A Great Day!

The Most Holy Place 3-30-06

One of the amazingly consistent themes through all of God's Word is His desire to fellowship with His children. When God created Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden, Adam was allowed to enjoy God's presence. God brought Adam the animals to name (Genesis 2:19) and actually walked with Adam during the day. However, this fellowship was broken and man was cast out of God's presence when Adam sinned by eating the forbidden fruit.

Many years later, God formed the nation of Israel to be a people fully devoted to Him. When God led the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery, He told Moses to construct a holy place for His presence to reside. God called this the Most Holy Place and instructed it be separated from the rest of the tabernacle by a curtain.

Leviticus 16:2

"The Lord said to Moses: 'Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.'"

The presence of God resided in the Most Holy Place, behind a curtain, and could only be entered by the High Priest once a year on the Day of Atonement. The High Priest would enter the Most Holy Place with the blood of a goat as a sacrifice for the sins of the people (Leviticus 16:15).

God loved us so much, and so greatly desires a lasting and intimate fellowship, that He gave His Son to be the final sacrifice for our sins: "He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12).

When Jesus died on the cross, "the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51). His sacrifice provides a way for us to enter into the presence of God at any moment; "We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus" (Hebrews 10:19).

God is calling us to reach out and draw near to His presence through faith in the sacrifice of His Son. The Creator of the Universe is knocking at the door; "If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20). Our Heavenly Father is calling us to an eternity of fellowship. Let's open the door and enter His presence today - let's enter the Most Holy Place.

Have A Great Day!

John 4:28-30 - Lesson #42
3-31-06

The disciples returned to the well and saw Jesus speaking to the Samaritan woman - something extremely unusual; "they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, 'What do You seek?' or, 'Why are You talking with her?'" (John 4:27). As the disciples journeyed with Jesus, they were in the process of learning who He was. And part of this process involved learning to trust in the not-so-ordinary mode of operation.

How many times has this lesson been taught throughout God's Word? Think about Abraham and Sarah needing to trust for the birth of Isaac in their old age (Genesis 18), the Israelites passing through the Red Sea (Exodus 14), the priests carrying the ark into the Jordan river (Joshua 3), defeating Jericho by marching around the city and shouting (Joshua 5), Gideon defeating the Midianites with only 300 men (Judges 7), and the list goes on and on. And yet, even with all these great lessons of trust, how often do we say: Lord, what are You doing? I'm not sure I can trust You! But the disciples continued to be transformed.

John 4:28-30

"The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, 'Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?' Then they went out of the city and came to Him."

The approach of the disciples brought an abrupt end to the conversation. We can't be certain how much the woman really understood about Jesus, but it's clear she saw Him as someone unique, someone special, someone who must be shared.

Leaving her waterpot meant she was in a hurry and planned to return. She had news that couldn't wait. There must have been something very compelling in her voice and in her face that day. She had been shunned by the people of the city; and yet, she went directly to the men - with excitement - and said come and see the Man who told me all I have done. With just those words, the men might have replied: Yeah, big deal! We know what you've done and it isn't pretty!!

But there was something different about the woman that day. And her excitement directed them to the anointed One, the Messiah...the Christ! She wasn't just talking about a prophet, but The Prophet!! Her compelling invitation to "Come" was such that they needed to find out more for themselves.

The woman knew very little, but what she knew changed her life and compelled her to share. Have we truly taken hold of the truth worth sharing? Is there a compelling on our heart to call people to Christ? "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). Let's allow His truth to so invade our life that we are compelled to reach out with the invitation to Come!

Have A Great Day!