

Devotionals
from
God's Daily Word Ministries

November 2006

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Free In The Fire

11-1-06

King Nebuchadnezzar had made a large statue of gold and commanded that everyone must worship the statue whenever they heard the sound of music - they must worship the statue, or face terrible consequences! "Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace" (Daniel 3:6).

Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were determined to live with an uncompromising faith. They believed God's Word and obeyed His commands: "You shall have no other gods before Me...you shall not bow down to them or worship them" (Exodus 20:3,5). These three young Jewish men took a stand and refused to worship the golden statue. Their devotion to God was greater than their fear of the fire; "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it...But even if He does not, we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Daniel 3:17-18).

Nebuchadnezzar was furious and followed through on his threat: "He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace" (Daniel 3:19-20). But when Nebuchadnezzar looked inside the furnace, he was amazed by what he saw.

Daniel 3:25

"Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."

As they were facing the fire, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego saw no chance of escape, but they placed their complete trust in God - a trust which would not falter even if they were burned. But rather than being burned by the fire, these three men were freed from their binding ropes and walked with "a son of the gods," who many believe is an Old Testament reference to Jesus Christ! (The KJV renders this verse "...like the Son of God.") In their time of greatest need, God comforted these young men and set them free.

The fires in our life WILL come. The heat will seem intense, but we must not fear or abandon what we know to be true. Our faith is ALWAYS refined and made stronger by fire; "the testing of your faith develops perseverance" (James 1:3). Fire will always teach us to trust more deeply and worship more sincerely. When we really believe this truth, it will become possible to actually rejoice in the face of fire. We can rejoice because we KNOW He is in complete and absolute control of every area of our life - this is true freedom! Let's walk with a bold faith, knowing our Father is there to comfort and protect us, knowing He will strengthen us and set us free in the fire.

Have A Great Day!

Be Prepared To Follow

11-2-06

We are often reminded of our need to pray and study God's Word. These essential disciplines allow us to abide in the presence of God and "hear" when He calls; they are also necessary for strengthening our faith in order to obediently follow where He leads.

God's Word encourages us that when He calls, He also provides the tools to accomplish our assigned task; "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). We are also comforted that as we respond, we will never be alone; "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). But God's call also carries responsibility; His call says He has made His choice - He has chosen us to take part in His wonderful plan, and, in faith, we must respond.

After delivering many of God's messages to the people of Israel - calling them to repent and return to the worship of the One True God - the prophet Jeremiah became impatient with God's timing: "I would speak with You about Your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?" (Jeremiah 12:1). Jeremiah complained about how long he had to wait for the wicked to be punished. He was following God and calling others to do the same, but the ungodly seemed to continue living the "good" life - sounds like our complaints today. But God's response wasn't what Jeremiah was hoping to receive.

Jeremiah 12:5

"If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan?"

God told Jeremiah that the situation in Israel was going to get worse in the coming days; He asked Jeremiah if he was truly ready for the challenge. Jeremiah had been called to be God's messenger and now was not the time to complain - this was the time to be a soldier and trust with ALL his heart; it was a time to renew his strength, and push toward the assigned goal.

Our Heavenly Father dearly loves us and desires an eternity of intimate fellowship. He is a God of great comfort, but He is also our Commanding Officer who challenges us to prepare for the Spiritual battles ahead. This world often appears corrupt and unjust, but the conditions of today are preparing us to fight in the trenches of tomorrow. We must trust now more than ever that God chose the right person when He gave us our assignments; He has made His call and promised to provide all the necessary tools at the proper time.

Let's spend more time worshipping at His feet and loving Him with all our heart. Let's rely on His strength and trust His understanding - let's draw closer to His side and always be prepared to follow.

Have A Great Day!

John 6:67-71 - Lesson #72
11-3-06

What a difference a day can make! After witnessing Jesus feed over 5000 people, many wanted to "take Him by force and make Him king" (John 6:15). But the next day when Jesus talked about being the bread from heaven and said, "He who eats this bread will live forever" (John 6:58), many who had followed Him across the sea and listened to Him speak "went back and walked with Him no more" (John 6:66). An honest evaluation of Jesus will either lead to a complete embrace or a total rejection.

John 6:67-71

"Then Jesus said to the twelve, 'Do you also want to go away?' But Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus answered them, 'Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?' He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve."

Jesus had watched many who evaluated the cost of following Him decide to walk away. And now He turned to the select group of twelve and asked for a decision - a difficult decision of commitment: Knowing what you now know, do you still want to follow? Of course, Jesus knew the answer! But He often brings us to a place of decision for the wonderful benefit of strengthening our faith.

Peter, as he so often did, spoke up first - and as usual he spoke his mind, "To whom shall we go?" Peter had heard the words of eternal life and concluded Jesus was the One he would follow. Peter's words reflected what the Psalmist wrote: "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You" (Psalm 73:25). Peter did not yet understand the full gospel message, but he had heard the words of Jesus and believed they were the words of truth.

Peter would continue to wrestle with how the words of Jesus should impact his life, and as more of the gospel message was revealed he would continue to grow in his belief. In fact, even after Jesus died on the cross and rose from the tomb Peter was continuing to learn and grow; "For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead" (John 20:9). Peter's journey of faith would last a lifetime, but it had its beginning in the simple belief of Jesus' word.

No one suspected Judas to be a betrayer. He was a member of the select group and acted like a true disciple - he walked and talked like a disciple - but it was clear he never believed the words of Jesus. It can be a dangerous mistake to assume that those who sit every week in church believe or even understand the gospel message. We must continually encourage and challenge one another to believe and apply all His revealed truth. Let's never settle for just the appearance of belief. Rather, let's believe the truth of His word and continue to study and grow in our belief until we know the eternal truth His word reveals.

Have A Great Day!

Strong In His Grace

11-6-06

When we are brought to the point of belief - the point where we see our sin, desire to change, and acknowledge God's Son as our only way to Heaven - we ask, in faith, for Jesus to forgive our sins and be our Savior. At that very moment, the grace of God abounds, His Spirit transforms our heart and He picks us up as His child: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The moment of true Salvation is without question the most significant event in our Christian life. In that moment, we are "born again" (John 3:7) and become a "new creation" in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) through the power of the Holy Spirit; "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit" (John 3:6). In fact, the moment of Salvation is so significant that even if we seem to stumble through every step past that point, we still have reason to rejoice with every breath - we are children of the King and will spend all eternity in His glorious Kingdom.

As we continue on this sometimes rocky journey, we are to strive for holiness and purposeful worship in our life. We are to diligently seek Him and "learn the secret of being content in any and every situation" (Philippians 4:12). We must learn to "trust in the Lord with all our heart" (Proverbs 3:5), but we must also remember that "apart from Me {Jesus}, you can do NOTHING" (John 15:5). If we strive for anything in our own strength, we are all destined to fall.

2 Timothy 2:1

"You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

This means we must continue to trust in His grace and in His grace alone. We did nothing to earn our Salvation, and we can do nothing to maintain our right standing before God besides believing in His Son; "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" (Galatians 3:3).

We are saved by the grace of God and we must continue to live by this same grace: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught" (Colossians 2:6). Our Heavenly Father will determine our path to holiness, purpose, contentment, and trust - and His grace will equip us with all we need for the journey.

Let's completely trust in the saving grace of Jesus! Let's apply the strength of His grace today in every trial and temptation. Let's live a life of pure and holy devotion by always remaining strong in His grace.

Have A Great Day!

His Amazing Grace

11-7-06

In the message "Strong In His Grace" we considered God's grace in the process of Salvation and saw we can do nothing to earn a right standing in His eyes. Our Heavenly Father poured out His love when He gave us Jesus; "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

God, through His amazing grace, gave us His Son and said, "Whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). We are allowed into an eternal relationship with God because of His grace and are strongly exhorted to live each day knowing our relationship is maintained by the same grace in which it began, not by anything we do or accomplish.

There are many things we are called to do as a Child of God, many ways to serve and honor our Heavenly Father, many ways to be obedient and seek after holiness; but we can NEVER fall into the trap of thinking, even for a moment, that what we do adds to our Salvation by grace. As much as faith in Jesus Christ is absolutely necessary for our Salvation, faith in Jesus Christ is also absolutely sufficient.

Paul delivered this message in many of his letters, but nowhere as strong as in his letter to the Galatian churches. He had preached the message of Salvation by grace, but they had been led into a false teaching which said they must earn their Salvation by first submitting to the Old Testament Law. Paul warned that if we fall into this same trap, "Christ will be of no value to you at all" (Galatians 5:2). The things we do have value, but the value is not in the religious activity or product we produce; rather, the only thing God will recognize is the faith in our heart which ought to motivate ALL we seek to accomplish.

Galatians 5:6

"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."

We show our love for God through worship, thanksgiving, prayer, study, obedience, and faithful service; and we acknowledge His saving grace with a humble spirit which does not allow us to become puffed up or feel deserving of our Salvation. We demonstrate our love for others as we refuse to cause harm, in word or deed, refuse to harbor unforgiveness, and actively look for opportunities to serve. And we show an understanding of God's grace as we express our love without requiring others to earn our love or even love us in return.

Let's receive His grace with a thankful heart, knowing we bring nothing to the cross besides our sin which He then takes away. Let's trust only in His grace, given to us through faith, and express our faith with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength as we love Him and love one another. Let's begin to live this life like we truly understand His amazing grace.

Have A Great Day!

Grace In Others

11-8-06

In the last two messages, we've considered the grace of God in our Salvation as well as in our daily Christian walk. Anytime we add requirements to faith, we have strayed from the true gospel message. We certainly need to be challenged as to what faith really means and how a saving faith will manifest itself in our life, but we must never walk away from Salvation by grace through faith alone.

Galatians 1:6-8

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!"

This is a serious call - one we cannot ignore. We are challenged in the strongest of terms to continue walking according to the true gospel.

We usually begin this walk by focusing on our own life. We slowly take our eyes off of what we can do and look more upon what Christ has already done; "He must become greater, I must become less" (John 3:30). But there remains another step we must begin to take. This important step is to recognize that the grace which pulled us out of the slimy pit and set our feet on solid ground (Psalm 40:2) is the same grace which works in the life of others. We know we can do nothing to earn or add to our Salvation, but how often do we place "requirements" on those around us?

As an example: In some churches the men always wear a necktie and have difficulty with those who professes to love the Lord but fail to conform to the "Law of the Necktie." Likewise, in other churches people worship in shorts and tee shirts. And though they preach Salvation by grace through faith, they have difficulty with those who professes to love the Lord but come to worship more dressed up and do not conform to the "Freedom" we have in Christ. Both groups look at the other and say, "How can they really be saved dressed like that?"

This may seem like a trivial example, but I trust the Spirit will guide as to how this applies in your own life. How about things like hair style or worship style? How about those "sins" which we, in our great wisdom, have identified as indications of true Salvation but which the Bible remains absolutely silent?

We must strive to follow Christ in a surrendered obedience; but, in doing so, we must never pull anyone from the true gospel. We are saved by grace through faith and faith alone - and "we" includes ALL our Brothers and Sisters. Let's follow hard in His grace and diligently seek to recognize God's grace in others.

Have A Great Day!

Spiritual Wisdom And Understanding

11-9-06

Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians to show that Jesus is sufficient to supply every need of the believer. In the opening verses, Paul wrote that the Colossians had a reputation for great faith in Jesus Christ - their love, hope, and hunger for the Gospel was bearing fruit and had been growing "since the day you heard it and understood God's grace" (Colossians 1:6).

Paul was thankful for their strong faith, but he wanted them to have even more and was committed to praying for their continued growth; "We have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all Spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Colossians 1:9).

Paul then explained the purpose of his prayer.

Colossians 1:10-12

"We pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father."

Though God's gracious gift of Salvation is free, the cost is high. We can do nothing to earn or maintain this gift besides believe in His Son; but the faith through which His grace flows is a faith committed to Him without reservation - prepared to follow anywhere He leads and willing to honor Him in all we do.

Paul didn't pray for the details of an honoring life; rather, he prayed for what truly produces change; "the knowledge of His will through all Spiritual wisdom and understanding." We never please God by focusing on specific activities, we please Him by drawing near and allowing His blessings to flow in and through our life. This is a life which bears fruit and is filled with endurance, patience, and thankfulness.

This life is available for us today...regardless of our circumstances. But we must draw nearer to our Heavenly Father and hunger for a better understanding of His will. We must long for His presence and continue to grow in love and faith. God has infinitely more to give and will only pour His blessings upon those who continue to seek Him with all their heart.

Dear Lord, we pray that You will give us a continued passion for You and an increased hunger for Your Word. We pray that You will strengthen our faith and use our life for Your glory. Heavenly Father, we pray that we will abandon ourself to You and that You will fill us with the knowledge of Your will through all Spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Have A Great Day!

John 7:1-9 - Lesson #73

11-10-06

Within about 24 hours Jesus had miraculously fed over 5000, walked on water, taught about eternal life and the bread from Heaven, and called many to the point of decision. Most heard His words and decided to "walk with Him no more" (John 6:66). But a select few joined with Peter and said; "You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). This had been an exciting day!

John 7:1-9

"After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him. Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. His brothers therefore said to Him, 'Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.' For even His brothers did not believe in Him. Then Jesus said to them, 'My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come.' When He had said these things to them, He remained in Galilee."

Chapter 6 records events near Passover, probably in April, and Chapter 7 begins with the Feast of Tabernacles which was six months later. We know from the other gospels that Jesus continued to minister in Galilee during these six months, but those events were not chosen for John's message; "these are written that you may believe Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31).

Jesus' brothers did not believe His message, but they had certainly heard Him speak and presumably seen Him perform miracles which could attract a crowd. They thought the best way to accomplish His stated goal (whatever that might be) would be to perform His wonders on the biggest Jewish stage possible. During the Feast, Jerusalem would be filled with people from all over Israel and if they could witness Jesus performing miraculous works, even those who had previously walked away would be convinced.

Jesus declined the offer and remained in Galilee because; "My time has not yet come." With a clear understanding of God's plan Jesus knew it was not His time for a final confrontation. He would follow later and continue to teach, but opposition was growing and there were several things yet to be accomplished. But the time was always right for His brothers because their lives did not confront the world, they were friends with the value system characterized by darkness. They were accepted and loved by the world.

We all have a desire, even a need, to be accepted. The question is: Where do we go to fill this need? The world relentlessly pulls with the promise of an accepting love, and all it asks is that we compromise the truth and remain in darkness. But Jesus calls us to step by faith into the light of His forgiveness. The time is never right to continue on our path of destruction, but the time is NOW for stepping into His everlasting love.

Have A Great Day!

Nothing Too Hard

11-13-06

Jeremiah had been a prophet for nearly forty years by the time Jerusalem came under attack by the Babylonians. He had long been proclaiming a message of repentance, but the people continued to ignore his words; now the enemy had surrounded Jerusalem and the end was near. In this time of great turmoil, God told Jeremiah to purchase a field from his cousin.

This was a strange request, but Jeremiah obediently purchased the field. However, he soon began to question God's reasoning: "See how the siege ramps are built up to take the city? Though the city will be handed over to the Babylonians, You say to me, 'Buy the field'" (Jeremiah 32:24,25). Jeremiah had been a prophet for many years. He had been given the privilege of talking directly with God, but this command just didn't make sense. Why should he purchase a field when the enemy was invading and taking prisoners?

God answered Jeremiah with a simple, yet challenging question.

Jeremiah 32:27

"I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for Me?"

Yes, the enemy had invaded the land and would soon overrun the city of Jerusalem. But God's plan was for the people to one day return: "I will surely gather them from all the lands where I banish them in My furious anger and great wrath; I will bring them back to this place and let them live in safety. They will be My people and I will be their God" (Jeremiah 32:37-38). Jeremiah's field was to be a reminder that God would one day restore His people - a reminder that He could be trusted even in the face of overwhelming circumstances.

We often have a difficult time seeing how all the pieces of God's plan fit together. He leads us down a path and we fail to see the purpose - especially when the enemy begins to attack. We want to fight back, but God says to patiently trust Him and pray. We want to determine a solution and solve the problem, but God says to love Him with all our heart and share His love with others.

The times in which we are most tested and pressed down ought to be the times of greatest growth and closeness with our Heavenly Father. When it seems we have no where else to turn, we ought to rejoice and trust Him even more! Let's put our life firmly in His Hands and submit to His guidance - even when we may not see where we are going or how we will get there. Let's trust His ways and always remember...for God, there is NOTHING too hard!

Have A Great Day!

The Example of Barnabas

11-14-06

Prior to meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, Saul (who would later be known as the Apostle Paul) was one of the greatest enemies of Christians: "Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison" (Acts 8:3). But Saul's conversion was dramatic and after a few years he tried to join with the believers in Jerusalem. However, with his reputation for hatred toward Christians, the disciples were not willing to accept him.

But one man saw beyond the past mistakes; saw beyond the slimy pit from which he had been removed; saw the grace of Jesus which had worked a miracle in Saul's life - that man was Barnabas! Barnabas believed in Saul, comforted him, and defended him to the other believers.

Acts 9:27

"But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus."

Saul was on fire for Jesus, ready to preach the gospel with the same energy he once used to persecute the church. But after just a short time in Jerusalem, Saul had to flee for his life back to his home in Tarsus. It's not clear what he did for the next several years, but there's no evidence of ministry work until Barnabas, once again, found Saul and provided the necessary encouragement.

Acts 11:25-26

"Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people."

The Apostle Paul went on to have a greater impact in the forming of the early Church and in defining Church doctrine than any other follower of Jesus. But if not for Barnabas, Paul may not have ever preached beyond his own back yard. In the early days of the Church, Barnabas believed in the absolute best in people and encouraged them at every opportunity. His encouragement of Paul resulted in more fruit for God's Kingdom than anything else he could have possibly done or imagined.

We all know someone who can use a lift - someone in desperate need of a friend to believe in them - someone in need of a Barnabas! Let's encourage others today by believing in the power of Christ working through their lives; by looking beyond what we can see, to what we know Jesus can do with a life completely devoted to Him. Let's be the spark which reignites the fire in others and helps them return to the great race - let's look for opportunities to encourage our Brothers and Sisters according to the example of Barnabas.

Have A Great Day!

Son Of Encouragement

11-15-06

In the message "The Example of Barnabas" we saw how Barnabas played an essential role in Paul's ministry. He boldly introduced Paul to the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 9:27), and then searched for Paul when he had fled Jerusalem to his home town of Tarsus (Acts 11:25-26). After taking Paul to Antioch, Barnabas remained with him for several years while they encouraged the church...and each other.

Being an encourager was a way of life for Barnabas. His name was originally Joseph, but prior to even meeting Paul, the apostles had begun to call him "Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement)" (Acts 4:36). Barnabas was able to evaluate other people according to their ability in Christ - an ability determined by His strength and not hindered by past failures. This allowed Barnabas to see great potential where others saw only weakness, and to encourage when others had given up.

Barnabas went with Paul on his first missionary journey where they jointly proclaimed the name of Jesus wherever they went. Another young man, named Mark, began this first missionary journey but then turned back. This apparent lack of perseverance bothered Paul so much that when he began his second missionary trip he refused to take Mark along.

Acts 15:37-39

"Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus."

Barnabas saw the Christ-given potential in young Mark and encouraged him as he had done with Paul many years before. As a result, Mark matured in his ministry and faithfully continued in his service to Jesus. He ministered along side the Apostle Peter (2 Peter 5:13), was reunited with Paul (Colossians 4:10, Philemon 24), and later wrote the earliest account of the Gospel - the Gospel of Mark.

The early church faced many difficulties - many opportunities for discouragement - but God used Barnabas to strengthen those who had been called to the front lines of battle. We can't all stand up and preach in front of large crowds or travel as missionaries to foreign lands, but we ALL have the ability to encourage those who God places in our path.

The world is full of people crying out for someone to care and believe in them. Individual lives can be changed, families can be restored, entire communities and even nations can be turned toward God, if each of us will encourage others to draw closer to our Heavenly Father, to love Him more, and to trust Him with all their heart. Let's share the love of Jesus and effectively minister by seeing others, and then taking action, as a Son of Encouragement.

Have A Great Day!

Intentional Discipleship

11-16-06

In the last two messages, we've seen how Barnabas was an encouragement in the lives of Paul and Mark. We considered how Barnabas must have seen the "Christ-potential" in others and disciplined them at critical seasons of their life.

Discipleship involves prayer, teaching, compassion, commitment, and the ability to lead by a Godly example; but there is also an element of discipleship which is extremely active and intentional. When Barnabas saw how Paul was being rejected in Jerusalem, he "took him and brought him to the apostles" (Acts 9:27). When he may have been concerned that Paul was discouraged; "Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Paul" (Acts 11:25). And when Mark was facing rejection and almost certain discouragement for future ministry; "Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus" (Acts 15:39).

Each of these events involved much more than a kind word as Barnabas continued on his own path; they involved evaluating the need, and then making the necessary changes in his own path to help meet the need - they involved being intentional.

There was certainly no better example of how to disciple others than Jesus. During His ministry on earth He was an example to all who saw or heard of Him. He taught large groups and ministered to individuals at every opportunity. But with a specific group of twelve, Jesus gave an extra measure of His time and energy to help them grow closer to God and equip them for future ministry.

Luke 6:12-13

"Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also designated apostles."

We ought to do more than encourage when it's convenient; more than live a Godly life and hope others will follow. In Jesus, we are given a wonderful example of choosing, through prayer, individuals whom we intentionally lead closer to God. This is clearly His command when Jesus says, "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

I wish I could say it's easy to "go and make disciples," but it's not. Getting schedules and desires to match up seems to get harder all the time, and can often become discouraging. And yet, we must not give up. Jesus showed us the way and commanded us to follow - this is the only true plan for discipleship!

Let's continue to lead through the example of a devoted and holy life and encourage those in need at every opportunity. But let's now take the next step and prayerfully identify those who will receive our special attention for an extended period of time. Let's pour ourselves into others and help them grow closer to Jesus through intentional discipleship.

Have A Great Day!

John 7:10-13 - Lesson #74
11-17-06

Jesus' brothers wanted Him to travel from Galilee to Jerusalem and make a grand entry at the start of the Feast of Tabernacles. They encouraged Him (some say sarcastically) to "show Yourself to the world" (John 7:4). But there was a growing number of Jews who "sought to kill Him" (v.1), so Jesus declined the invitation because "My time has not yet come" (v.6).

John 7:10-13

"But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. Then the Jews sought Him at the feast, and said, 'Where is He?' And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him. Some said, 'He is good'; others said, 'No, on the contrary, He deceives the people.' However, no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews."

The time had not yet come to make a grand entrance into Jerusalem, but Jesus had no intention of ignoring one of the required feasts; "Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles" (Deuteronomy 16:16). Jesus perfectly fulfilled all the requirements of the law and also the perfect timing of His Father. Jesus went to the feast in a manner which would not draw attention to Himself.

Recall that when John refers to "the Jews" he usually means the group of Jews who were opposed to Jesus and His ministry. Most people in Jerusalem were Jews, as were His disciples. These contentious Jews assumed He would make His entry in a way that He could be arrested or captured and killed.

The word "complaining" is also translated as grumbling or whispering and denotes low level discussions or arguments. From the beginning Jesus preached a message which called for a decision. His message did not allow for neutral indifference. But though most had formed an opinion, both opinions were wrong. He was neither a deceiver nor simply a good man. Jesus was the Son of God who came to give eternal life.

But as is the case in every generation, the opposition instills fear in those who seek to follow Christ. Those who disagree with Jesus feel He is a threat which must be eliminated, and His followers become a threat by association.

Sadly, we live in an indifferent generation where everything has become acceptable, including a "whatever" religion which keeps Christ on the shelf. But for those who follow Jesus as the only way to eternal life there remains an opposition which causes fear. If they cannot control through physical persecution they pound away through ridicule and rejection. Do we voice our belief or have we become controlled by the fear inducing minority? Let's become more bold in our allegiance to Christ. Let's speak openly and without fear about our Savior, the true Son of God.

Have A Great Day!

God's Perfect Will

11-20-06

Much of our Christian walk seems to involve searching for God's will. We search for His perfect will for our job, home, school, church, and relationships; and we're often frustrated because God seems silent regarding the details of our life. But God is not silent! His Word reveals much of His will, and a large portion of His will for our life today is the same as for every past generation.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

We often gloss over such passages, thinking we already understand and ought to search for "deeper" truths. But in God's plan for us to be "conformed to the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29) there is no greater challenge to our faith. Do we really believe God is in control? Does our life - our attitude - reflect this belief?

Our Heavenly Father desires us to live each moment with a thankful heart, full of joy - regardless of our circumstances. Why? Because this reveals our trust in a loving God. He wants us to continually commune with Him in prayer and refuse to leave His presence to pursue concerns or pleasures of the world. This portion of God's will has been clearly revealed!

Some are facing situations today which make following this portion of God's will very difficult. They see absolutely no reason for rejoicing and can't understand how God can be directing their path. How is it possible to remain by His side when being pressed down from all directions and when the pulls of the world seem relentless?

We must begin by viewing our life from an eternal perspective rather than the temporary nature of the world; "The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:17). All our trials will soon be gone (do we really believe this?). God is in control and, in the end, ALL will glorify His name; "In all things God works for the good of those who love Him" (Romans 8:28). As we trust and love Him with all our heart, He works ALL things for the good - no matter how bad our situation may appear or how difficult it may be to understand His plan. He IS in control! This level of trust is what Paul referred to as "the secret of being content" (Philippians 4:12).

There are certainly times when God will give us very specific direction, but perhaps He's waiting until we follow His general will for our life. Let's come before Him today with a thankful and loving heart. Let's enter His presence and refuse to be taken away by circumstances which will soon fade. Let's trust Him without compromise and joyfully walk each step by faith according to God's perfect will.

Have A Great Day!

Actively Wait

11-21-06

In the message "God's Perfect Will" we saw that God's will is for us to live a life of thanksgiving and prayer; a life of contentment and peace independent of circumstances. It is also "God's will that you should be sanctified {set apart, made holy}; that you should avoid sexual immorality" (1 Thessalonians 4:3). These are general aspects of God's will, given to every one of His Children. His specific direction will come as we obediently align our life with His general will...and wait.

We live in a generation where waiting is viewed as a waste of time, but learning to wait is how we grow: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31 KJV).

This is a powerful and encouraging passage: if we wait on the Lord, we will be strengthened, soar like the eagles, and not grow weary. But what does it really mean to wait? We were not called to "take up the cross of Salvation" so we can then live our lives sitting on the couch. Rather, as believers in Jesus Christ, we have been invited to a wonderful lifetime journey - a journey which is sometimes difficult, but one always filled with adventure and purpose.

1 Timothy 6:11-12

"But you, man of God, flee from all this {evil}, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses."

Notice all the words of action: flee, pursue, fight, take hold. This is definitely a call to actively move forward in our journey of faith.

So do we wait, or do we fight and take hold? Do we rest and hope in the Lord, or do we flee and pursue? The answer is a simple but absolute yes! We are called to a life of action - to a life where we "bear much fruit" (John 15:8) - but we must learn to "act" while waiting and trusting God for every result. We must give Him all our effort while remaining "in the vine" (John 15:4), and allowing the life of Christ to flow through us and produce the fruit.

This means we are to boldly share the gospel message, but then to wait on God for the harvest of belief. It means we are to seek opportunities and diligently prepare for service, but then continue to listen and trust Him to reveal His desired path.

God calls us to a faith of complete trust; a faith which produces both action and patience. Let's take hold and fight the good fight of faith as we learn to actively wait.

Have A Great Day!

By All Possible Means

11-22-06

The Apostle Paul was a pillar of strength who saw the ways of God more clearly than any other individual. He had a unique boldness in his message because he had received the gospel directly from God: "The gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:11-12).

There is no doubt that Paul had a special blessing from God: "This man {Paul} is My chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15). But if Paul would have remained attached to this highly favored position of strength and superior knowledge, his ministry would have been severely limited.

1 Corinthians 9:22

"To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some."

Paul was so devoted to preaching the Gospel that he could humbly minister to anyone! He was determined to reach every person God placed in his path - even if this meant lowering himself and becoming weak.

We must be careful to understand that weakness does not mean we engage in sin! God NEVER asks us to violate His commands in order to accomplish His will; we never need to sin in order to reach someone with the gospel. Rather, becoming weak means showing compassion without regard to a person's status; it means having the "strength" to walk beside the weak and minister the love of Jesus without condemnation. Godly weakness means showing grace to others because we understand the grace we've been given.

As we minister to the lost - as we touch those without Christ - there must be a single purpose to our message. Without Jesus we are ALL lost and on our way to an eternal damnation; "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). We must never forget this basic truth. We must never let our position in Christ cloud the message of the cross. We have been saved and set free; "He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness" (Colossians 1:13). But now, the world around us is in desperate need of this same Savior.

We each have a message to share - a message which can encourage and be used to draw others to faith in Jesus. Let's begin to share this message with ALL. Let's begin to step outside our select and "comfortable" group - outside the group we relate to and claim to understand. The Good News of Jesus is a precious life-saving gift! Let's begin to share this gift with ALL - by ALL possible means.

Have A Great Day!

Truly Thankful

11-23-06

In the United States, the holiday we celebrate on the fourth Thursday in November is probably my favorite holiday of the year. I know that as a Christian I ought to favor Christmas and Easter but I think I have grown to prefer our holiday of Thanksgiving. Don't get me wrong, I love to remember the birth and resurrection of Jesus. And believe me, I'm certainly thankful for what those days represent. But Thanksgiving is a holiday where everyone can celebrate with the same guideline of being thankful!

At Thanksgiving, there are no groups trying to ban the display of turkeys from government property and there are no courts creating laws which forbid the teaching of the first Thanksgiving in our public schools. No one is forbidden from making speeches about thankfulness and there is no movement to change "Happy Thanksgiving" to "Good Fall Feast." We are free to encourage one another to be thankful and consider the "blessings" of our life. Granted, most do not know the God from whom all blessings flow and therefore don't know who to thank, but there remains a purity in Thanksgiving which has somewhat disappeared from other holidays.

Psalm 86:11-12

"Teach me Your way, O Lord, and I will walk in Your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear Your name. I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify Your name forever."

I long for the day when my heart is not divided, for the time when I am able to praise with ALL my heart. No matter how long I walk His path, distractions tug and occupy portions of my life which ought to be reserved for God alone. I guess that's why I appreciate a day which causes me to refocus and remember...and to be thankful.

This Thanksgiving I was reminded of an extra special blessing. All of my children are home this week, including two grand-babies. Tuesday evening we had a campfire in the backyard and all sat up singing praise songs. All five kids lifting their voices in praise to an awesome God. It was one of those moments I think I'll remember for many years.

So as I finish writing this message in the comfort of my home with my entire family safely asleep in their warm beds, I want to say a special thank you to my good friend, Dr. Joe, who is spending this holiday away from his family in the desert on the other side of the world. I thank you for reminding me that the scenery of central Texas is not as bad as I think. I pray for your safe return, and for those who serve by your side.

I know that for most in the world, today is just a regular day. But perhaps we could all spend a little extra time on this regular, ordinary day to consider things - preferably specific things - for which we can praise God with ALL our heart and be truly thankful.

Have A Great Day!

John 7:14-18 - Lesson #75
11-24-06

Jesus went to the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem in a manner which would not attract attention. The opposition against Him had grown and the beliefs of those at the feast had become greatly divided; "However, no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews" (John 7:13).

John 7:14-18

"Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. And the Jews marveled, saying, 'How does this Man know letters, having never studied?' Jesus answered them and said, 'My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.'"

Though the time was not right for a grand entrance into Jerusalem, the time was always right to teach. Jesus would continue His teaching ministry right up until the end of His time on earth, and the outer court of the temple was a natural place for a Rabbi to present His message.

As Jesus taught, the Jews marveled that He knew the scripture so well, having never attended an official rabbinical school; "He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matthew 7:28-29). Even as a young boy talking with the teachers in the temple, Jesus knew the word of God; "And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding" (Luke 2:47). But those who have come to believe in Jesus are no longer astonished, for we understand Him to be the entire truth, the very Word of God; "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

When Jesus taught from the scripture, He showed how the writings of what we now call the Old Testament pointed to Him as the coming King; "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me" (Luke 24:44). Jesus did not claim this as His own interpretation of scripture but as the message given for Him to deliver by God.

Jesus was the promised King who would set His people free, but He also came to announce the character of God: "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18). The announcement of God's character was a call to repentance in preparation of true freedom, and this "doctrine" is seen as teaching from God only as someone "wills to do His will."

Let's seek a greater understanding by being diligent to follow and glorify His name in all we do. His will is the way of truth and His word is the lamp which lights our path. Let's continue to study and follow His word, and then prayerfully begin to better understand and appreciate the absolute truth of His everlasting word.

Have A Great Day!

Preach The Word

11-27-06

In the message "By All Possible Means" we ended with an encouragement that "we each have a message to share - a message which can encourage and be used to draw others to faith in Jesus." We were then exhorted to "begin to share this message with ALL." But as we boldly go out and begin to minister to others, we must ensure we are ministering according to truth.

Paul's second letter to Timothy was the last of his writings. Written while in prison and awaiting a certain death, Paul used this letter to give some final encouragement to a young preacher.

2 Timothy 4:1-2

"I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction."

Paul knew his time of ministry had come to an end - and with his last words, he told Timothy to carefully "Preach the Word." Timothy had been taught the true Word of God, but Paul warned that people would not accept this truth; "Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Timothy 4:3).

There have always been those who distort the Gospel message - always those who remove the sufficiency of the Cross or the necessity of a repentant heart. The world rewards those who dilute the truth of Christ with the philosophy of man and his methods of success. Unfortunately, false teachers will continue to abound and will always have an audience.

But we must refuse to compromise! We have been given the Word of God - a message of truth. And while this message is a wonderful blessing, it also carries an incredible responsibility. We are called to know this message and apply its principles of forgiveness, grace, and love as we live a life devoted to holiness, thanksgiving, and praise. We then must share this message of absolute truth with others at every opportunity.

Our time here is very, very short. We are "a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (James 4:14). Some of us may vanish in a few days, others not for many years - but we will ALL vanish. What remains in the end will ONLY be that which is done according to truth and for the glory of God.

Let's focus more of our time and effort on the treasures which last for eternity. Let's remain aligned to His Word and continue to apply the truth we have received; sharing with others, without shame or compromise. Let's accept the charge today to stand firm and Preach the Word!

Have A Great Day!

The Name of Jesus

11-28-06

In the message "Preach The Word" we were strongly encouraged to share a message of truth with the world which is uncompromising and aligned with the Word of God. We cannot continue to trust in the messages of the world, nor in the teaching of the "religious" when their words are not supported by Biblical Truth!

Toward the end of a passage we call "The Sermon on the Mount," Jesus gave a strong warning: "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). Our message must always lead down the "narrow road" and toward the "narrow gate" of Salvation. If it does, it is truth and honoring to God; if it does not, it is full of deceit and grieves our Heavenly Father.

Of course, the most important aspect of a true message is the name of Jesus. If our message does not include the sacrifice of Jesus as our necessary AND sufficient path to forgiveness and eternal life, then we do not carry a message of truth. Without Jesus there is no Christian faith - there is no eternal hope.

Philippians 2:9-11

"Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in Heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

God exalted (lifted up) Jesus to the highest place in Heaven. Have we exalted Him to the highest place in our own life? Before we have any chance of communicating a message of truth with the world, we must have a message of truth residing in our heart. Have we truly accepted His forgiveness which only comes through faith, or are we still trying to earn our way, chasing after false messengers, and traveling down the broad road? Do we love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30), or are we still just getting acquainted from a distance?

What about our place of worship? God has an important role for the local church and desires each of us to be in fellowship with other believers. But if our church does not lift up the name of Jesus Christ, it becomes little more than a social club leading an entire flock of lost sheep down the broad road of destruction. God forbid!

Let's exalt Jesus to the highest place in our life, in our home, and in our church. Let's love Him with all our heart and take active steps to draw closer to His presence. Let's show the world that eternal life is only through faith in the name which is above all other names - the name of Jesus.

Have A Great Day!

We Have Been Sent

11-29-06

In the last few messages, we have been encouraged to share the message of truth with whoever God places in our path. We saw the need to reach people where they are, "to the weak I became weak" (1 Corinthians 9:22), and the need to share an understandable message without self-righteous condemnation; but also, to share without compromise as we lift up the name of Jesus Christ.

The Word of God teaches there is only one way to Heaven: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Salvation is a gift of grace given to those who place their faith in the sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of sin - there is no other way! And although relatively few will actually travel the narrow road that leads to life, the road is available to ALL who will come: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13).

It's God's desire for everyone to call on His name; "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9), but not everyone will. Some have hardened their heart through continued rejection and willful disobedience, and now refuse to repent and receive the truth; others simply never hear the Good News.

Romans 10:14-15

"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?"

Only God is able to draw someone near and lead them to repentance, and only the Holy Spirit can transform someone's heart into a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). But God has chosen to give His children the responsibility of sharing His message of forgiveness and truth with the world; "As You sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18).

In order for the message of Salvation to truly reach the world, we who know the truth must accept our commission to be "sent." We must be determined to share the gospel message whenever and wherever He directs; "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). This may mean in another country, but it may also mean in our own backyard - or in our own family as we love them and demonstrate the true peace of Jesus.

Let's faithfully pick up the torch today. We have been given everything we need (2 Peter 1:3), we do not lack any Spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 1:7), and we have been declared ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). The world is waiting to hear! Let's **BOLDLY** go forth with His Word, with an assurance that we have been sent!

Have A Great Day!

God's Plumb Line

11-30-06

Amos was a shepherd when God called him to preach to the northern kingdom of Israel. For more than one hundred and fifty years, the northern kingdom had worshipped by their own set of rules and even began to worship other gods. Amos was sent to reveal their sin and call the people to repentance. He warned they must return to God with all their heart or face certain judgment.

Amos 7:7-8

"This is what He showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in His hand. Then the Lord said, 'Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.'"

A plumb line is simply a string with a weight on one end which will hang straight because of the unchanging pull of gravity. Plumb lines have been used for thousands of years as a guide. Building a wall seems relatively easy: stack one brick on top of another until the proper height and width is achieved. But without a reference line, it's nearly impossible to determine when the wall is straight. Without a true standard as a guide, our well-intended efforts produce a jagged mess which will soon crumble and fall.

God used a plumb line to show that the people of Israel had once been true, but now they were building their lives without a reference. God had established clear guidelines and preserved them within His Word. He was now bringing judgments according to His unchanging standard; "I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line" (Isaiah 28:17).

The people did not listen to Amos' plea. They continued to live outside God's will and were guided by their own evil desires. God's judgment came thirty years after the end of Amos' ministry as He allowed the Assyrian army to march through the northern kingdom and bring complete destruction in 722 BC.

God is making the same call to us today. We cannot continue to build using the world's system of values as our reference. This is a standard in constant change, sinking deeper and deeper into the slimy pit. We may try to justify our actions by remaining slightly "above" the standard of the world; but as this standard continues to sink, we will follow it right down. This should NOT be our chosen path!!

Our lives need an unchanging reference to call us back when we stray. This reference must be the Word of God which calls us to a life of absolute pure devotion. When we build on the foundation of Christ and determine to love Him with ALL our heart, His Word ensures we will rise tall and not be found leaning to the left or right. Let's build a life which is true and does not waver - let's live by His Word and build according to God's plumb line.

Have A Great Day!