

DAILY PATH



VOLUMES
ONE & TWO

PATH
MINISTRY

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INTRODUCTION

This 80-day devotional guide (the combined volumes 1 and 2 of *Daily Path*) is designed to compliment your personal study, meditation time of God's Word. I encourage you to read the entire given passage for the day. You might even read verses before and after the given passage to enhance your insight into the passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you through your reading and meditation. Even write down insights that God gives you through reading the Word and meditating on it. (If you have a journal where you write down insights, use that. If not, a place is provided at the end of each day's reading where you can write down your insights.) Then, read the comments from *Daily Path* to compliment what God has already shown you.

At times, the same passage will be used over multiple days. Each day will bring out different aspects of the passage.

Daily Path devotions are not designed as in-depth Bible studies. Rather, they express one or two thoughts that you can meditate on through out the day.

Path means, "a chosen course of conduct, action, thought." *Daily Path* is a tool to help you choose daily the appropriate conduct, action, thought.

May *Daily Path* be a blessing to you as you journey toward Christ-likeness.

Blessings,

Darrell Anderson

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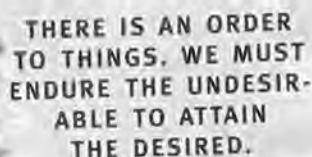
THE PROPER ORDER

Genesis 29:14-28

This story stinks of a scam. Jacob loves and desires Rachel the younger daughter. However, after Jacob works seven years, Laban gives him Leah. Is this a trick? Jacob was ticked (v. 25). Why did Laban do this? I don't know. He should have been up front with Jacob from the beginning. See, it was their custom to give the older daughter in marriage first. Jacob did not really want Leah, he wanted Rachel. However, in order to get Rachel he had to first get Leah.

This story reveals a great spiritual principle. There is an order to things. We must endure the undesirable to attain the desired. Jesus demonstrated this principle, Paul preached it, and the saints of old lived it. Here are a few examples of the principle:

- Before a crown is worn a cross is borne.
- Repentance must precede forgiveness.
- Before a prize is won the race must be run.
- For Jesus to increase, first I must decrease.
- Before the victory comes the struggle.
- To live for Christ I first must die to self.



THERE IS AN ORDER
TO THINGS. WE MUST
ENDURE THE UNDESIR-
ABLE TO ATTAIN
THE DESIRED.

Before Rachel there was Leah. This story is not meant to degrade Leah; just the opposite. Leah was as valuable and precious as Rachel. Jacob simply did not recognize that fact. In the previous examples, repentance is as sweet as forgiveness. Both elements are needed. Do not discount the process. The process should be as sweet to you as the destination. Don't just thank God for Rachel, thank Him for Leah too!

INSIGHTS

MAKING AN IMPACT

Judges 7:1-7

Imagine two football teams lined up against each other. Eleven against eleven. One coach says he has too many players on his team. He takes away six players. He says there are still too many so he takes away four more. Now it is two against eleven. Who do you think is going to win this game?

God dwindled Gideon's army down to 300 men. The enemy had around 135,000 men. Pretty bad odds if you ask me. God is trying to make two points. 1) God and you are a majority. You may be the only Christian in your work place, school, neighborhood or family. That is OK because with God on your side you are a majority. 2) God wants all the glory. When God uses you to do incredible things, God wants everyone to know, including you, that He did it.

In this biblical story, some men left due to fear. Fear here means petrified, so trembling with fear that one can't move. One cause that keeps some from making an impact in their sphere of influence is fear. Satan has rendered many believers powerless due to fear – fear of losing a friend, losing my position, being rejected, being harmed.

**IT MAY BE TWO
AGAINST ELEVEN,
BUT ONE OF THOSE
TWO IS GOD.
YOU WIN.**

God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power. You can make an eternal impact in your world. The odds may look like they are against you. You may feel outnumbered. Rest assured you are not. It may be two against eleven, but one of those two is God. You win. Decide today to be a person of impact. Let God use you to impact a life today for Him.

INSIGHTS

NOW, THAT IS BIG!

I Samuel 17:4-7,48-50

Goliath was huge! He was over nine feet tall. He probably weighed between 400 and 500 pounds. His armor weighed 125 pounds. The point of his spear weighed 15 pounds. Now *that* is big!

Why do you think God went into detail about the size of Goliath in scripture? I think it was to show how helpless David was against this giant. There was no way David could defeat this enemy in his own power. He must get his strength from God.

In life, you will face situations and problems that are too big for you to handle on your own. You look at these circumstances and think there is no way I can overcome this. This passage tells us that there is nothing too big for God. There is no enemy too great.

I Corinthians 10:13 tells us there is no temptation that you cannot overcome. Psalm 65:6 says God is armed with strength. Luke 1:37 says nothing is impossible with God.

I do not know what situation you are in today. Maybe you are up against a giant of your own. Rest assured, there is no sin God can't forgive. There is no situation God can't fix. There is no problem God can't solve.

He formed everything from nothing. He holds the universe in place. Now that's BIG!

THERE IS NO
SITUATION GOD
CAN'T FIX. THERE IS
NO PROBLEM GOD
CAN'T SOLVE.

INSIGHTS

THEM'S FIGHTIN' WORDS

1 Samuel 17:8-10,23,43

When I was in the 9th grade, I lived in Las Vegas, Nevada. I had a teacher who hated Christianity as well as Christians. He particularly despised Southern Baptists for some reason. One day in class, this teacher went off on how ridiculous Christianity was. He berated Christ, Christians, Baptists, for several minutes. Finally, I had enough. I jumped to my feet and yelled at him, "You don't know what you are talking about!" Then I began to expound on my initial comment. Needless to say, the teacher was not happy with me. I didn't handle the situation the best way. However, he pushed me too far. I could no longer sit and listen to this man profane my Lord. I had to do something.

David reacts to Goliath profaning his God. As all the other Israelites do nothing, David rises up and says enough is enough. He will not let his God be profaned by this Philistine. To David, "them's fightin' words!"

Does the ungodliness in America bother you at all? Does the filthy language in the movies, the sexual content on most shows disturb you? Our nation is profaning God on nearly every front. Does it make you want to rise up and fight or are you unmoved?

Let's get more personal. Does the sin in your life bother you? Do you recognize when you sin? Do you seek to rid your life of sin or are you content to harbor sin? May sin never become palatable to you. May you wage a continual war against sin in your life and in America!

**AS ALL THE OTHER
ISRAELITES DO
NOTHING, DAVID RISES
UP AND SAYS
ENOUGH IS ENOUGH.**

INSIGHTS

ALL BY MYSELF

1 Samuel 17:11,16,24,32

In the movie, *The Poseidon Adventure*, the ship is damaged and begins to sink in the ocean. While it is sinking, the ship flips. The top of the ship is now on the bottom, and the bottom is now on top. As the people seek a way of escape, two parties meet. One group of several hundred are going to the upper deck to get out. The smaller group of 10 or so are going to the bottom to get out. The main character knew he was right. He knew to escape, one must go to the bottom because the ship had capsized. He was willing to stand alone in his quest.

David, too, must stand alone. Everyone else was afraid of Goliath. Only David believed in his God enough to stand and fight. He was not swayed by the beliefs of others.

Can you stand alone? Can you go against the flow? Are you strong enough in your walk with God to do what is right even if everyone else does what is wrong?

When you are pressured to become involved in an unethical or questionable business transaction, can you stand alone? When everyone preaches safe sex can you preach abstinence? When no one else will stand up for Christ in your school, or office, or store, or company, will you?

Remember, when you stand alone for Christ, you are not really alone. He is with you! He is empowering you!

ARE YOU STRONG
ENOUGH TO DO WHAT
IS RIGHT EVEN IF
EVERYONE ELSE DOES
WHAT IS WRONG?

INSIGHTS

FULLY DEVOTED

I Kings 11:1-6

You're probably familiar with Solomon. The most known aspect of Solomon is his wisdom. He asked God for wisdom and God granted that desire. Because he did not selfishly ask for riches, long life or honor, God gave him those things as well. Solomon was considered the wisest man of his day (I Kings 4:31). His reign as king was unequalled.

His father, David, was also a great king and a great man of God. These two men had many attributes in common. However, one devastating difference existed. David was known as a man after God's own heart (I Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22). David was not perfect. His sins of adultery and murder are well documented. However, he confessed those sins and repented. For the rest of his life he followed whole-heartedly after God.

Solomon however, did not. Solomon allowed his wives to turn his heart after other gods (v.4). His heart, as he grew old, was not fully devoted to the Lord like his father David's was (v.4). He did evil in the eyes of the Lord (v.6) and did not follow the Lord completely like his dad did (v.6).

David started strong, sinned, repented, and then finished strong. Solomon started strong then turned his heart to idols. Everyone sins. God is not looking for perfect, sinless individuals. He does, however, desire those who will be fully devoted to Him all the days of their life. The issue is the heart. You can have wisdom, wealth, fame, and power, but those things are empty if God does not have your heart.

Don't be like Solomon. Finish strong! When you sin, repent. Don't let sin reign in you. If you do, eventually it will take your heart away from God. Guard your heart! Love the Lord your God with all your heart. Let nothing steal your affection. Stay fully devoted to God even in your old age.

INSIGHTS

FIRE VS. SCARS

1 Kings 18:19-39

Elijah issues a challenge to the children of Israel, and the followers of Baal. Build an altar! The god who answers by fire is the true God! We see in verses 26-29, that the prophets of Baal try to get their god to come through but there is no response. After hours of frantic screaming, dancing, and cutting themselves, these prophets see no fire they only have scars. Remember this truth: False gods don't bring fire. They just leave scars!

Unfortunately, people today in America still worship false gods. These gods are not made of wood. They're not sitting on the shelf in our homes, but they are very real and worshiped in many hearts.

FOUR FALSE GODS IN AMERICA:

- 1. Materialism:** The worship of stuff (what I have). Success and self-esteem revolve around what material things I have. I rely on my possessions when I am in trouble and pursue them as my means of security.
- 2. Humanism:** The worship of self (what I am). I am god. I can produce all that is needed. Man is good and can fix any problem. I rely on myself when the going gets tough.
- 3. Narcissism:** The worship of sensuality (what I want). If it feels good do it because it is right. What ever brings me pleasure is good. I seek pleasure over all other things.
- 4. Relativism:** The worship of sin (what I do). There is no absolute right and wrong. Everything is situational.

If you are relying on any of these gods to come through for you, you will be like the prophets of Baal – scarred! Only Christ is able to do the miraculous in your life. Dedicate your life to pursuing Him instead of these other “gods” and you will not be disappointed.

INSIGHTS

TROUBLER

1 Kings 18:19-39

In verse 17, Elijah is called a “troubler” of Israel. King Ahab has been living in sin. He and his wife have been worshipping Baal and they have led the people of Israel to do the same. Because of Ahab’s sin, Elijah says there will be no rain. There was no rain for three years. As a result we come to this challenge on Mount Carmel.

Elijah did not create this problem Ahab did due to his sin. Is this not typical of us today? We sin. When we begin to face the consequences of our sin we want to blame someone else for the mess we are in.

Elijah does two things in this story that are relevant for us today. First, he confronts sin. He did not decide to mind his own business or stick his head in the sand. Rather, he met the sin head on and said enough is enough. He got labeled as a troublemaker. You will too. Confront sin in your community and see what happens. Sin is rampant in America and we need more people who are willing to stand against it. Even though confronting sin is hard it is worth the effort.

Second, he promotes God. Because of his willingness to confront sin, God was given the opportunity to reveal Himself, His power, and to do the miraculous. God used Elijah’s faithfulness to glorify himself.

The world desperately needs more Elijahs! Will you be an Elijah to your generation? Take a stand against sin and see what God does. Be a vessel that God can use to glorify Himself and draw people to Himself.

INSIGHTS

GOD IS ANXIOUS

1 Kings 18:19-39

This last look at this passage revolves around verses 36-38. Remember the frantic demonstration of the prophets of Baal? Elijah's approach is considerably different. With Elijah there is no dancing, no screaming and no self-mutilation. Elijah simply steps forward and prays. Then the fire falls!

This passage reveals a great truth. God is anxious to reveal Himself. He is not hiding from you or trying to distance Himself from you. He wants you to experience His love, grace, power, and mercy.

This truth says at least two things. One, you don't have to work at getting God's attention. You already have it. You don't have to try and earn His approval. If you are a believer you already have it. God is tuned into what you need. He always has a listening ear. He is always ready and willing to demonstrate His power and grace in the midst of your situation.

Two, God is only a prayer away. Elijah had to pray and ask God to manifest Himself. Without the request there would have been no fire. God is only a prayer away. But he is a prayer away. You can come to God with any and every need, burden, hurt, request, or desire. Know that God really wants to hear from you. He really wants to commune with you.

What do you need God to do for you or in you? What do You want to see God do in this world? Do you desire for God to manifest Himself in a powerful way? He is only a prayer away!

**YOU DON'T HAVE
TO WORK HARD AT
GETTING GOD'S
ATTENTION. YOU
ALREADY HAVE IT.**

INSIGHTS

ANSWERS FROM THE STORM

Job 38:1-3

Have you ever been in a storm? Have you ever been in a tornado or hurricane? If you have, you can attest to the fact that being in a violent storm can be frightening. In this passage we see Job in the midst of a storm. His life has literally fallen apart. He has lost his wealth! (See Ch. 1) He has lost his children. He has lost his health. As you can imagine, Job cries out to God, "Why!?"

In today's passage, God gives us some needed insight. Four truths are present in this passage.

1. There was a storm. This word literally means "tempest." Today's meaning is "hurricane." This was not a spring rain or a windy day. It was a storm! For Job, this experience was not a mild inconvenience, but a storm.

2. God didn't stop the storm. He did not even stop the storm from becoming violent. Scripture says God answered out of the storm. While the storm was still raging, God answered.

3. The Lord answered. He was not silent. He responded to Job's plea.

4. God is in control.

In the storms of your life, rest assured that God is there. He may not stop all of your life's storms, but he will show Himself mighty in the midst of the storm if you will seek Him.

In the midst of your storms turn to God not away from Him. Listen for His voice. Feel His protection. Know He is in control. The Lord is with you even in the midst of the storm!

**GOD MAY NOT STOP
ALL OF YOUR STORMS,
BUT HE WILL SHOW
HIMSELF MIGHTY IN
THE MIDST OF THEM.**

INSIGHTS

THE WAITING ROOM

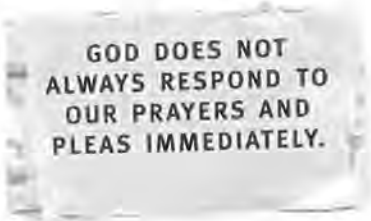
Psalm 13 & Psalm 40:1-3

Several years ago I blew out my knee playing basketball. A friend drove me to the emergency room. I expected to be seen right away. After all, I was hurt! I wanted to know what was wrong and how it would be fixed. And, I wanted to know immediately! To my surprise, they did not wheel me into a room right away. Instead, I was told to take a seat in the waiting room. I waited, and waited, and waited. The longer I waited the more I hurt, and the more I wanted to see the doctor. I learned something about myself that day: *I hate emergency waiting rooms!*

In Psalm 13, David is waiting for God to respond to his need. "How long, O Lord?" "Look on me and answer." Can you relate to David? Somewhere along the way, David grew better at waiting. Psalm 40:1 says David "waited patiently for the Lord."

God does not always respond to our prayers and pleas immediately. At times, there is a period of time between our plea and God's response. During that time we are in God's waiting room. The emergency room experience taught me a few lessons in regard to sitting in God's waiting room. Now, if it is awhile between my prayer and God's response, I try to remember these insights. May these lessons help you:

- My condition is not critical. If it were, I would be helped immediately.
- God is on His time table. He will respond to me at just the right time.
- Waiting is part of the trusting process. I must learn to embrace the waiting.
- I can't fix the problem myself, so I have no choice but to wait.



**GOD DOES NOT
ALWAYS RESPOND TO
OUR PRAYERS AND
PLEAS IMMEDIATELY.**

INSIGHTS

THE LIFE CYCLE

Psalm 23:1-3

How long can you go without eating food? How long can you go without getting hungry? It is obvious that our body uses up its nourishment quickly. Physically, our bodies are in a constant exchange of hunger and saturation. Our spiritual lives are in the same flux.



To a sheep, the green pasture is the place to find food. To a believer, the green pasture is the Word of God; it is communion with God. As we spend time with God, our soul is restored. Then and only then are we able to live out the Christian life. As we minister and serve, we use up our spiritual food supply. Therefore, we must return to the green pasture - to God.

Unfortunately, many Christians try to live the Christian life on a used up food supply. The result is burn-out! Many previously on fire believers are no where to be found today.

If you get out of the habit of eating from the green pasture of God's Word, you will starve to death! The Lord is your shepherd! Meet Him at the green pasture every day. He provides a pretty good spread!

INSIGHTS

IN GOD WE TRUST

Psalm 62

Stability. Security. Safety. God is all three. God is trustworthy because He is our stability, our security, and our safety. Verses 2 and 6 say that God is your Rock. Shaken means not greatly moved. A storm can wash away little pebbles, but it cannot move great boulders. God is the One who stabilizes you during life's storms. When you trust in God, the storms of life will not overtake you. You are standing on an immovable Rock!

These same verses describe God as your Fortress. The fortress is a picture of security. Psalm 34:7 says the angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him. Psalm 125:2 says the Lord surrounds His people. He provides security when you trust in Him.

Verses 7 and 8 call God your Refuge. A refuge is a place of safety. In Old Testament times, there were cities of refuge where a person who accidentally killed someone could run into and be safe from the pursuing family members of the deceased.

I had a weird dream one night. I was in my house, behind a chair, hiding from a rhino that was chasing me. Just as the rhino was about to attack me, my dream shifted me to another house where I was hiding behind a couch from a bear. As the bear prepared to pounce on me, my dream took me outside where I was running from a lion. As I ran, my feet became like cement blocks. I could barely move much less run. Right before the lion caught up to me I saw a fence with a small opening. I crawled through the opening where I was safe from the attacking lion. When I awoke, I sensed God's Spirit saying to me that He is like that opening in the fence. "I am your refuge. In me you are safe from the enemy." It was a weird dream but it had a great truth. Today, let God be your Stability, your Security, and your Safety.

**WHEN YOU TRUST
IN GOD, THE STORMS
OF LIFE WILL NOT
OVERTAKE YOU.**

INSIGHTS

A BIG APPETITE

Psalm 63:1-5


For the next five days we will look at a man who had a big appetite. We will discover what his appetite was and why he had such an appetite. Read Psalm 63:1-5 but meditate on verse 1.

At feeding time, my dog goes crazy. She runs circles around each piece of furniture in our game room as I take her food from the garage to her bowl. She slides on the slick tile floor as she tries to get a grip on each lap. She starts jumping and shaking because she is so excited to eat. It's as if she is starving, and we feed her all the time.

David says he “thirsts” and “longs” for God. He has a passionate desperation for God. He has a big appetite. He longs to know God, to fellowship with God, to be intimate with God. Just like the dry, cracking ground longs for water, David longs for God.

How is your appetite? What does your soul long for? God longs to fellowship with you. Do you long to fellowship with Him? Do you go to the spiritual “cupboard” during the day because you need a snack between meal-times?

Ask God to increase your appetite! There is no need to starve or watch how much you eat when it comes to mealtime with God. No appetite is too big!



HOW IS YOUR
APPETITE?
WHAT DOES YOUR
SOUL LONG FOR?

INSIGHTS

TASTE AND SEE GOD'S GOODNESS

Psalm 63:1-5

Remember, David has a big appetite for God! Let's look and see why. Read Psalm 63:1-5, taking a look at the phrase in verse 2: "I have seen God..."

David says he has a big appetite for God because he has seen God. This statement is simple and general and yet deeply profound. Read Psalm 34:8. David says he has "tasted" and "seen" God's goodness. God is good!

I have fairly good will power when it comes to eating sweets — except for ice cream. I love ice cream! I cannot get enough, especially if it has chocolate in it. Rocky Road, Cookies and Cream, Chocolate Chip... all are in serious trouble around me. My wife rarely buys it because I will eat the entire half gallon in one day. Ice cream, to me, tastes great. The more I eat, the more I want.

David has "tasted" God and he confesses God is good! David cannot get enough. The more time he spends in fellowship with God, the more he learns about God, the more he desires to be with God.

Meditate today on the goodness of God. Write down how He has shown His goodness to you. Thank Him for His goodness. Let God's goodness increase your appetite for Him. Renew your commitment to spend time in God's Word "tasting" His goodness.

THE MORE TIME
HE SPENDS IN
FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD,
THE MORE HE DESIRES
TO BE WITH GOD.

INSIGHTS

THE GLORY OF THE LORD

Psalm 63:1-5

Today, let's look at the word "glory" in verse 2. David has a big appetite for God. One reason why is because he has beheld the glory of God.

It is difficult to explain the glory of God. Scripture gives some insight. Read the following passages that speak of God's glory: Exodus 24:17; Exodus 33:22; Revelation 21:10-11; Revelation 21:23

We cannot handle full exposure to God's glory. God's glory is so intense, it will light up the Holy City.

Have you ever gone to the movies during the day? After being in the dark theatre for a few hours, you walk immediately out into the bright sunlight. The intensity of the sun is so great, it causes you to squint or close your eyes completely. The sun is so bright it hurts your eyes.

God's glory, His brilliance, His splendor, His majesty, His beauty is overwhelming. God is so beautiful and magnificent that David, even though he has only seen a hint of God's glory, has an insatiable appetite for God.

Just like the disciples wanted to pitch a permanent tent on the mount of transfiguration when they saw God's glory, David wants to pull up a permanent chair at God's table and feast on Him.

Have you beheld God's glory? Have you seen His beauty, majesty, splendor? God's glory is like a jewel more magnificent than the most brilliant and priceless diamond necklace.

**GOD'S GLORY IS
SO INTENSE, IT WILL
LIGHT UP THE
HOLY CITY.**

INSIGHTS

REAL POWER IN A REAL WORLD

Psalm 63:1-5

David has beheld God's power (v.2). David has seen God's power at work in real life situations. David defeated Goliath with a sling shot in the power [name] of the Lord. (I Samuel 17). God manifest His power by protecting David against Saul and Absalom as they tried to kill him. The power of God's forgiveness cleanses and restores David after his sins of murder and adultery.

You have faced, are facing, or will face situations in life that will defeat you unless God demonstrates His power in those situations.

God's power is manifest through you, into your situation, as you yield your life to the Spirit of God. (Note Acts 1:8 and Ephesians 3:16). The power that raised Lazarus from the dead, healed the lame and the blind, shut the mouths of lions, parted the Red Sea, opened the prison gates, and rolled the stone away from Jesus' tomb is the same power available to you as you yield to God's Spirit. When you quit relying on yourself and trust God, His power is manifest. God always comes through in crunch time. He is omnipotent – all powerful!

If you were to cut a log, you would not use a little pocket knife. Why? That pocket knife is not big or strong enough to cut through the log. You could cut with that pocket knife for hours and make very little progress. Instead, you would use a chain saw. Its powerful blades and chain speed will cut right through that thick log in no time.

Likewise, why face life's trials and difficulties in your own strength when you can avail God's power? Your intelligence, position, wealth are not adequate to be victorious over life's most overwhelming situations. God's power is more than enough. It's real power!

INSIGHTS

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

Psalm 63:1-5

In verse 5, David gives another reason for his insatiable appetite to pursue and know God. Only God satisfies the soul. “Satisfy” means to “fill to overflowing.” God does not give your soul only what it needs. David says his soul is so overwhelmed by the goodness of God that he cannot contain all that God has for him. God gives more than I can hold.

The phrase, “richest of foods,” is a word picture. David is king. He has the finest livestock, gardens, and chefs. He can lay a spread to beat all feasts. Just as David can provide his guests with a lavishly adorned feast of food, so God satisfies the soul with the “best of the best.”

At a particular restaurant, I have the habit of gorging myself from their massive buffet line. They have lots of food and it is all great! Stuffed from multiple helpings, I am brought the most magnificent piece of cheesecake. Even though I am nearly sick from eating too much, I scarf down that piece of cheesecake. If another piece of cheesecake were offered to me, I would eat it too or die trying. The more I eat, the more I want. The great taste is satisfying yet it creates a hunger for more at the same time.

God’s goodness is so incredible, it satisfies the soul like nothing else can while creating an appetite for more. How’s your appetite? You can hunger for fame, power, wealth, comfort, pleasure, or security. Only God satisfies — guaranteed!

**GOD’S GOODNESS
IS SO INCREDIBLE,
IT SATISFIES THE SOUL
LIKE NOTHING ELSE.**

INSIGHTS

SANCTUARY

Psalm 73:1-17, 23-26

Surely you can relate to the psalmist. He envies the wicked. Why? The wicked seem to prosper while he, trying to be righteous, flounders. He is frustrated and about to throw in the proverbial towel. He is contemplating going over to the dark side (v.13-14).

Things seemingly have not changed. Even today godless people still seem to have it all: wealth, fame, health, and a trouble-free, burden free, care-free life (v.4-12). Many righteous people however, are plagued with pain, sorrow, and hard times. Maybe you are like the psalmist, ready to end your pursuit of holiness and purity. *Don't!*

Something wonderful happens to the psalmist. He is trying to figure out why life is seemingly so unfair. Then, we see him enter the sanctuary of God (v.17). He has an encounter with God and his perspective changes. He understands. He is reminded of the destination of the ungodly. He realizes that soon the tables will turn. The righteous may have troubles now, but waiting is an eternity of abundance, joy, wealth, peace. Yet, for the wicked destruction looms.

Entering the sanctuary makes all the difference. The journey of doubt, anger and envy is fine as long as that journey takes you to the sanctuary of God. Always run to God, never away from Him. Your encounter with God will change your perspective from the temporal to the eternal.

Ponder your indescribable eternal future as a Christian. Thank God for all the glories that await you. The next time you become disheartened by the success of the wicked, enter the sanctuary. You won't come out the same.



**YOUR ENCOUNTER WITH
GOD WILL CHANGE
YOUR PERSPECTIVE
FROM THE TEMPORAL
TO THE ETERNAL.**

INSIGHTS

PAUSE TO PRAISE: PART ONE

Psalm 103

Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise His holy name. It's okay to shout these words. I think David sang and shouted these words as he wrote them. There are many things to praise God for. Today, praise Him for His person. Verse 8 says God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

When my oldest son was two years old, he was eating cereal and watching TV. A commercial came on that was asking the viewer to give to needy children. While the announcer was talking, pictures of starving, third world children were being shown. The announcer said, "Will you help feed these starving children?" When he said this, my son took a handful of cheerios and tried to feed the kids through the TV set. Compassion is being moved to meet a need. God knows your every need. His compassion moves Him to meet your needs.

Have you ever coached a basketball team of 5 year old boys. I have. It is not pretty. Most of them cannot dribble, pass, or shoot a basketball, or guard anyone. They just run around in one big herd chasing the ball. As

**LET HIS LOVE ENFOLD
YOU WHEN YOU FAIL,
AND LET HIS COMPAS-
SION EMBRACE YOU
WHEN YOU HAVE NEED.**

their coach, I could get really angry at them and frustrated with them. However, I don't. Rather, I am patient with them because I realize their limitations. When it comes to you, God is slow to anger. He knows your limitations. He knows you are weak. He is patient. He treats you with love rather than anger.

Today, praise God for His compassion, patience and love. Share with Him your needs and your struggles. He cares for you. Let His love enfold you when you fail, and let His compassion embrace you when you have need.

INSIGHTS

PAUSE TO PRAISE: PART TWO

Psalm 103

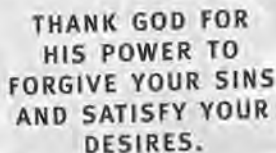
We praise God for His person. We should also praise God for His power. God is omnipotent – all powerful! He has the power to do whatever He wills. Today, let's see two ways He utilizes His power.

Verse 3 says God has the power to forgive sins. Have you ever seen flash paper used? Magicians use it for some of their tricks. When you light flash paper, it burns quickly and brilliantly, then it is consumed. After flash paper is burned there is nothing left. No ashes! No fibers! Nothing! So it is when your sin meets God's forgiveness. Your sin is completely and eternally removed.

Try this experiment sometime. Put 5 or 6 drops of several colors of food dye into a jar of water. Stir the water. The water will become black. Then, pour bleach into that water and stir it again. The bleach will turn the water clear again. The stain is removed. God's forgiveness also removes the stain of sin in your life. God makes your sin as white as snow. (Isaiah 1:18)

Verse 5 says God has the power to satisfy your desires with good things. I am sure you have desires. Your desires may include wanting to be loved, accepted, secure. It may be to be successful or have contentment. Don't try to satisfy those desires on your own. You will mess things up. You will create even more want in your life. Rather, let God satisfy those desires with good things. Himself! His benefits! He knows exactly what you need to be satisfied in life.

Thank God for His power to forgive your sins and satisfy your desires. Rest in His strength today. Call on Him to meet your every need. Pause to praise Him all through the day.



**THANK GOD FOR
HIS POWER TO
FORGIVE YOUR SINS
AND SATISFY YOUR
DESIRES.**

INSIGHTS

S A T I S F I E D

Psalm 107:1-9; 17:15

The word “satisfied” can have two connotations. The meaning depends on the preposition attached to it. One can be satisfied in or be satisfied with. We should never be satisfied with, but we should always be satisfied in! Let me explain.

Some people become satisfied with their relationship and their walk with Christ. Consequently, they become complacent and lax in their passion for Christ-likeness. Their Christian life becomes hum-drum and routine.

Others, however, seek to be satisfied in Christ. They realize that everything they need is found in Christ. Therefore, they hunger and thirst after Christ. Matthew 5:6 says these people are blessed. Why? Because they are filled. Filled with what? Filled with Christ and all that He desires for them.

The catch is this. A person who is satisfied with their walk with Christ, will not find satisfaction. They will not be at peace. However, those who hunger and thirst after God will be satisfied. He will be satisfied with good things (107:9).

Are you restless? Is peace a stranger? Are you looking to the things of the world to satisfy you? Has your Christian walk become boring and lifeless? If so, maybe you are hungering after the wrong things! Satisfaction comes in Christ.

**THOSE WHO
HUNGER AND THIRST
AFTER GOD WILL
BE SATISFIED.**

INSIGHTS

PASSION

Psalm 119:129-136

The Psalmist was passionate about the Word of God. He longed for and obeyed God's Word. He calls God's words wonderful. Are you passionate about knowing and obeying God's word? Today, we will look at two reasons we should have a passion for God's word.

First, verse 129 says that God's words are good. The foundational principle is that whether we understand them or not, whether we like them or not, or whether we agree with them or not, all of God's statutes, decrees, laws, are good.

We tell our children not to stick their fingers in the light socket, don't eat candy before supper, don't play in the street. Our children may not like the rules we set, but that does not change the fact that they are good rules. All of God's rules are good and should be heeded.

Second, verse 130 says God's word gives light. This phrase is a word picture that describes the opening of a gate to let something in. Once I visited the Botanical Gardens in Fort Worth. As I peeked through the gate I could see beautiful flowers. However, it wasn't until I actually went into the gardens that I saw the real beauty. The vivid colors, the diverse textures, the aromas all were extraordinary. Only when we go deep into God's word do we see God's beauty. His word reveals his grace, love, mercy, holiness and all the wonderful attributes of His nature.

Don't miss God's beauty. Go deep into the Word. Have an ever-growing passion for God's word and enjoy His beauty!

**ALL OF GOD'S
RULES ARE GOOD
AND SHOULD
BE HEADED.**

INSIGHTS

PERMISSION

Psalm 119:129-136


In the previous devotion, we looked at why we should be passionate about God's word. Today let's look at giving God permission to work in us through his word.

Verse 133 says, "let no sin rule over me." I hope that phrase expresses your heart. You must let God's word correct you when you are in sin. No one likes to be corrected. No one is eager to admit they are wrong. However, when we are in sin God's word is designed to penetrate our heart and convict us of our sin. You must not let even one sin have dominion over you.

My youngest son has a tendency to leave things in his pants pockets when he changes clothes. My wife and I check the pockets when we do laundry but we sometimes miss things. On one occasion, we washed a load of jeans. We transferred the jeans into the dryer to dry partially. When we opened the dryer door to pull a pair of jeans out we saw this stringy, sticky stuff on the pants. Upon further investigation we saw this substance on most of the clothes in the dryer. We discovered one piece of gum got washed. One piece of gum – not a whole pack – but one piece of gum in one pocket made a huge mess.

Likewise, one sin can devastate your life. If you let one sin have dominion in your life your entire person will be affected. When a person has cancer surgery the surgeon desires to get all of the cancer because he knows what a little cancer in the body can do. Sin is a spiritual cancer. Even one sin can wreck your life.

Give God permission to correct you through his word. If there is sin in your life today get rid of it now. Confess it and let God cleanse you.



**SIN IS A
SPIRITUAL CANCER.
EVEN ONE SIN CAN
WRECK YOUR LIFE.**

INSIGHTS

PRAYER

Psalm 119:129-136

As you have read, the psalmist had a passion for God's word, and he gave God permission to correct him with his word. Thirdly, the psalmist expresses a prayer in this Psalm. In verses 134-136 he prays for three things.

One, he prays he would be redeemed from the oppression of men. In other words, he prayed that men would not carry as much influence on his decisions and lifestyle as God does. He prays that he would be set free from the desire to please, impress and be accepted by people.

Two, he prays for God's face to shine on him. He prays for God's favor. He confesses that his heart's desire is to be accepted by God. He desires friendship with God above any other relationship.

Three, he expresses sorrow for his sin and for the sin of his nation. He weeps when he thinks about how his nation has plummeted into total disregard for God and his Word.

Can you identify with the psalmist? Search your heart and think through these questions. Today, let God do a work in those areas where He convicts you.

Do you seek to please people more than you seek to please God? If so, in what areas? Does sin in America grieve you? Are you growing in your friendship with God? Are you prioritizing time with Him? Do you weep for your friends that are without Christ? Is there a fellow believer that is trapped in sin that you need to talk to?

HE PRAYS THAT HE
WOULD BE SET FREE
FROM THE DESIRE TO
PLEASE, IMPRESS AND
BE ACCEPTED.

INSIGHTS

MASTER CRAFTSMAN

Psalm 139:13-14

Let's spend three days talking about music. Judges 5:3 says, "I will make music to the Lord..." For an instrument to make beautiful music, it must be made by a master craftsman. Taylor Guitars crafted a beautiful guitar called the Liberty Tree guitar. During the Revolutionary War, patriots rallied around Liberty Trees. When the last Liberty Tree was destroyed, Taylor Guitars made 400 Liberty Tree guitars out of this tulip-poplar tree. The guitar has the American Flag inlaid on it and the beginning of the Declaration of Independence burned into it. One craftsman said of this guitar, "We've never made a guitar from wood that inspired actual reverence."

You are an instrument, crafted by the Master, that inspires awe. In Psalm 139:13-14, we see that God "knits" or "interweaves" our tendons, nerves, arteries, veins, fibers, and tissues with great love and care into a master creation. The word "wonderfully" means "distinguished" or "separate." God created all that is, yet he created you separate and distinguished from the rest of His creation. You are a priceless instrument, crafted in the image of God, to make beautiful music with your life.

Today, realize you are priceless. Remember you are more special than anything else God created. If you feel you are worthless, don't! You are fearfully and wonderfully made. You are a priceless instrument created by The Master Craftsman. He does not make junk.

**YOU ARE PRICELESS.
YOU ARE MORE
SPECIAL THAN
ANYTHING ELSE
GOD CREATED.**

INSIGHTS

MASTER TECHNICIAN

Lamentations 5:14-15

There is nothing worse to a musician than playing an instrument that is out of tune. Sometimes our life gets out of tune with God. When this happens, just like an instrument, we need to get put back in tune.

In the Lamentations passage, the music of these young men has stopped because of sin (v.16). Sin is what gets our life out of tune with God.

As a Master Technician, God uses two tools to get us back in tune with Him. Read Hebrews 4:12, II Timothy 3:16, and Psalm 139:23-24. God's Word and God's Spirit work in tandem to get us and keep us in tune with God.

When an instrument that is grossly out of tune is played, the listener cringes at the awful sound. Likewise, when a life is grossly out of tune with God due to sin, the on-looker cringes at what he sees. On the other hand, an in-tune instrument can make beautiful music. So, too, can a life that is in tune with God.

Is your life in tune or out of tune today? Is there sin that You need to deal with today? Let the Master Technician use His tools to rebuke, correct, search, and penetrate your soul, so that your life will make beautiful music for the lost world to hear!

**AN IN-TUNE
INSTRUMENT CAN MAKE
BEAUTIFUL MUSIC.
SO CAN A LIFE THAT'S
IN TUNE WITH GOD.**

INSIGHTS

MASTER MUSICIAN

Psalm 81:2

Regardless of how magnificent an instrument is, it only makes beautiful music when someone picks it up and plays it. An instrument cannot play itself (player pianos excluded).

If an inferior musician plays the instrument, the music is tolerable at best and horrible at worst. However, if a master musician plays it, beautiful music comes forth. The quality and beauty of the music is determined by both the instrument and the musician.

We determined already that you are a magnificent instrument crafted by The Master. The big question today is, "Who are you letting play you?" Read Romans 8:5-8.

The musician controls the instrument. Who or what controls you? Are you seeking to please your sinful nature, or do you seek to please God? Are you controlled by your sinful desires or by the Spirit of God?

If anything other than God is "playing" your instrument, you are making music that is intolerable to God and to a world that needs to hear beautiful music. When you place your instrument (yourself) in the Master Musician's (God's) hands and give Him permission to play (control) you, you make beautiful music.

Begin the music! 1) Rest in the fact that you are wonderfully made. 2) Keep your life in tune with God. 3) Give God permission to control you.

**THE MUSICIAN
CONTROLS THE
INSTRUMENT.
WHO OR WHAT
CONTROLS YOU?**

INSIGHTS

A GOOD NAME

Proverbs 22:1-11

Read the following names. As you read them, meditate on what thoughts and images come to mind concerning those individuals. Determine which names produce positive connotations and which ones evoke negative thoughts. Classify in your mind which ones you believe have “a good name”; and why, and which ones do not.

Billy Graham	Adolph Hitler
Gandhi	Mother Teresa
Howard Stern	Charles Manson
Dennis Rodman	Jesus

A good name is to be treasured. Today’s proverbs give five characteristics of a good name.

- 1. Prudence (v.3)** – A prudent person has the ability to use reason to solve problems, discipline himself, and manage his affairs effectively.
- 2. Humility (v.4)** – Humility is freedom from pride and arrogance. A humble person practices a dependence upon God.
- 3. Generosity (v.9)** – One who blesses others and gives freely to those in need is generous.
- 4. Purity (v.11)** – The motives of the heart are pure, not self-exalting or self-satisfying. Purity speaks to the integrity and holiness of the inner man.
- 5. Gracious Speech (v.11)** – One with gracious speech encourages, uplifts, and blesses others, and reflects a person with a grateful heart.

Do you have a good name? When others hear your name what connotations do you think are brought to their minds? Do the above mentioned characteristics exemplify your life? Are all of these characteristics in your life? Ask God to help you maintain a good name; it is better than great riches!

INSIGHTS

FEAR THE LORD

Proverbs 23:17

Fear! It affects people differently and causes strange reactions. Fear of flying, water, spiders, snakes, the dark, of being alone, of being around people, of speaking in public are just a few of the myriad of things people are afraid of. Today's devotion passage says we are to fear the Lord. Are we to be afraid of God? No! What then does it mean to fear the Lord?

First, to fear the Lord means to be cautious. Proverbs 8:13 says to fear the Lord is to hate evil. Hate, in this context, means to "want nothing to do

with." I tolerate lettuce. I don't really like lettuce, but I can handle two or three bites. However, I hate green peas. I do not want to look at them, smell them, or especially eat any. I want absolutely nothing to do with green peas.

When you fear the Lord you hate sin and evil. Do not tolerate sin in your life.

Be sensitive to God's Spirit when He warns you that you are getting close to sinning. Do not play around with temptation and sin. Sin is serious; Jesus had to die to deal with sin. Hate sin! Hate evil! Stay away!

Second, I Peter 1:17 says to live in reverent fear. Reverence means to "put great worth on." Reverence recognizes God's holiness, splendor, majesty, glory and causes one to say "WOW!" Reverence leads to obedience. Here is the pattern. I value God. Because I value God, I please God. In order to please God, I obey God. When I obey God, I glorify God. Revelation 14:7 says, "Fear God and give Him glory."

Do not be afraid of God, rather fear the Lord. Acknowledge His greatness today. Commit to shun sin and flee evil. Value God above anything and everything else. He is worthy!

**BE SENSITIVE TO
GOD'S SPIRIT WHEN HE
WARNS YOU THAT
YOU ARE GETTING
CLOSE TO SINNING.**

INSIGHTS

“ F E A R ” R E S U L T S

Psalm 25:14

The previous devotion dealt with what it means to fear the Lord. Today, let's look at the results of fearing the Lord. Take a few moments to read and meditate on the following passages from Proverbs: 1:7, 9:10, 19:23, 10:27, 14:27, and 15:16.

The first result is insight. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom. Said another way, the fear of the Lord is the starting point and the most important point to knowing who God is and knowing how to please Him. Psalm 25:14 tells us that God entrusts the deeper insights into His person and power with the person who fears Him.

The second result is life: the quantity and quality. Since the fear of the Lord creates caution toward sin, one misses out on destructive behaviors. As a result, one can add length to life (Prov. 10:27). The fountain of life (Prov. 14:27) talks of abundance, or an overflowing. When you fear the Lord, you open yourself up to enjoying all of God's goodness, blessings, and abundance.

The third result is contentment. Better is a little with the fear of the Lord (Prov. 15:16). Contentment says I no longer feel the need to keep up with the Jones'. If you pursue material things you will never be satisfied. Pursue God and you will be so satisfied in Him that material things will be insignificant. You can even be content in difficult circumstances. "Untouched by trouble" (Prov. 19:23) means that negative circumstances, trials, will not destroy you. They do not rattle your cage or rock your world because you know God and His promises of faithfulness and provision.

Are you experiencing insight, life, and contentment? These blessings are a result of fearing the Lord. Thank God today for His goodness. Ask Him to help you "Fear the Lord" more. Remember Proverbs 23:17, "... *always be zealous for the fear of the Lord.*"

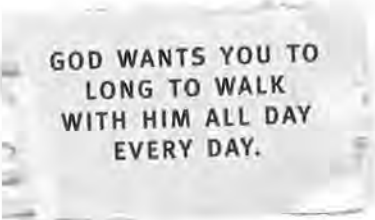
INSIGHTS

2 4 . 7 . 3 6 5

Isaiah 26:1-9

I love basketball. As a youth, a college student, and even as a young adult I was in the gym every chance I got. I could play for hours. It did not matter whether I was playing with others or shooting around by myself, I never got tired of playing.

Is there something you could do all day, every day, and never get tired of doing? Is there someone you could be around all day, every day, and not get tired of being around? In this passage, the writer says there is something to do and someone to be with 24.7.365.



**GOD WANTS YOU TO
LONG TO WALK
WITH HIM ALL DAY
EVERY DAY.**

Notice the words in this passage: steadfast (v.3), forever (v.4), dwell (v.5), walking (v.8), the night (v.9), the morning (v.9). All of these words speak to a continual, long-term encounter. The writer says we should seek to be with God continually. A quiet time where one spends ten or twenty or thirty

minutes with the Lord is good. It is a great discipline. However, God wants you to long to walk with Him all day, every day.

As verse 9 states, do you yearn for God? Does your spirit long for Him? When you think on God's goodness through the day He promises peace. When you trust in Him continually He is your stability.

Continue to have a designated time with God each day, but do not let that time be the totality of your intimacy with God. Keep your mind staid on Him 24.7.365.

INSIGHTS

EXTREME MAKEOVER: THE REALITY

Ezekiel 36:16-21

You have probably seen the TV show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*. In that show, designers come into a needy family's home, and in one week completely redo it. It is redone inside and out and from top to bottom. Each episode features a different house and family. Each house chosen is a mess. Some are very small, some do not have enough rooms. Others are dilapidated with pieces hanging down or falling apart. Every house is in desperate need of a makeover.

The reality in this chapter of Ezekiel, is that the house of Israel is in a mess. Because of their sinful lifestyle and idol worship, Israel has been ravaged by an enemy. Their towns are now desolate and lifeless. The people are scattered or captives.

Today's reality is that many lives are in a mess. Many today are held captive by the enemy, Satan, and have been ravaged by his constant assaults. Many live a sinful lifestyle and are willing to worship anything except Christ. How is your house? Have you allowed Satan entrance into your life? Is your house falling apart?



God gives two insights for those in this dire condition. First, in verse 32, He says to be ashamed. In other words repent! Feel sorry that you have sinned against God. Second, in verse 37, He says He will yield to the plea. Said another way, if one will cry out to God to makeover his life, God will listen and do it.

Do you need an extreme makeover? Do you have a friend or relative that needs an extreme makeover? Let the Master Designer change the reality of the house.

INSIGHTS

EXTREME MAKEOVER: THE REMODEL

Ezekiel 36:24-32

During the show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, the designers meet together to map out the remodel of the house. They give specific details as to what they will do to make the house beautiful.

In verses 33 and 34, God gives three aspects to His remodel. This passage speaks literally to Israel, but it is also a prophetic word to people today revealing what Christ can do in a person's life.

One, God will resettle the town (v.33). This statement is a picture of life. He says He will give life to that lifeless place. In verse 26, God says He will put in a new heart and a new Spirit. On the show, when the designers remodel the house, they throw all of the old appliances and furniture away and replace them with beautiful new stuff. God does the same. II Corinthians 5:17 says anyone in Christ is a new creation. The old is gone, all is new.

Two, God rebuilds the ruins (v. 33). He restores strength. When the wall of a city was rebuilt, the city was able to protect itself from attack. God gives us strength to resist Satan and his temptations.

Three, God replants the land (v.34). In other words, instead of barrenness in our spirit, God allows us to experience and enjoy His fruit, His blessing and His fullness.

Is your life today characterized by life, strength, blessing, and spiritual fruit? If so, thank God for His goodness. If not, ask God to remodel your house. Let Him take out the old and fill you with Himself and His benefits.

IS YOUR LIFE TODAY
CHARACTERIZED BY
LIFE, STRENGTH,
BLESSING AND
SPIRITUAL FRUIT?

INSIGHTS

EXTREME MAKEOVER: THE RESULT

Ezekiel 36:33-38

For two days we have taken a look at God's extreme makeover abilities. We have discussed the reality and the remodel. Today, let's look at the result. What is the result of this extreme makeover?

In the last portion of the TV show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, the designers give the chosen family a tour of their newly remodeled house. This tour is the first time the family has seen the house since it's makeover. They are ecstatic! The change is incredible. Their dilapidated house is now a beautiful home. As they go from room to room viewing the change, the family members are yelling, crying, jumping up and down, and thanking the designers profusely. The sentiment is "look at this house!"

Verses 35 and 36 reveal the response people will have in regard to Israel's restoration. So it is spiritually. When people see a life that was once broken, ravaged, weak, and barren, but now is alive, strong, fruitful, and whole, they respond "look at that life!" As a result, God is glorified.

The main result of this extreme makeover is that God is glorified. An accompanying result is your life is changed. You get to enjoy the beauty of your new, transformed life while directing praise and glory to God. The Designer gets the credit, you get the makeover. What a deal!

Thank God for His transforming power. Be willing to acknowledge who made the change in your life if someone asks.

THE MAIN RESULT
OF THIS EXTREME
MAKEOVER IS THAT
GOD IS GLORIFIED.

INSIGHTS

CHOOSE

Daniel 1:1-15

Suppose I placed on one side of a table an assortment of vegetables and some water, and on the other side of the table were cokes, candy, chocolate cake and maybe some cheesecake. Then, I asked you to choose what you wanted to eat. Which side of the table would you grab from?

Daniel was faced with a similar decision. He chose the veggies. Why? He knew that food was healthier than the rich fatty food the king served. This food choice is a picture of our life choice. Choosing veggies represents choosing God's way, while choosing the fatty foods represents the world's way. These two ways of living are drastically opposite from each other. Look at these examples:

GOD'S WAY

1. No premarital/extramarital sex
2. Forgiveness
3. Absolute truth
4. Giver (others oriented)

WORLD'S WAY

1. Multiple sex partners is okay
2. Revenge
3. Relativism
4. Taker (me first)

To some, at first glance, the world's way of living looks appealing. However, in the long haul that kind of lifestyle is destructive. Like eating candy and cakes, they taste good but there is no real nutritional value to those foods.

Don't get caught up in the glitz and glamour of the world and sin. Sin is fun but only for a season. Then, it destroys you. Go against the flow. Choose God's way. Let others choose candy and fatty food. You choose veggies. You will be much better off (v.15).

INSIGHTS

DON'T FEAR THE FURNACE

Daniel 3:8-26

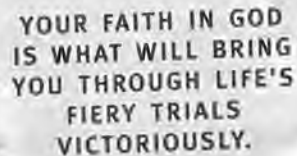
You probably are very familiar with this story. Let's zoom in on the furnace. It is interesting to note that the same fire killed some (v.22) while others were unscathed (v.25). How is this possible? May I suggest that the issue is not the fire, rather it is what is put into the fire.

I don't work with pottery, but I have friends who do. They tell me that before a piece of pottery can be placed into the kiln for "firing," it must be coated with certain protective sealants. Without the coating, the pottery would be ruined. You see, fire can either destroy or purify. A piece of paper will burn if put over an open flame. A cooking pan will not burn because it is made to be placed over the flame.

In life, we all face difficult circumstances. We all face fiery ordeals. All are thrown into the fires of life at times. How you fair in the fire depends on your preparation. As you walk with God, when you trust God, as you pray and read the Word, you are preparing yourself. When the fire comes, you are coated. You are ready. Those difficult events will mature you, purify you, and strengthen you.

The faith of these three men is what brought them through the fire victoriously. Your faith in God is what will bring you through life's fiery trials victoriously.

Do not fear the fire. Prepare for it! If your Christian stand leads you to a furnace, do not back down. The furnace will not hurt you. Instead, it will strengthen you. Plus, God will receive glory as a result of your faithfulness. Remember, if you are thrown into a fire for your faith, Jesus will be in there with you (v.25)!



**YOUR FAITH IN GOD
IS WHAT WILL BRING
YOU THROUGH LIFE'S
FIERY TRIALS
VICTORIOUSLY.**

INSIGHTS

R U N N I N G

Jonah 1:1-17

When I was about 13 years old, I was playing catch in front of a neighbor's house. I was throwing the baseball toward the house. As I released a throw, the ball went sailing over the intended target and right into the plate-glass window of the neighbor's house. As soon as the "crash" sounded, I took off running. I did not want to be held responsible for paying for the window. I did not want my parents to know I broke the window. I thought if I ran, I could get away from the situation. Was I ever wrong. My parents found out. My running got me in twice the trouble I would have been in had I done the right thing to begin with.

So it is with Jonah. He tries to run away from what God has asked Him to do(v3). Have you ever, or are you now running from God? Are you trying to get away from doing God's will? If you have, or if you are, here are five truths to think about.

1. God will not let His rebellious child alone (v4). He will pursue you. He will not sit quietly while you rebel.

2. Your life will go downhill (v4). Things will get worse. Problems will arise. You cannot run from God and be comfortable.

3. Your rebellion affects others (v5).

Your rebellion hurts those close to you.
Your family, your church!

4. It can be a tough road back (v15).

5. God always provides a way back (v17). You must first admit your sin (v12). Per Jonah, it's better to run to God than away from Him.

**IF YOU RUN, THINGS
WILL ONLY GET
WORSE. YOU CAN'T
RUN FROM GOD AND
BE COMFORTABLE.**

INSIGHTS

THE TRIP BACK HOME

Jonah 2:1-10

As we discovered yesterday, running from God takes its toll. The paradox is that we can never run away from God. He sees and knows us wherever we are. Let's look at a few more truths concerning the Jonah story.

As noted yesterday, God always provides a way home for His wayward child. However, to come home we must: 1) admit we have sinned, and 2) submit to God's way. In chapter two, we see Jonah's submission.

God's way may not be the easiest way to live, but it is the most rewarding. In the process of coming back from your wayward journey, note these two truths:

1. Rebellion takes a while to have an effect. Notice in 1:5, Jonah sleeps, but in 2:2 Jonah prays. At the beginning of our rebellious journey, all things seem fine. However, time takes its toll. God's conviction grows stronger. God will do what He must in order to bring you back to His purpose for your life. This idea brings us to truth #2.

2. Rebellion will catch up with you. God will continue to pursue you. He will not let up. He will allow, even cause circumstances to become unbearable. He will pursue you until you reach the bottom. For, He knows that once you reach bottom, you have nowhere to look but up. From inside the fish Jonah prays (2:1).

HE KNOWS THAT,
ONCE YOU REACH THE
BOTTOM, YOU HAVE
NOWHERE TO LOOK
BUT UP.

Don't wait until you hit bottom to pray to God. Save yourself some heartache, pray before you get swallowed by the fish!

INSIGHTS

GOD'S WILL?

Matthew 4:1-11

The years 1988-1991 were tremendously difficult years for me and my family. One week after moving my family to a new town to serve in a new church, I "blew out" my knee. I spent the next three months in a cast, and several more months in a brace and rehabbing. We had a 2¹/₂ year old son and a newborn son. For the next two plus years, life seemed to be unraveling at the seams. I had two knee surgeries and a near-death experience that led to emergency surgery to repair a ruptured esophagus. Both boys developed asthma. For months they both took breathing treatments every four hours. Between the two of them, we made six ER visits, had a hospital stay and a surgery. Our out-of-pocket medical bills totaled \$15,000. The more I prayed, the worse things became. I began to wonder if I had missed God. Had I stepped out of God's will? Was I now suffering the consequences of being out of God's will?

The temptations of Jesus give us a great truth to remember. **Many times, God's will is the more difficult road.** Life in God's will is not always easy or fun. Jesus was in the center of His Father's will, led by the Holy Spirit. Yet, He is being severely tempted by Satan. He is in a wilderness. Also, Jesus is facing some difficult decisions. To be faithful to His Father, to stay in the center of His will, Jesus must be willing to suffer and die. His decision in the wilderness led Him to the cross. I am sure Jesus never doubted whether He was in God's will.

If you are in difficult days, do not assume it is because you are out of God's will. You may be. However, God's will may be the very reason you are in the midst of hard times. Today's word is not easy but it is true. Those three years of my life were not fun years, but they were among the most fruitful spiritually. God did amazing things in me and through me during those days. Trust God to fulfill His plan for you even if it means you must endure difficult days.

INSIGHTS

HIGHS AND LOWS

Matthew 4:1-11

Think about times when you experienced great spiritual highs and/or victories! Now, think about times when you experienced deep spiritual lows or defeats. How far apart were your highs and lows? At times, they may have been rather close to each other. Jesus' wilderness experience reveals another great truth. After great spiritual victories or highs often come your greatest lows and temptations.

In Mark 1:12, another account of the wilderness temptations, it says at once the Spirit sent Jesus to the desert. The temptations came immediately after Jesus' baptism. Jesus, at His baptism, had just heard His Father say, "You are my Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased." What a high! Then boom! He is sent to the wilderness to fight Satan.

We see this truth played out in many biblical characters: Elijah in I Kings 18-19; David in II Samuel 10-11; Abraham in Genesis 12; Stephen in Acts 6-7; and Paul in Acts 16.

When God uses you in a mighty way to impact His kingdom, Satan is ticked. Satan does not want you to be victorious in your Christian life. He does not want you to get on a roll of being used by God. Therefore, Satan brings temptations to try and make you fall. Also, if after spiritual victories you become spiritually arrogant, you set yourself up to fall. When you think you are too godly and too holy to sin, beware! Your greatest time of temptation may be lurking.

Remember, after great spiritual victories and highs, continue to walk with God and trust Him. Keep your guard up. Great temptations await. Be prepared so you can be victorious over those temptations.

**AFTER GREAT SPIRITUAL
VICTORIES OR HIGHS
OFTEN COME YOUR
GREATEST LOWS AND
TEMPTATIONS.**

INSIGHTS

WAKE UP

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Several observations can be noted from this familiar parable. Let's look at three. First, **spiritual warfare is real** (vs. 37-39). There is a real devil and he is active, and he is trying to wreak havoc in as many lives as possible. It is no accident that most TV shows and movies are filled with sex and filthy language. Neither is it accidental that prayer in school has been ousted. Homosexuality and pornography are growing. There is a battle going on that we do not see with our natural eyes. Satan wants to destroy you, God loves you and wants you to spend eternity with Him. Do not get entangled with the weeds that the devil sows.

Second, **our enemy is Satan, not the lost** (vs. 25 & 35). It is easy to look at people without Jesus with disdain. We look at their pagan lifestyle and witness their anti-God philosophies and want to judge them, ridicule them, or despise them. But, we must remember, lost people are not the enemy, Satan is. Satan is the destroyer. Lost people are victims. If not by the grace of God you could be just like them. We must love those who do not know Jesus so they may be won over and snatched from Satan's grip.

Third, **sin reigns when the Church sleeps** (v. 25). Our enemy, Satan, is making headway because we, the church, have let him. The church needs to WAKE UP! Romans 13:11 says, "And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber."

An atheist threatened to sue a city in Ohio if a copy of the Ten Commandments was not taken down from a courthouse wall. It was. Christians in the city were outraged. Within six months, 10,000 placards of the Ten Commandments were placed in believer's front yards. The atheist, who was offended by having to see one copy of the Ten Commandments, now was exposed to 10,000 copies. That is the church waking up!

INSIGHTS

IMAGE IS EVERYTHING

Matthew 23:1-7, 25-28

Read each of the following descriptions and picture in your mind the image of what each description represents:

- Pin-striped suit, dress shirt, cell phone, BMW
- Male, long hair, nose ring, sagging pants, T-shirt, multiple tattoos
- Letter jacket, buff/cut body, jeans, “Rocky” voice (*Yo, Adrian!*)

We tend to judge and categorize people based on their outward image. For this reason, many of us spend much time being sure we portray a certain image. After all, image is everything.

The Pharisees probably coined the phrase “image is everything.” Their phylacteries, the leather cases worn on the forehead and left arm containing portions of Exodus and Deuteronomy, were bigger than most. Their tassels, hanging from the four corners of their prayer shawl, were longer than most. The reason for these exaggerations was to display how much “holier” they were than everyone else. They tried to prove their superiority by sitting in the seats reserved for the most prominent people.

What did Jesus say about the Pharisees? He called them whitewashed tombs; beautiful on the outside, dead on the inside. They were like the movie sets in Hollywood – facades; nothing beyond the exterior.

I Samuel 16:7 says God looks at the heart. Romans 8:29 says we are to be conformed to the image of Jesus. Image is everything. We are to bear the image of Christ. Do not neglect your inner person. What you are on the inside is more important than what you appear to be on the outside. Don’t try to look holy. Be holy (I Peter 1:15-16).

**WHAT YOU ARE ON
THE INSIDE IS MORE
IMPORTANT THAN WHAT
YOU APPEAR TO BE
ON THE OUTSIDE.**

INSIGHTS

CLOSENESS = CHANGE

Mark 5:24-34

Have you ever felt desperate? So desperate that you no longer cared what people thought of you or what might happen to you?

In this passage, we see a woman who is desperate. She has been sick for so long. She realizes she has one last hope. Jesus! She knew Jesus was her only hope. She had spent all her money on doctors and remedies only to find them lacking the power to heal her. Now, she is not only sick but she is also broke (v26).

So, she risks being humiliated. She fights through the crowd so she can touch Jesus. She was determined to get as close to Jesus as possible. She was not satisfied with seeing Him from a distance. She wanted close enough to touch Him because she knew if she got that close that she would be healed.

Do you desire to be close to Jesus with that kind of passion? Are you making every effort to be as close to Jesus as possible? Do you spend time with Him daily? Do you confess sin in your life? Do you take advantage of the times you have to worship Him corporately as well as privately?

In verse 34, we see that this woman was the only person healed that day.

Many people were hanging around Jesus. Only one experienced His power.

Let Jesus change you. Don't be content to just hang around the church. Be a person who passionately seeks to be as close to Jesus as possible. His touch can change your life!

**MANY PEOPLE
WERE HANGING
AROUND JESUS.
ONLY ONE EXPERI-
ENCED HIS POWER.**

INSIGHTS

THE MOUNTAIN TOP

Mark 9:2-8

Have you ever had an experience with God that simply overwhelmed you? Reflect on that experience. The experience is so incredible that you wish the experience would never end.

At a retreat, we had a tremendous move of God. At the close of the service time, we had a prayer time. We were praying that God would give us a clear vision for a ministry to students. God enveloped us during that prayer time. The room was filled with an unexplainable presence. We stood in a circle, holding hands praying. Students began to call out to God on behalf of their lost friends. Confession and repentance poured from the hearts and lips of many. Finally, I closed in prayer. After the prayer time no one moved. No one spoke. No one looked around. No one knew what to do. Everyone was frozen by the power and presence of God.

Peter, James and John are in a similar experience. They see a sight that overwhelms them to the point that they want to stay there. But the experience ends (v. 8). I pray you have had and continue to have these kinds of mountaintop experiences. However, ask yourself these two questions.

1. Do I have to have spiritual highs to walk faithfully and to live the Christian life?

2. Am I dependent on Jesus or on spiritual highs? Experience for experience sake is useless. God allows us to experience Him in unique ways so that we may be more devoted followers of Him. Walk with Him faithfully and joyfully whether you are on the mountain top or in the valley.

DO I HAVE TO HAVE
SPIRITUAL HIGHS
TO WALK FAITHFULLY
AND LIVE THE
CHRISTIAN LIFE?

INSIGHTS

SELL EVERYTHING

Luke 18:18-29

This ruler would fit in well in today's society. He knew who Jesus was (v.18); he was interested in spiritual things (v.18); he was a good moral person (v.21); he was wealthy (v.23); and he had knowledge of scripture (v.20). This description could apply to many churchgoers.

However, Jesus was not impressed with these qualities. So, Jesus tells the man to sell everything he has and give it to the poor. The man left sad. Why? Because he could not give up the most important thing in his life – his possessions.

Is Jesus asking you to sell everything you have? Probably not! However, He is asking you to give up whatever is most important in your life. What is Jesus asking you to give up today? Your pride, your popularity, your money, sports, TV, a person? Jesus goes at what is the most important thing in your life and says, "Give it up!"

Why? First, only Jesus satisfies. Nothing else in life can satisfy your deepest longings other than Jesus. Second, Christ is all you need. If you were to lose everything but Jesus, you would discover that He is all you need. Third, Jesus wants you to be totally dependent on Him. No crutches and no security blankets.

The young ruler knew what it took to follow Jesus. He was not willing to do it. Are you? The commitment is hard but well worth it. God promises to reward you in this life and in the life to come (v. 30). I do not know exactly how God will choose to bless you as you leave all to follow Him (v.28). However, those blessings will last forever. That is a pretty good trade – my stuff for His!

**IF YOU WERE TO LOSE
EVERYTHING BUT
JESUS, YOU WOULD
DISCOVER THAT HE
IS ALL YOU NEED.**

INSIGHTS

YOU KNOW

Luke 23:32-43

The crucifixion of Jesus is by far the most moving part of scripture to me. It still amazes me that Jesus would willingly die for me. In the midst of agonizing pain, humiliation, and mockery Jesus demonstrates His faithfulness to His Father and His commitment to mankind.

The rulers and soldiers sneered at Him and mocked Him. If he is really the Christ, prove it they mocked. Save yourself! Jesus ignored their comments and fulfilled His calling. In this scene, Jesus gives a three-fold example of how to live life.

One, when you know who you are, you have nothing to prove. Jesus knew he was the Son of God, the Savior. He did not feel compelled to respond to the jeers by performing some miracle. He felt no obligation to ease their doubts and ridicules.

Two, when you know your purpose, you have steadfastness. Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. He did not come down from the cross because He knew the cross was why he came.

Three, when you know where you are going, you have no fear. Jesus soon would be at the right hand of God His Father in Paradise. Death created no fear in Him.

Do you know who you are? Do you know your purpose? Do you know where you are going? If you are a follower of Christ, you are a child of the King with all the rights and privileges thereof. Your purpose is to glorify Christ in everything you do (I Cor. 10:31). Heaven is your final destination. Don't let persecution or tribulation derail you, distract you, or scare you.

Today, ask God to confirm in your heart who you are in Christ. Recommit yourself to fulfilling God's purpose for your life. Fear not, God is with you.



**DON'T LET
PERSECUTION OR
TRIBULATION DERAIL
YOU, DISTRACT YOU,
OR SCARE YOU.**

INSIGHTS

THE INSURMOUNTABLE

John 6:1-14

In this story, Jesus is faced with an *impossible situation*. A great crowd is gathering (v5). There is not enough money to buy groceries for everyone (v7). Also, there is no store to purchase the food even if they had the money to buy food (v5). Lastly, all the food they have on hand are five loaves of bread and two small fish.

Faced with this impossible situation, Jesus asks an *interesting question*: "Where shall we buy bread?" Jesus is not stumped, He is merely testing the disciples (v6). Philip responds in the flesh (v7).

Consequently, Jesus performs an *incredible miracle*. Not only does He feed all the people, but He exceeds the need (v 12-13).

Jesus proves yet again that nothing is too hard for Him. With God, nothing is impossible. Rest assured today that there is no problem you have that is too big for God. There is no situation too difficult for God to resolve. There is no circumstance in life that is insurmountable if you call on the Lord to meet your need. He is the source. You cannot overcome life's insurmountable issues in the flesh. Only by relying on God's supernatural power can the impossible be accomplished.

1) Is there something in your life that seems insurmountable? 2) If so, are you trusting God or yourself for the solution? Remember, God not only meets your need, He exceeds it!

THERE IS NO
SITUATION TOO
DIFFICULT FOR GOD
TO RESOLVE.

INSIGHTS

WHICH "C" ARE YOU?

John 11:1-6, 16-21, 32, 45-48

Here we read of the death of Lazarus. This passage is a dramatic display of Christ's power and authority as well as His love and compassion. He is in control of all things. Even when on the surface it appears things are out of control, Jesus has your life firmly in His control.

This story features several characters all of whom come from different perspectives and are in different stages of relationship with Jesus. Let's look at each character and see their present state of mind and feelings toward Jesus. As we do, examine yourself and see which one best describes you presently.

In verse 48 we see the Pharisees. The Pharisees were conceited. They felt they were more religious than Jesus. Their belief system was right and they hated and feared Jesus because His system was a threat to theirs. Is your religious belief system getting in the way of you being able to see Jesus as he really is and follow Him?

Verses 21 and 33 reveal Mary and Martha. They are confused. They thought Jesus loved them yet He let Lazarus die. How could a loving Christ allow such a tragedy? They were hurting. Are you in the place of pain and confusion? Has Jesus, in your eyes, failed to come through for you?

Lazarus was comatose. He needed life. Once revived, his grave clothes needed to be removed. Do you feel lifeless, strangled by grave clothes? Do you need reviving?

In verse 16, we see committed Thomas. He did not fully understand all that was happening, but he was willing to die for Jesus if necessary.

Which "C" are you? Let God's power and love revive your lifeless spirit, and bring understanding to your confusion.

**IS YOUR BELIEF
SYSTEM GETTING IN
THE WAY OF YOU BEING
ABLE TO SEE JESUS AS
HE REALLY IS?**

INSIGHTS

PRUNING TIME

John 15:1-15

I transplanted a rose bush from my front yard to my back yard. I had never done that before. I tried to get all the roots so I would not kill the plant. After a few weeks, I noticed the leaves were dying. The plant looked dead. Instead of pulling the plant up, my wife decided to prune it. She cut off all the dead stuff. A few mere leafless stubs remained. To my amazement, in a few weeks, this rose bush was thriving with new blooms. Today, it is bigger and better than ever.

You are much like that rose bush (v. 1-3). To become Christ-like, you must be pruned. Those areas in your life that are not glorifying Christ must be cut away. He may prune you through difficult circumstances. He may prune you through the words of another. He may prune you through His Word. The point is to let God prune you!

The purpose to the pruning is that you would bear fruit. The word *remain* means to “abide,” to “stay,” or to “linger.” The word *bear* means to “carry” or to “identify.” In other words, the only way I can bear fruit is to stay connected to the vine. I cannot produce the fruit. I can only carry the fruit. God produces good fruit in me so I can be identified as a Christian. I bear the likeness of Christ because I have allowed Jesus to prune me.

Meditate on these four questions:

1. Am I bearing godly fruit? Am I identifiable as a Christian?
2. Do I linger in God’s presence?
3. What areas of my life does God need to “prune”?
4. What areas of my life am I being disobedient in? Christ-likeness is neither quick nor easy. But it *is* rewarding and fulfilling!

INSIGHTS

JESUS' PRAYER: PROTECTION

John 17:15-25

In this passage, we see a multi-faceted prayer by Jesus for all believers (v20). One aspect of this prayer is for protection (v15). If Jesus is praying that we be protected, then we must be under attack. We are! The evil one, Satan, is constantly shooting his fiery darts straight toward us.

One of Satan's strategies prevalent today is deception. II Corinthians 11:3 and II Thessalonians 2:9-10 tell us that Satan seeks to deceive us. If he is effective in deceiving us, then he can derail us from believing the Truth, and ultimately destroy us. Below are five popular deceptions of Satan that many are buying into, along with a corresponding scriptural rebuttal.

1. We can have the best of both worlds. James 4:4 says we cannot love the world's system and Christ. We must choose.

2. There is no consequence to sin. James 1:15, Romans 5:12, and Romans 6:23 tell us that sin has deadly consequences. Most of the consequences are not immediate, but that does not mean they do not exist.

3. Christians are powerless. We have the ability to resist temptation and live a victorious, overcoming Christian life. Philippians 4:13, I Corinthians 10:13, Acts 1:8, Ephesians 6:13, Romans 8:37.

4. I can serve God effectively in the flesh. John 15:1-6 says we are only productive spiritually if we stay connected to the source of life and fruit.

5. There are many ways to God. John 14:6 and Acts 4:12 reveal that there is only one way to God and that is through a relationship with Jesus.

Don't let Satan deceive you. Know and believe the truth of God's Word. Remember, Jesus is praying that you will be protected from Satan's deception. May His prayer be answered.

INSIGHTS

JESUS' PRAYER: SANCTIFICATION

John 17:15-25

Not only is Jesus praying for your protection, He is also praying for your sanctification (v17). Sanctification defined is...

- the Holy Spirit's applying to the life of the believer the work done by Jesus Christ.
- the process by which one's moral condition is brought into conformity with one's legal status before God.

A small town pastor, who served in a small church, had a wife and three children. The youngest child, a boy, had just turned four years old. In this church, when a child turned four years old, he or she graduated from the nursery to "big church."

On this boy's first time in big church, his father, the pastor, had a baptismal service. He baptized several people. The son watched motionless. His eyes were fixed on this amazing scene. He watched every move his father made as he baptized.

That afternoon. While the family was eating lunch, the young son asked to be excused from the table. Receiving the OK, the boy ran out of the room. A few moments later a horrifying, penetrating scream emerged: "MEEEEEEEE-OOOOOOOOOWWWWWW!"

The family realized that their cat, who always sits at the foot of the table during mealtimes, was missing. Each family member had the same thought: "THE CAT!"

They all rushed to the bathroom. Sure enough, when they arrived at the bathroom door, they saw the young four year old standing by the toilet, his hand holding down the toilet lid, and smiling ear to ear.

"I baptized the kitty!" the boy proclaimed proudly.

The father approached the toilet and lifted the lid. When he did, he saw their cat clawing his way out of the bowl. With the lid lifted, the cat jumped out of the toilet and went flying through the hall, into the master bedroom, and under the bed. That cat was terrified and traumatized.

The father sent his son to his room. After the family quit their hysterical laughter, they went to find the cat and console him. The father decided to go talk to his son. After all, he could not allow his son to flush the "kitty" down the "potty."

The pastor asked, "Why did you baptize the kitty in the commode?"

The son responded, "Because I want to be like you, Daddy!"

Jesus is praying that you will look like Him and act like Him. May His prayer be answered.

FIVE TRUTHS

Acts 12:1-16

What a story! I would have loved to have been Peter during this experience. Can you imagine what Peter must have been feeling and thinking as these events are taking place?

This story reveals five truths. Meditate on these truths. Make personal application as God's Spirit speaks to you.

FIVE TRUTHS

1. Persecution comes to those who serve Christ (vs. 1-3). II Timothy 3:12 says, "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Expect it. Prepare for it.

2. Your way is not always God's way (v.2). I am sure James' preference was not to die. God's path is sometimes the harder road. Your focus must not be what you want, rather be willing to do what God wants you to do.

3. God knows your situation (v.5). Peter's imprisonment did not catch God by surprise. If you are in a bad situation, know that God is aware of it. In fact, he is busy working in the midst of your situation even before you see Him working.

4. Prayer works (vs.5 & 15). Prayer gets God involved. Is prayer your first response in bad situations? Do you really expect your prayers to be answered?

5. Miracles still happen (vs.6-10). God still intervenes in our situations. God did not stop doing the miraculous when the last apostle died.

CAN YOU IMAGINE
WHAT PETER MUST
HAVE BEEN FEELING
AND THINKING?

Some of these truths are difficult to embrace. Some are difficult to believe, especially when you are in the midst of trying times. However, all of these truths are true. Are you "imprisoned" by something today? If so, get with some friends, pray, and ask God to set you free!

INSIGHTS

JUSTIFICATION

Romans 5:1-5

Therefore! Anytime you see the word “therefore” you must see what “therefore” is there for. In chapter 4, Paul tells how Abraham was justified by faith. Now, he says since you are justified by faith, certain privileges are yours. When you were justified by faith you were given at least five privileges.

1. Peace (v.1)– You now have peace with God. You have been reconciled to Him. You are now God’s friend.

2. Grace (v.2)– You now have access to God’s grace. You are accepted as God’s. God’s wrath no longer awaits you. You can experience His blessings, gifts, and presence fully.

3. Hope (v.3)– You now have a future. Heaven is your eternal reward. Presently, God has a great plan and purpose for your life. You can look toward the future with expectancy.

4. Joy (v.4)– You now can rejoice in suffering because you know God is working His plan in you. You are becoming what God intended you to be through suffering.

5. Love (v.5) – God will pour out His love to you. He does not give it to you in drops, rather He rains down His love in buckets through His Spirit.

Meditate on how God has ministered these five elements to you. Relish

in the fact that because of your faith in Jesus, you get to enjoy peace with God, access to grace, hope for tomorrow, joy even in suffering, and love lavished on you through the Holy Spirit. Nowhere else will you receive these benefits to this degree. “Therefore”, enjoy!

BECAUSE OF YOUR
FAITH IN JESUS, YOU
GET TO ENJOY PEACE
WITH GOD AND HOPE
FOR TOMORROW.

INSIGHTS

TO DO OR NOT TO DO!

Romans 7:15-25

War is a messy endeavor. One day you are winning, the next day you feel like you are losing. In war, one can win many battles but still ultimately lose the war. Likewise, one can lose some battles yet be on the winning side when all is said and done.

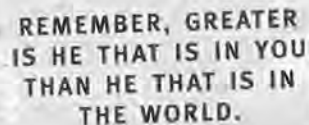
In this passage, Paul expresses his personal inward battle. He does what he does not want to do and he does not do what he knows he should do. He does not want to sin yet he does. He is winning some battles and losing some battles when it comes to his struggle against sin. Can you relate to his frustration?

An unseen spiritual battle is being waged and every believer is in the middle of the battlefield. Satan wants to destroy you. He constantly fires ammo at you in the form of temptations. God loves you and has empowered you to be able to fend off the devilish assaults. This struggle at times can

feel like a tug-of-war. Satan is luring you toward destruction in the form of enticing temptations while God is drawing you toward intimacy with Him through conviction. Remember, greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4). You can win the battle.

When it comes to winning more battles in this spiritual war, remember these truths:

- Submit to God, resist the Devil and he will flee (James 4:7).
- God will always provide a way of escape in temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13).
- Pray for grace in your time of need (Hebrews 4:15),
- Keep your armor on (Ephesians 6:11).
- Jesus has rescued you from the adversary (Romans 7:24-25).



REMEMBER, GREATER
IS HE THAT IS IN YOU
THAN HE THAT IS IN
THE WORLD.

INSIGHTS

GOLF

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Paul compares the Christian life to a race. Allow me the freedom to stretch the athletic analogy to include golf. I love golf. I do not get to play as often as I would like and I am not a good golfer, but I love the game. You may or may not have any interest or knowledge concerning golf. However, believe it or not golf is much like the Christian life. Here are the top ten similarities between golf and the Christian life.

10. Both are challenging. Golf is not an easy sport; neither is the Christian life an easy endeavor.

9. Trouble is everywhere. Golf courses feature sand traps, water hazards, high roughs, and out-of-bounds. Get in any of those and its trouble. Get caught in the hazards of pride, lust, greed, bitterness, laziness, and its trouble.

8. Focus is important. Lose your focus for one shot and it may cost you several strokes. Lose your focus in life and it may cost you more than you want to pay.

7. There are ups and downs. Sometimes you do well and sometimes you don't.

6. Discipline is essential. Constant practice is critical.

5. It is a mental endeavor. Golf, many say, is 90% mental. Romans 12:2, says we are to renew our mind. Mark 12:30 says we are to love God with all of our mind.

4. It is more fun with others. You can do both alone, but both are meant to be enjoyed in groups.

3. The fun outweighs the bad. The bad times are frustrating but the good times are unbelievable.

2. You will never perfect it. You will always have room for improvement. You will always be able to strive to do better.

1. It is a lifelong enjoyment. My basketball days are over, but golf is an "old man's game." Living the Christian life is a lifelong journey. You will never outgrow it

INSIGHTS

MOTIVATED BY LOVE

I Corinthians 12:31-13:7

The early Corinthian believers had gotten off track. They were gifted with spiritual gifts, but they were abusing certain gifts. They had become spiritual show-offs. In the church, each was vying for prominence and attention. They were motivated by pride and selfish ambition trying to prove their deep spirituality to the detriment of others and to the church. The last sentence in I Cor. 12:31 is more literally translated, "Since you are eagerly desiring greater (showy) gifts, let me show you the greatest practice." Then he speaks on love.

Paul is communicating that the most important aspect that reveals your spirituality is love. People will know we are Christians by our love (John 13:35). When you are motivated by love you are demonstrating your spiritual maturity.

Here's a description of love:

Love is patient: Be long-tempered with others. Do not retaliate against or snub others when wronged.

Love is kind: Be useful to others. Kindness repays evil with good deeds. It extends grace to all.

Love does not envy: Rejoice in the successes of others. Do not wish harm on others because you want what they have.

Love does not boast: Do not "toot your own horn" and do not desire others to toot it. Do not demand that conversations revolve around you and your accomplishments.

Love is not proud: Do not maintain or exude an attitude of superiority.

Love is not rude: Do not partake in behavior that violates biblical principles and social standards.

Love always protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres: Love is a lifestyle.

Love should be the motivation for all you do. Are you sometimes motivated by pride or selfish ambition? When you are, you are likely to be impatient, mean, envious, boastful, arrogant, and rude. To check your motivation, examine which characteristics you are displaying. Ask God to help you make love your constant motivation.

INSIGHTS

MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

II Corinthians 5:11-21

Several years ago I had emergency surgery. In a matter of a few weeks I lost 25 pounds. When I was strong enough to “go out”, my wife took me to wash our van. We went to one of those do-it-yourself places. While I was using the foam brush, I got foam on my pants. When I went to swipe the foam from my pants — remember I was 25 pounds skinnier, my wedding ring flew off of my finger. I searched for over thirty minutes for that ring. Finally I found it about 100 yards from the car wash in the middle of the road. Long story short, it had gotten hit by a truck and bounced down the road.

When I picked up the ring, it looked awful. It was bent, dented, scuffed, and covered with tar. But I didn't care. I was just happy I found the ring and that it was not lost for good. In my quiet time the next morning God revealed to me a great truth in regard to the lost ring incident. Just as I longed to recover my ring, God longs for those people who are lost spiritually to be found. Like my ring, many people are battered, bruised, scarred, and covered in sin. That does not matter to God. He loves them anyway. A

master jeweler repaired my ring. God, the Master Physician can repair a broken soul.

Here is the catch: God wants to use you as an instrument of reconciliation. Share the message of reconciliation to a lost soul today. See the lost as Christ sees them. Help reunite a wayward soul to his Creator.

**JUST AS I LONGED TO
RECOVER MY RING,
GOD LONGS FOR
THOSE WHO ARE
LOST TO BE FOUND.**

INSIGHTS

WEAKNESS IS STRENGTH

II Corinthians 12:1-10

Paradox: an assertion that is seemingly contradictory but is actually true. The Christian life embodies several paradoxes. One is this idea: *weakness is strength*. In the verses prior to today's reading, we see Paul boasting (facetiously) about who he is and what he has done. He has much to boast about. Apparently there was a danger of Paul becoming conceited (12:7). So, Paul was given a thorn. We do not know what the thorn was but we do know two things about the thorn. One, Paul did not want it. Two, God did not take it away.

Paul desired to glorify God and to be used of God. Paul initially believed that this thorn would hinder his ability to do what God had called him to do. So, he asked God to remove it. God did not. Why? Weakness is strength!

Grace means favor or comfort. *Sufficient* carries the connotation of having more than enough; ample. *Rest* speaks of permanence. It means to fix a tent on. Instead of removing the thorn, God says, "My comfort is more than enough for you." The phrase, *power made perfect*, literally means that God's power continually increases as Paul's weakness increases. In other words, the weaker you are the greater God's strength is manifest in you.

What Paul thought would hinder his effectiveness in kingdom work was actually the very instrument God used to propel his ministry. What is the application? Your power is insufficient! You cannot resist temptation, further the gospel, or live joyfully in the midst of trials and tribulations in your own strength.

Be like Paul—boast in your weakness. For it is in your weakness that God's strength can rest on you. As long as you walk in self-sufficiency you will not experience God's all-sufficient grace. If you have a thorn, remember it is there for a reason.

INSIGHTS

SALVATION DELIVERED

Ephesians 1:3-14

Often a person makes a purchase and takes the purchased item home immediately. But sometimes a purchase is made and the item must be delivered at a later date. I've bought furniture and had to wait two days for it to be delivered to our home. Technically, the furniture was mine when it was paid for and tagged at the store. But I didn't get to enjoy the furniture until it was delivered.

**YOU ARE BOUGHT BY
JESUS CHRIST, BUT YOU
HAVE NOT YET BEEN
DELIVERED TO YOUR
ULTIMATE DESTINATION.**

Salvation is similar. When saved, you are "tagged" or marked as God's (v.13-14). But, your ultimate redemption is not complete (v.14). You are bought, I Corinthians 6:20 says, at a price, but delivery is pending. As a believer in Christ, you are like the furniture I purchased. You are bought

and paid for by the shed blood of Jesus Christ, but you have not yet been delivered to your ultimate destination. You are still in route.

To prove you are God's purchase, you have received a deposit. For now, you get to enjoy the deposit, the presence of the Holy Spirit. Later you will get to enjoy the full inheritance. When you were purchased by God, you were entitled to the benefits of being His. To be God's means you are:

- adopted as God's son (v.5).
- blameless in God's sight (v.4).
- forgiven by God's grace (v.7).
- sealed with God's Spirit (v.13).
- chosen through God's will (v.4).

What a deal! Thank God today for the inheritance that awaits you. What a day when God's possession is delivered. You and God get to enjoy one another's company forever.

INSIGHTS

STRENGTH

Ephesians 3:14-21

In verse 16, Paul prays that we might be strengthened. Strength means force. He prays that we as believers would have the ability to withstand outside pressures. Power comes from a Greek word that we get our word “dynamite” from. This power comes from God’s Spirit and it resides in the inner being of those who have trusted Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Picture this illustration in your mind. A plastic cup represents your inner being. This cup is sitting on a table. A firecracker, which represents the “power,” is underneath the plastic cup. When the firecracker is lit, it explodes and sends the cup flying six feet into the air. This cup could never soar in the air on its own. It only was able to fly as a result of the explosive power of the firecracker. The power of the firecracker made the cup fly.

You have the strength to resist temptation. You have the strength to live a victorious, joy-filled life, even during times of tribulation and trials. However, the power does not come from yourself. Only the Spirit of God that resides in you through faith can produce that kind of power.

If you desire the strength to resist temptation and to live a victorious Christian life, unleash the power of God’s Spirit within you. Don’t try to live the Christian life in your own strength. Let the Spirit have His way in you.

**YOU HAVE THE
STRENGTH TO LIVE
A VICTORIOUS, JOY-
FILLED LIFE, EVEN
DURING TRIALS.**

INSIGHTS

SURRENDER

Ephesians 3:14-21

Verse 17 says, "...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts." The word *dwell* means "to make one's home in," or "to be at home in." The verse is a prayer of Paul. Paul is saying that he hopes Christ will "be at home" or "feel at home" in your heart.

When I invite a friend into my house and say, "Make yourself at home," I am saying three things. I want my friend to be comfortable in my house, have full access to all rooms in my house, and do what he wants. In other words, I want him to make my home his home. My friend would not feel at home in my house if I gave him a lot of rules, restricted his access to certain rooms, or did things that made him feel awkward. Jesus desires and deserves the same freedoms.

Have you given Jesus full access to every area of your life? Are you holding areas of your life back from him? Have you said, "God, I will give you everything except (fill in the blank)"? Have you given Jesus rules? Told him what he can and can't do with you? Jesus does not want to succumb to your will. He wants you to submit to his! Are there things in your life that are awkward with Jesus in there? Examine your heart, see if any sin is at home in you. If so, evict the sin so Jesus' Spirit can be comfortable to roam through your entire being.

Don't restrict the Spirit's work in you! Surrender every aspect and area of your life to him. Give him full access, let him do what he wants with you. Let him "be at home" in your heart.

**JESUS DOES NOT
WANT TO SUCCUMB
TO YOUR WILL.
HE WANTS YOU TO
SUBMIT TO HIS.**

INSIGHTS

SATURATION

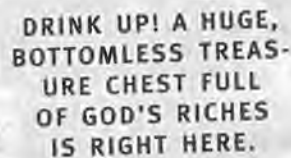
Ephesians 3:14-21

I am sure you have watched a movie or read a book where the story line revolved around a person or persons trying to find a pirate's hidden treasure chest. These people want to find the chest because they're aware of the fact that the pirate's treasure or riches are stored in that chest.

Verse 16 says that God has "glorious riches." It is as if God has this huge bottomless treasure chest, and in this chest are all of his riches. In verse 19, Paul prays that you would be filled with the "fullness" of God. In other words, be saturated! Enjoy, partake of all of God's riches.

My dog will not drink from her outside water bowl. She is an inside dog with an inside water bowl. However, when we are not home she stays outside. Regardless if that dog has been outside for 10 hours in 100 degree weather, she will not drink water from the outside water bowl. She would rather die from dehydration than drink from that bowl. She will look at it, sniff it, even step in it, but she won't drink from it. Life-saving water is right there for the drinking but she refuses.

Paul says DRINK UP! All of God's fullness — this huge, bottomless treasure chest full of God's riches — is right here. Don't dehydrate spiritually. Spend time with God. Spend time in his Word. Commune with him. Let him reveal his goodness. Then saturate yourself in it!



**DRINK UP! A HUGE,
BOTTOMLESS TREAS-
URE CHEST FULL
OF GOD'S RICHES
IS RIGHT HERE.**

INSIGHTS

ROCK CLIMBING

Ephesians 6:10-18

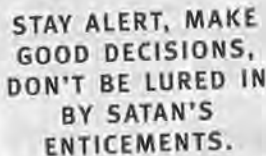
My oldest son enjoys rock climbing. I don't know much about rock climbing. Really, all I know is what my son tells me. As a result of our conversations, I have come to realize that rock climbing and spiritual warfare have much in common. Three factors are important to both activities.

First, *you must have the right equipment*. To rock climb, you need a good pair of climbing shoes and a good rope that has some give or stretch to it. Also needed are carabiners, or rings of solid aluminum with a spring-loaded gate that holds the rope. The harness is worn by the climber and belay devices are used to stop a falling climber. For spiritual warfare, God has fully equipped you to effectively thwart the enemy's attacks. A rock climber must have his equipment with him in order to climb. You must always wear your spiritual armor in order to be victorious in your spiritual battles.

Second, *you must be grounded on the rock*. A climber must stay firmly grounded on rock. He moves from rock to rock. When the climber gets off the rock he can fall. Verse 10 says to be strong in the Lord. You cannot be strong in yourself. You need to rely on God's strength, you must stand on the Rock of Ages to withstand Satan's assaults.

Third, *watch your step*. A wrong step for a climber leads to a fall. A wrong step for a believer leads to a fall. Satan puts temptations in front of you that may look appealing. However, take a step toward it and down you go. Stay alert, make good decisions, don't be lured in by Satan's enticements.

Thank God that he has equipped you for battle. Win the battle today.



STAY ALERT, MAKE
GOOD DECISIONS,
DON'T BE LURED IN
BY SATAN'S
ENTICEMENTS.

INSIGHTS

NEGATIVE IS POSITIVE

Philippians 1:12-21

Another great paradox in scripture is negative is positive. The truth is that God uses negative circumstances for positive results. In this passage, Paul is in chains. He is imprisoned, not for a crime committed, rather for sharing Christ.

We see two positive results emerging from Paul's negative situation. One, those needing to hear the gospel heard it (v. 13). The Palace Guard was like today's Secret Service. As the guards watched Paul, Paul told them about Jesus. Probably as many as 1,000 soldiers heard the gospel, most of whom might never have heard the truth had Paul not been in prison. Thankfully, he was willing to be used even in that situation.

Two, those needing boldness to share the gospel got it (v.14). Christians were being persecuted at that time. As a result, many grew afraid of telling people about Jesus. Paul's faithfulness inspired others to also take a stand and boldly proclaim the message.

Are you in a negative situation? If so, instead of asking God to take you out of the situation, ask Him to use you in the midst of your situation. Our priority should be commitment, not comfort. There is a purpose in your pain. God's power will sustain you and he will glorify Himself through your negative situation if you will allow Him to.

Instead of complaining about your situation, embrace it. Let God use you in the midst of it. Watch God do the incredible. Remember, with God's perspective, negative is positive.

INSTEAD OF COMPLAINING ABOUT YOUR SITUATION, EMBRACE IT. LET GOD USE YOU IN THE MIDST OF IT.

INSIGHTS

J E S U S

Colossians 1:15-23

Spend today reflecting on Jesus. Today's passage gives us much insight into Jesus. Look at what this passage tells us about Jesus. Jesus is:

- **the very image of God:** the reality of God (v.15).
- **the firstborn:** first in power and position (v.15).
- **the Creator:** all things are created by Him (v.16).
- **the Sustainer:** all things are held in place by Him (v.17).
- **eternal:** He is before all things ((v.17).
- **our Authority:** He is the head, supreme (v.18).
- **our Reconciler:** He moved us from enmity to friendship with God (v.20).
- **the Sacrifice:** His blood paid my debt (v.20).
- **our Justifier:** He presents me without blemish and free from accusation (v.22).

Words cannot describe the splendor, the majesty, the radiance of God. Yet we use words to try and capture who Jesus is and what He means to us. Below is an excerpt from a song I wrote that describes who Jesus is to me. May these words be a blessing to you.

*Sweetest Rose of Sharon, Bright Morning Star;
Fairest of ten thousand, that is who You are.
Lily of the Valley, sweetest name I know.
You gave Your life on Calvary to pay the debt I owe.
Everlasting Father, Giver of good things;
You are the Great I AM, that is why I sing
Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End;
The sacrificial Lamb of God who took away my sin.*

Praise Him today for who He is! Worship Him anew! Fall deeper in love with Him today!

INSIGHTS

ASHAMED

II Timothy 1:1-8

In verse 8, Paul tells Timothy to not be ashamed to testify about the Lord. Why are we as believers ashamed at times to tell others about Jesus? May I suggest two reasons? One reason is sin. Verse 9 says we have been called to live a holy life. Unfortunately, not all believers are living a holy life.

I was eating at a restaurant one evening. As we prepared to pay and leave, I excused myself to go to the restroom which was located near the entrance of the restaurant. As I entered the restroom, things didn't look right. Something was missing, but I didn't put two and two together until I walked out of the restroom. As I exited the restroom into the main foyer, I noticed that everyone (a dozen people or so) was staring at me and giggling and pointing. I turned around to see the sign on the door. It said, WOMEN. I had been in the ladies restroom. I was so embarrassed; I felt so ashamed. When you, as a Christian, live in sin, you can't help but feel shame because God's Spirit will convict you. It is hard to tell others about the change Jesus can make when you are not living a changed life yourself.

A second reason is fear. According to verse 7, Timothy must have been experiencing fear. Fear keeps you from doing what you should and could be doing. By the end of my 9th grade year, I was ranked 3rd in my county in tennis. Late the next summer we had tryouts for the varsity team at school. I played my first match on Friday and won it. I was to return Saturday for several more matches, but I didn't return. I was afraid that I was not good enough to make the team, so I did not even try. My fear halted my activity. Fear of rejection, failure, and persecution keeps many believers from sharing the gospel.

Are you ashamed of the gospel? Is fear or your unholy lifestyle keeping you from being a bold witness for Christ? If so, confess it today and ask God to give you a spirit of power and love to unashamedly share the gospel.

**IS FEAR OR YOUR
UNHOLY LIFESTYLE
KEEPING YOU FROM
BEING A BOLD WITNESS
FOR CHRIST?**

INSIGHTS

PREPARATION IS THE KEY

II Timothy 4:1-5

Paul tells Timothy to be prepared in season and out of season (v2). What does Paul want Timothy to be prepared to do? He wants him to be able to correct, rebuke, encourage, instruct. He wants him to be able to spot and resist false doctrines and myths, and to recognize those who teach these ideas.

How is Timothy to be prepared? He is prepared by staying in the Word. He is prepared by staying in tune with God through prayer. Preparation is important because it is through preparation that one succeeds. When crises come, I do not have time to prepare. I must be prepared before the crises occur.

- An athlete succeeds in the game because of his preparation and workout routine.
- A musician performs well because he has done scales and practiced in private.
- A student aces a test because he studies beforehand.

A Christian must prepare himself for living a victorious Christian life. Victory does not come by accident. Your spiritual preparation in private is directly related to your success in public.

**YOUR SPIRITUAL
PREPARATION IN
PRIVATE IS DIRECTLY
RELATED TO YOUR
SUCCESS IN PUBLIC.**

If you are experiencing defeat in your Christian life, take a look at your preparation time. Are you showing up for game time out of shape? You will do much better in the tests of life if you have spent time studying the book that has all the answers.

INSIGHTS

DISCIPLESHIP

Titus 2:1-14

Think about those persons who have impacted your walk with Christ and have invested in your spiritual maturity. What did these people do for you? What are some of the characteristics of their life?

Discipleship is a churchy word for impacting a person's life. A commitment to discipleship is not just a personal commitment to grow in your own walk with Christ. It is also a commitment to invest in the lives of others and encourage others to grow in their walk with Christ.

Paul disciplined Titus. Paul took the responsibility of helping Titus grow in the faith. Now he is challenging Titus to do the same. Three aspects of effective discipleship are given in this passage.

1. Teach sound doctrine (v.11) – Teach the fundamental truths of God's Word. Be sure your "student" is grounded in the Word.

2. Teach some to train others (v.4-10) – When you invest your life in someone encourage them to in turn invest their life in another.

3. Teach by example (v.7) – Live what you teach. Have integrity. Seek to live an upright and godly life (v.12).

The question for today: Are you involved in the discipleship process? Are you intentionally investing your life into the life of another? It is great to deepen your own walk with Christ. However, it is even better to also help another deepen their walk as well.

If you are discipling another, great. If you are not, ask God to make it clear to you when He thinks you are ready to disciple another. Then, trust God to lead you to the one He has prepared for you.

ARE YOU INVOLVED
IN DISCIPLESHIP?
ARE YOU INVESTING
YOUR LIFE INTO THE
LIFE OF ANOTHER?

INSIGHTS

KNOWN FOR

Philemon 1

What would you consider to be the greatest compliment someone could give you? As people think about you, what would they consider to be your best attributes?

Philemon is the subject of Paul's letter. Paul gives high praise to Philemon. Paul recognizes five qualities in Philemon. In verse 5, Philemon is recognized for his faith in the Lord Jesus. Philemon's faith was so real, so alive, so public that Paul was hearing reports about it. He also had great love for the saints. He demonstrated love to his fellow believers. These acts of love must have been consistent for Paul to note them.

In verse 21, Philemon is recognized for his obedience. Philemon was a man who sought to walk with God in a consistent, obedient manner. His life was yielded to his Lord and Savior. He is also commended for his generosity. Paul knew Philemon would do and give more than he asked. Philemon was generous with his love, his praise, his time, his money, his life.

In verse 22, we see that he was a man of prayer. Do these attributes describe you? Can people write or say these things about you? Which one of these attributes do you need to improve on? May others thank God for you because of your ministry to them.

WHEN PEOPLE THINK
ABOUT YOU, WHAT
DO THEY CONSIDER
TO BE YOUR BEST
ATTRIBUTES?

INSIGHTS

RUN THE RACE

Hebrews 12:1-3

Picture this: Four people are lined up to race in a 100 meter dash. One person has a 10lb weight attached to each leg. Another has both legs tied together. A third is completely blindfolded. The fourth person has no restrictions. With all other physical factors equal, who do you think wins the race? Obviously, the one free of hindrances wins.

In this passage, you are encouraged to run the race. To run effectively, watch out for three hindrances. One, do not become **burdened**. Throw off those weighty things that hinder your ability to run. We all face pressures in life relating to finances, children, work, health, etc. Do not let the pressures of life weigh you down. Throw them off. Let God carry them. Cast your cares on God for he cares for you (I Peter 5:7).

Two, do not become **bound**. We all have sins that we are particularly prone toward. Don't let sin entangle you and trip you up. Make confession of sin a consistent habit (I John 1:9).

Three, do not be **blind**. Fix your eyes on Jesus. In basketball, a person guarding the person with the ball should keep his eyes on his opponent's torso. If he fixes his eyes on the ball or on the feet, he can be fooled. The torso is the constant. Jesus is the Author and Finisher of your faith. Fix your eyes on Him. If you place your attention and focus on something else you will be fooled and be blinded by the evil one.

Your race is a marathon not a 100 meter dash. Are you burdened? Are you bound? Are you blind? If you are, talk to God about it today. Remove the hindrance. Run the race!

IF YOU PLACE YOUR
ATTENTION AND FOCUS
ON SOMETHING ELSE,
YOU WILL BE FOOLED
BY THE EVIL ONE.

INSIGHTS

WASH UP

James 4:6-10

Let's camp out at verse 8, where it says, "wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts..." To explain what this phrase is saying, allow me to relate two stories.

My youngest son cannot be accused of being a neat freak. The concept of cleaning his room does not compute. I remember one specific instance when I asked him to clean his room. He closed his door and went to work cleaning. In just a few moments he opened his door, proudly paraded into the living room, and announced he was done cleaning his room. When I entered his room, sure enough it looked clean. There was nothing on the floor. As I opened the closet door I realized he had not cleaned his room, he had merely hidden everything in his closet.

When I was a youth minister, two of my senior guys came to church one summer Sunday morning in polyester three-piece suits. They had never worn suits to church. They usually came in short-sleeve shirts. They had even been known to wear shorts. After teasing them, I asked why the new dress code. They confessed. The day before, they had worked on their cars. They had grease all over them. Instead of washing up, they wore the suits to cover up the grease.

In today's passage, *wash your hands* means to deal completely with your sin. *Purify your hearts* means to not hide your sin, instead, confess it. When you sin, never try to hide it from God. Likewise, do not harbor it in your heart. Confess it and get rid of it – all of it. Today, ask God to reveal if you have unconfessed sin in your life. If He says you do, "Wash up!"

**WHEN YOU SIN,
NEVER TRY TO HIDE IT
FROM GOD. LIKEWISE,
DON'T HARBOR IT IN
YOUR HEART.**

INSIGHTS

USE YOUR GIFTS

1 Peter 4:1-11

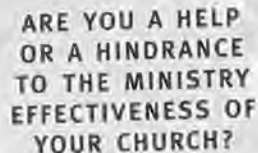
You may feel silly doing what I am about to ask. However, if possible do the following activities. By doing them you will better understand today's truth.

First, gather the following items: board, hammer, nail, screw, screwdriver, small wrench, pliers. Try to hammer the nail into the board by using the wrench. Now hammer the nail with the hammer. Next, try to screw in the screw with the pliers. Finally, use the screwdriver to put the screw into the board. Obviously it is easier to do a job when you use the correct tools.

Second, collect a baseball, a basketball, a soccer ball, a chair, and something edible. Toss the baseball in the air a few times. Now dribble the basketball. Now kick the soccer ball from foot to foot. Next, sit and stand several times. Finally, take a bite of your food item. Now do all of these things at the same time! It was easy to do those things one at a time. It was impossible to do them as well (if at all) when you had to do them all at once.

These two illustrations expose two problems in the church. One, many people serve in no ministry position. Two, because of problem #1, some serve in multiple positions. These problems create two negative results. First, people are having to minister outside of their giftedness. For them, it is like driving a nail with a wrench; possible but frustrating and difficult. Second, some people are doing too much. As a result, they are not doing any of their ministries well.

Verse 10 says, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others..." Are you using your gifts in ministry? The church functions best when every believer does his part. Are you a help or a hindrance to the ministry effectiveness of your church? Use your gifts! Be involved in ministry! Help your church be all it can be for the glory of God!



ARE YOU A HELP
OR A HINDRANCE
TO THE MINISTRY
EFFECTIVENESS OF
YOUR CHURCH?

INSIGHTS

FAULTLESS FOREVER

Jude 1:17-25

I am sure you have attended a banquet or event, or seen one on TV, where a special guest was featured. Typically at these sort of events, a person comes to the podium and introduces the esteemed guest. The “introducer” might say something like, “It is with great joy and pleasure that I present to you...!” Great applause follows.

One day, a similar scene will take place in Heaven. Jesus will be the “introducer” and you, as a believer, will be the esteemed guest. Verse 2 says Jesus will present you before His glorious presence with great joy. The word “present” means to “make you stand.” Jesus, allegorically speaking, will stand you before all of Heaven and say, “It is with great joy and pleasure that I present to you...(your name)... faultless forever.” Faultless means to be spotless, un-blamable. It literally means that not a drop of iniquity remains on the soul.

Your presentation into eternity is just that – eternal. The phrase “before all ages, now and forevermore” is as complete a statement of eternity as can be expressed. It covers the past, present, and future. How can one stand before Christ faultless, blameless, spotless? Through Jesus Christ our Lord (v.25)! He erases your debt and washes you clean. Psalm 103:12 says your sins were removed as far as the east is from the west. Psalm 130:3 says no record of sin is kept. Upon salvation, your sin is forgiven, forgotten, and forever removed. Though your sin was like scarlet, it has been washed white as snow (Isaiah 1:18).

HOW CAN ONE STAND BEFORE CHRIST FAULTLESS, BLAMELESS, SPOTLESS? THROUGH JESUS CHRIST!

The One who will introduce you is the One who made it possible for you to be there. Today, thank Jesus for His cleansing blood that washed you so clean that you will be presented in Heaven as “Faultless Forever!”

INSIGHTS

FACETS OF FAITH: A WAR

I Timothy 1:18; II Corinthians 10:3-4; Ephesians 6:11-18

For the next six days, we will look at different descriptions of the Christian life. Each description reveals a different element to the Christian life. We must understand each description. Together, the six descriptions embody the entire Christian experience. However, if we don't understand one or more, our Christian life can become out of balance.

Today's description is *war*. The Christian life is described in scripture as a war. The specific element here is intensity. There should be an intensity to your Christian life. We must understand that we are in a battle. Satan is a roaring lion, an adversary, an enemy. He is on a search-and-destroy mission. If you are not aware of and equipped for the battle, you will be defeated.

The best way to defeat the enemy is to know his plan of attack. Satan has a four-phase plan of attack:

- 1) **He wants to entice you.** Just like in Genesis 3 with Eve, Satan tries to make sin look appealing.
- 2) **He lures you in.** He wants you to take a bite. He encourages you to rationalize why committing this sin is OK. "Only once won't hurt." "No one will know." "I can ask forgiveness later."
- 3) **He traps you.** Once you bite, you're trapped.
- 4) **His final desire is to destroy you.**

The best way to be victorious in this war is to recognize Satan's attack in the enticement stage. Resist him. Use your armor to deflect his assault. God has given you the ability to resist the Devil and to resist temptation. The Christian life is a war. It is a fight you can win.

**GOD HAS GIVEN
YOU THE ABILITY
TO RESIST THE DEVIL
AND TO RESIST
TEMPTATION.**

INSIGHTS

FACETS OF FAITH: A PARTY

Psalm 68:3; II Samuel 6:14; Psalm 51:12

The Christian life is also described as a party. Words like *rejoice, joy, dance, sing, shout, feast, celebrate* are used throughout scripture. These words are all descriptive of a party. The specific element communicated here is *Enjoyment*. The Christian life should be fun, exciting and full of joy. Yes the Christian life is a war, but it is also a party.

I am sure that you have attended a live sporting event. During the game, when the home team does good things, the fans go nuts. They are up screaming, dancing, clapping. They are having a blast. Many times before a football game, fans will meet together in the parking lot for a tailgate party. Friends celebrating together, eating together, and enjoying one another's company is all part of the package. What a great experience.

The Christian life should be the same way. Yes, there is a time and place for quiet reverence, but there is also a time and place for a get-down, get-with-it celebration. Your salvation should have created joy in you. David prays for God to restore the joy of his salvation. Do you need to pray that prayer today? Has the intense war aspect of your faith robbed you of your joy?

You do not have to physically dance before the Lord, but your spirit should be dancing before Him. Today, may you rejoice before God. May you be happy and joyful. May you walk in the joy of your salvation. Party on!

**THERE IS A TIME
AND PLACE FOR QUIET
REVERENCE, BUT THERE
IS ALSO A TIME
FOR CELEBRATION.**

INSIGHTS

FACETS OF FAITH: A FAMILY

II Corinthians 6:18; I John 3:1-3; Romans 8:29

I have a picture of my youngest son when he was six months old. When I put that picture next to my picture when I was six months old, the two pictures look almost exactly alike. One would think that the two pictures are of the same person.

In scripture, God is called, among other names, our Father. We are called his children. The third description of the Christian life is that of a family. The old chorus that says, "I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God," expresses this concept. The specific element for this aspect is "image."

It is amazing how much children look like their parents. As children of God, we should bear the image or the likeness of our Father. This dimension of Christian life is really a call to discipleship.

While on earth, we are to be continually growing in Christ-likeness. II Cor. 3:18 says we, "...are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory." Romans 8:29 says we were predestined to look like God's son.

Do you look like your heavenly father? Can people see in you the characteristics of Jesus? Do you look more like Jesus today than you did a year ago?

Today, renew your commitment to spend your life becoming more like Jesus. Rejoice that you have a loving father. The greatest compliment you can give him is to want to be like him?

**DO YOU LOOK
MORE LIKE JESUS
TODAY THAN YOU
DID A YEAR AGO?**

INSIGHTS

FACETS OF FAITH: A BODY

Ephesians 4:25; 5:30; Colossians 1:24; I Cor . 12:12-18

As Christians, we are part of a body. Each believer has a function. In order for the body to be healthy, each part of the body must function as it was created to function. In other words, you are important!

Try dribbling a basketball with your feet. Try writing your name by holding the pen in your mouth. Try catching a ball with your eyes closed when it is thrown to you from ten feet away. All of these tasks might be possible to do, but the result will be much worse than if those tasks were done using the appropriate part of the body. It is easier to catch a ball with your eyes open and to dribble a ball with your hands.

The specific element for this facet is "exercise." You must function in the body. You have been given at least one spiritual gift. You are to use it in service to the body. God's church can function without you and your gift. However, it will function much better with you using your gift.

In order for your body to maintain good health you must exercise. Bad things begin to happen to you when you do not exercise, especially if you go long periods of time without exercise. The body of Christ suffers when you do not exercise your gift.

Are you contributing to the health of the body of Christ? Are you exercising by using your gift? Discover your spiritual gift. Develop it. Demonstrate your spiritual gift by using it to edify the body.

ARE YOU CONTRIBUTING TO THE HEALTH OF THE BODY OF CHRIST? ARE YOU USING YOUR GIFT?

INSIGHTS

FACETS OF FAITH: A RACE

Hebrews 12:1; I Cor. 9:24; Galatians 5:7; II Tim. 4:7-8

When I was in college, my fraternity entered an intramural swimming competition. I like to swim but I am not a great swimmer. I was at this swim meet to keep stats and cheer my frat brothers on.

The last event was a four-person relay. Each person was to swim two hundred meters freestyle. But a few minutes before the race, the guy who was to swim third got sick. He couldn't compete. So I volunteered to take his place. I ran into the locker room, changed into a swim suit, then ran back outside and took my place. When it was my turn I jumped in the water and flew the first length. I made the turn and swam a pretty fast second leg. When I turned to swim lap three, it was as if I hit a wall. All of my body parts began to shut down. I finally finished lap three. When I turned for the fourth and final lap, I thought I was going to drown. People were threatening to jump in and save me. My legs dangled motionless in the water, my arms barely moved. All the other teams' final swimmers were done. I was in the pool alone. I started with a blaze of glory. I finished a tired, beaten, humiliated, waterlogged man.

The Christian life is a race. But it's a marathon, not a sprint. The specific element is "endurance." Many start well but fade in the end. Will you finish strong? At the end of the race God will be at the finish line. It will be great to hear him say, "Well done. Come receive your crown."

Determine today to endure, to finish strong. Don't let sin or frustration or laziness or age keep you from breaking the tape in full stride.

**I STARTED WITH A
BLAZE OF GLORY.
I FINISHED A TIRED,
BEATEN, HUMILIATED,
WATERLOGGED MAN.**

INSIGHTS

FACETS OF FAITH: A MARRIAGE

Ephesians 5:23, 31-33; Revelation 19:7

Finally, the last description of the Christian life is that of a marriage. The element here is “intimacy.” If you are married, do you remember your honeymoon night? Remember the passion you had for your spouse? Your greatest desire at that moment was to be with your spouse. We as believers are the bride of Christ. Jesus longs to have intimacy with you. Do you long for intimacy with him?

Song of Solomon expresses in vivid detail the passion of two people that are intimate with each other. Are you madly in love with Jesus? Do you desire to be with him more than with any other person?

Unfaithfulness can kill intimacy in a marriage probably faster than anything else. Proverbs 5:15 tells spouses to drink from their own cistern. In other words, do not adulterate yourself with another person. Be intimate only with your spouse. We can have no other gods other than Jehovah. Christ alone should receive our love and allegiance. Believers must never let something become dearer to them than Jesus.

How’s your love life? Not with your spouse, with Jesus. Is there anything in your life right now more important to you than your relationship with God? Are you dedicating time to spend alone with Him? It is in your time alone that intimacy grows. Renew your commitment to spend time alone with God. Remove anything that has taken the place of Jesus as your first love.

**IS THERE ANYTHING
IN YOUR LIFE RIGHT
NOW MORE IMPORTANT
THAN YOUR RELATION-
SHIP WITH GOD?**

INSIGHTS

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