

DAILY PATH



VOLUMES
FIVE & SIX



PARAMOUNT

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INTRODUCTION

This 80-day devotional guide (the combined volumes 5 and 6 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. You may choose to journal your thoughts or 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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FROM FEAR TO FREEDOM

Exodus 3:10-14, 4:1-2, 10-13

In 8th grade I moved to a new city, which meant I had to enter a new school. I did not know how to order lunch at this new school because it was so different than what I was used to. I was too fearful to ask how to order, so instead of eating lunch, each day I went into the boy's restroom and read a book. Humiliating I know! After several weeks in this routine, I discovered that guys were playing basketball during lunch. Since I loved basketball I started going to the courts. Soon I was playing basketball and making friends. When they went in to order lunch I followed them, listened to how they ordered and learned the system. Now I was playing ball with friends and eating lunch. No more reading in the restroom! I had moved from fear to freedom!

Moses had a similar predicament. He was fearful. We see this fear in the Exodus passages. We can identify three fears that Moses displayed, and the fears we must guard against as well.

Fear One - The Fear of Inadequacy - "What if I Can't" Syndrome

Moses' response to God's call in Exodus 3:11 is, "Who am I?" In other words, I can't do this! God responds by saying I CAN! God does not always call

the equipped but He always equips the called! If God calls you to service for Him, he will equip you to do the task.

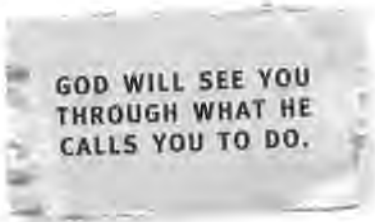
Fear Two - The Fear of Failure - "What if I Don't" Syndrome

In Exodus 4:10 Moses expressed his lack of communication skills. What I sense here is Moses saying what if I fail! God assures him of his presence and his power. God will see you through what He calls you to do, He won't leave you hanging! He will provide everything you need to accomplish the task he calls you to.

Fear Three - The Fear of Opposition - "What if I Try" - Syndrome

Moses' fear expressed in Exodus 4:1 - what if they do not believe me or do not listen to me or challenge me or attack me or oppose me? What then? God again promises to provide his power and presence even in the midst of opposition.

The truth for today is that whatever God calls you to do you need not fear. God will provide everything you need including his very presence with you. Trust in God's adequacy and power to enable you to complete the task God calls you to.



**GOD WILL SEE YOU
THROUGH WHAT HE
CALLS YOU TO DO.**

ONE TRUE GOD

Exodus 20:1-17

For the next several days, we will be in this same passage as we look at the different vintage commandments given by God. Today we look at the first one in verses 1-3 - *You shall have no other gods before me.*

The Suzerainty treaties were common in the Near East in the 2nd millennium BC. In these treaties, the Suzerain (great king) and vassal (servant) made a treaty that identified the Suzerain as the king of kings and he would claim ultimate authority over all other kings. This vassal would serve this Suzerain exclusively. Quite possibly, Moses and the Israelites were familiar with this kind of treaty, which means this commandment clarifies Yahweh as the Great King. When the Israelites accepted this commandment they were accepting the Lordship of Yahweh.

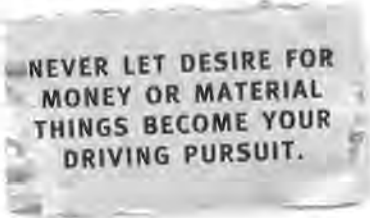
God knew the people would have a tendency to drift toward polytheism or worshipping other gods. He wanted to set Himself apart as the founder of Israel and the One True God.

Like the Israelites, we too have a tendency to drift toward dependence on other things. Two "gods" have risen in popularity over the years.

One is Narcissus. In ancient mythology, Narcissus was a youth that fell in love with his reflection. The application for us - It is all about me. In Narcissism we in essence worship ourselves. I am in control. The focus is on me and what I want. We expect people to serve us rather than serving others. We want our needs met rather than meeting the needs of others. Narcissus becomes our god when it becomes all about me!

Mammon is the other god. Mammon is defined as the false god of riches. During the Middle Ages, Mammon was personified as the demon of riches. When the desire for money and material things becomes our driving pursuit, we have drifted toward the god of Mammon.

Is the focus of your life on yourself, on money, or on the One True God? God says I am the Lord your God and I will protect you, provide for you, and bless you. So, may He be your One True God and may you never drift toward another!

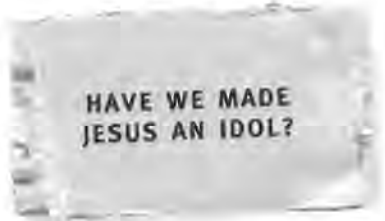


IDLE IDOLS

Exodus 20:1-17

Today we examine the second commandment in verses 4-6 - *You shall not make for yourself an idol*. Ancient idol makers were craftsmen. In many ways they were also theologians. An idol was a visual aid made to describe that god's attributes. For example, if the idol maker made an idol with the body of a lion, the legs of a bull, the wings of an eagle, and the head of a man, then he was describing that god as having the speed of a lion, the strength of a bull, the wisdom of man, and that he should be exalted like an eagle. So, over time, worshippers moved from worshipping that god to worshipping the idol itself.

Note the progression in verses 4-5. Do not "make" an idol! Do not "bow down" to that idol! Do not "worship" that idol! God said do not acknowledge (make) any idol because once you do, it will not be long until you give it external demonstrations of allegiance (bow down to it) and soon you will give it your full devotion (worship it). Most of us do not worship real idols (what an oxymoron). But, have we made Jesus an idol?



I used to keep in my office a wooden Jesus head that a friend brought to me from Israel. It looked just like how I thought Jesus would look like: beard, long hair and a crown of thorns. Every day when I arrived in my office I would bow down to that Jesus head and pray to it. NOT REALLY! However, as I thought about this wooden Jesus, I realized how convenient it would be to have a Jesus like this. I would not have to worry about him telling me to do something I didn't want to do; or confronting me on any issues in my life; or convicting me. I could take him with me or I could leave him if I didn't want him around. I could worship him on my terms! I would be in control and I would dictate the terms of the relationship.

The problem with reducing God to this wooden Jesus head idol is it makes God less than he is. It strips him of his power, glory and majesty. It puts me in control instead of him.

Here is the question of the day - Have you created a Jesus idol? Do you worship God or do you worship what you want God to be? Are you trying to control Him instead of allowing him to control you? Have you crafted Jesus into what you want him to be rather than allowing him to be all that he is? Don't reduce Jesus to a wooden head!

WHAT'S IN A NAME

Exodus 20:1-17

Names are important! As parents we struggle to find the right names for our children. Names mean something. Names identify us! In ancient Judaism names were extremely important. Hebrew names were often actually sentences within themselves. Jacob means, "He grasps the heel". Israel means, "He struggles with God". Abraham means, "Father of many". Likewise, God's name is important!



Today we examine commandment three in verse 7 - *You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.* God's name, as with the Hebrew tradition, represents who he is. God's name means God himself. His name includes all of his nature, virtues, attributes, character, methods, words, authority and truth.

B.H. Carroll says God's name = God's essence (all that He is). So, what does it mean to misuse his name? We misuse God's name when we trifle it, misapply it and tarnish it. But I want to look at a subtle misuse of God's name; that is when we make it of no avail. We misuse God's name when we are fruitless, when we do not allow him to be who he is in us, when carrying his name seems to make no difference in us. This subtlety of misuse comes when we do not apply the meanings of God's names.

1. Adonai - Master - Are you allowing God to be Sovereign? Have you given God outright ownership of your life?
2. Jehovah Rapha - The Lord Heals - This name refers to restoring something to its normal state. Are you allowing him to heal your brokenness?
3. Jehovah Jireh - The Lord Provides - Are you asking for and trusting in God's provision?
4. Jehovah Shalom - The Lord is Peace - When Gideon was afraid he built an altar and called it The Lord is Peace. Are you experiencing the peace of God? Do you find yourself in times of great anxiety and fear? In those times let God be your peace!
5. EL-elyon - God Most High - Are you exalting God as the most important thing in your life?

We could continue, however the point is this - God does not want us to misuse his name. Stated in the positive, he desires we use his name appropriately. May you appropriate his name today! Claim him as your healer, provider, and master! Experience the essence of God as you claim his name!

S A B B A T H

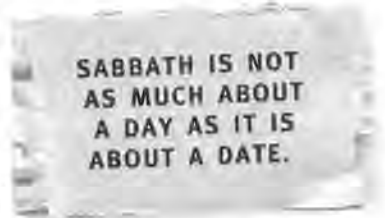
Exodus 20:1-17

As we survey verses 8-11, what does it mean to “*remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy*”? This subject is broad and cannot be thoroughly investigated in today’s devotion. But for simplicity’s sake, look at the Sabbath as a date: a date with God!

Think of our relationship to God like a marriage. As a couple we become consumed with kids, work, chores, paying bills, etc. The marriage can suffer if we do not prioritize time with each other. Likewise, our lives are busy, consumed with a myriad of responsibilities and activities. Our relationship with God can suffer if we do not make time for Him. Sabbath is a way to make time for God! It’s a date!

Keeping the Sabbath holy means to set it apart. To remember it or observe it means to guard it, secure it, cling to it. So, we keep the Sabbath holy when we prioritize and set apart time to worship. It is not intended to be a spiritual straight jacket binding us to some legalistic practice. Simply stated it is not as much about a day as it is about a date!

Remembering the Sabbath provides a time of healing. The Israelites were not to plant crops on the 7th year. This was a time for the land to repair, recover and recuperate. Life is hard and can wear us down. As we rest in the Lord, he restores damaged areas of our lives. He rejuvenates our passion and fire for Him. He renews our commitment to follow after Him.



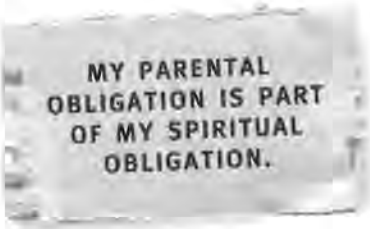
Remembering the Sabbath is to remember grace. God rested from his work. God not only completed the work of creation but he also completed the work of salvation. We no longer must work for our salvation. Sabbath is a reminder that I can rest in grace because the work is done. I need not strive to earn God’s approval. I can rest in God’s completed work!

Hebrews 8:9-10 - There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Rest in God’s Sabbath! Enjoy your date with God!

MOM AND DAD

Exodus 20:1-17

My dad married my wife's mom! Really! Crazy huh! My mom and my wife's dad both passed away many years ago. As my dad and Denise's mom spent time together they fell in love and got married. Now my mother-in-law is my stepmother and my dad is my father-in-law. This put a new spin on "mom and dad".



MY PARENTAL
OBLIGATION IS PART
OF MY SPIRITUAL
OBLIGATION.

Verse 12 commands you to *honor your father and your mother*. What does that mean and how do we do it? First, honor does not mean obey. As an adult child no longer under your parents' roof, you are not obligated to obey them. But, you are obligated to honor them. This word honor literally means "to be weighty" or "reward." It denotes a continued action and is both an attitude and an action. You not only see them with honor but you treat them with honor as well.

We see in John 2:1-7 and John 19:25-27 that Jesus sets the example by honoring his mother both through attitude and action. Honoring your father and mother has three distinct applications.

1. It means you value them! You appreciate all that they did and do for you. In today's dollars it is said it costs an average middle income American family \$225,000 to raise a child from birth to 18. That does not include college costs. Parents probably gave up some of their own dreams, goals and pleasures for your sake. We owe them much. Appreciate their sacrifices.

2. It means you don't blame them! No parents are perfect. All have flaws and failures. Situations like extreme abuse and neglect aside, we cannot blame our parents for our dysfunction, issues or problems. Even if our parents were not the greatest in expressing love, discipline and care, at some point we still become responsible for our own behavior. We cannot go through life blaming our parents. Forgive!

3. It means we take care of them! My parental obligation is part of my spiritual obligation. Read Mark 7:9-13. This passage reveals how some used their spiritual devotion as an excuse not to take care of their parents. They were masking their greed in spirituality. Jesus condemned this and said true spirituality involves taking care of your parents. I Timothy 5:4, says repaying your parents is pleasing to the Lord.

SOCIAL NETWORK (1)

Exodus 20:1-17

Commandment 7, “*You shall not commit adultery*”, is a sensitive issue. It has several applications. Let’s look at one of those today. Adultery is basically a sexual relationship with someone other than your spouse. The most common application is an affair, or cheating on your spouse. Several forces combine to encourage this type of adultery. The media constantly bombards us with sex and portrays adultery as being no big deal. It has been normalized by the world so many have become numb to its destructive force. Some psychologists say humans are not meant to be monogamous. We already battle our flesh. So, when our fleshly desire feeds off the premise that we were not built for monogamy, we act on our urges. Also, we must combat a spiritual enemy as well. Satan wants to convince us that it is OK to cheat on our spouse. He tempts us with thoughts like, “no one will find out”, or “my spouse did it.” So, the temptation is there for all of us. But, as followers of Christ, God has called us to resist the temptation and to be faithful to our spouse.

One of my favorite passages of scripture is Proverbs 5:15 – “Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well.” Don’t steal water from another man’s well! Water represents satisfaction. In other words, value your spouse above all others and receive your sexual satisfaction from your spouse.

Read Matthew 5:27-28. In this passage, Jesus deepens the concept of adultery to include not only a physical act but also a lustful look. Lusting for another in your heart, Jesus says, is like committing the physical act.

In a recent survey, 70% of the people polled said it was OK to flirt in the workplace. The same survey noted that 70% of extramarital affairs initiate from the workplace. Interesting how these percentages match. Office flirtations can easily become office affairs. Cease the flirting and the possibility of an affair greatly diminishes. Job said, in Job 31:1, “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.” That is a great covenant.

Today, examine your heart. Maybe you do not struggle at all with adultery or lust. Maybe you do. If you do struggle with lust, do not feel condemned. Rather take some practical steps to help you be victorious over this issue. If you have fallen in this area, confess it and receive God’s cleansing and forgiveness. If you have a friend who is presently in an adulterous relationship, help them to see their error and help restore them. Most of all make a covenant with your eyes! Decide to drink from your own cistern!

SOCIAL NETWORK (2)

Exodus 20:1-17

Today we end our look into the vintage commandments of God by addressing four; *do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony and do not covet.*

Do not murder! Chances are good that you have not murdered anyone. But, Matthew 5:21-24 says that if you are angry with your brother without cause, you are subject to the same judgment as the one who murders.

Do not steal! If it is not yours, don't take it! If you did not think of it, don't claim it! Stealing someone else's idea is just as wrong as stealing someone's possessions.

Do not give false testimony! Don't lie about people or about situations. Two common reasons exist for lying. One, we sometimes lie in order to get someone in trouble. We want to frame them, make them look bad or harm them and their reputation. Two, we sometimes lie to stay out of trouble. We did something wrong. We do not want to own up to the mistake so we deflect the blame.

Do not covet! Covet means to desire or lust. Coveting is a compelling desire that wants something that is taboo. Joshua and his men lost the first battle at Ai because one of the men coveted and took some items that God said to leave alone. In Micah 2:2, people are condemned because they coveted and seized others' fields and houses. Coveting reveals a lack of contentment. To want what someone else has shows that I am not grateful for what God has given me.



These four commands indicate the connection between my relationship with God and how that relationship impacts my interaction with people. These four commandments can be capsuled into one thought - do not mistreat people. The real issue involves what is in one's heart regarding people.

Read Romans 13:8-10. Verse 9 hits the nail on the head. It says that all of these commandments are summed up in one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Paul says that if we love people we will not have to worry about mistreating them. When one truly loves others as God has instructed us and modeled for us, we will not have to worry about obeying these commands. Our love for others overpowers our selfish motivations. Sin produces action; love also produces action. Focus on loving others and you will produce the right actions! Today, don't focus on what not to do, rather focus on what to do-love!

FAITHFUL BUT NOT ALWAYS FULL OF FAITH

Judges 6:36-40

Take a moment and also read the following passages: Matthew 11:2-6 and John 20:24-28. Do you always feel like you are full of faith? Is faith in God always pouring out of you like a busted water pipe? Or, do you experience moments of questioning, wondering, even doubting? These three passages give some insight into today's concept. Is it possible to be faithful even when we are not full of faith? I believe it is.

The word "faithful" means to be reliable or trustworthy. This word "full" means basketfuls. It carries with it a sense of always being in that state. Our three passages relate three men of God who were faithful men of God yet they experienced moments of questioning. In Matthew, John the Baptist wonders if Jesus is the one they have been waiting for, the Messiah. In John, Thomas doubts the resurrection and proclaims he must see Jesus' scars for himself. Gideon, in the Judges passage, wanted to be sure it was God who was speaking to him. He needed reassurance and confirmation so he asks God to make things clear. These three examples expose three main times of questioning we can sometimes have.

Three causes of doubt or questioning in our lives are:

1. Jesus, are you who you say you are? John the Baptist is requesting confirmation for that very question.

2. Jesus, can you do what you say you can do? Thomas did not have basketfuls of faith when it came to Jesus' claim that he would rise from the dead. He did not believe his fellow disciples. It was one thing for Jesus to claim it but another thing to actually have the power to do it. Thomas questioned that ability.

3. God, is that you speaking to me? Gideon wanted to be extra sure it was God speaking to him before he embarked on a dangerous mission.

The interesting aspect of these stories is God never scolded them, criticized them or condemned them. In fact God did just the opposite. He assured John that he was indeed the Messiah. Jesus willingly showed Thomas the scars and obliged Gideon with the fleece test. Too, these men remained faithful to God even during their moments of questioning.

Negative circumstances may create periods of doubt or times of questioning. It is OK! God understands that and is pleased to prove his faithfulness to you. However, in those times when you do not have basketfuls of faith, continue to be faithful; continue to be reliable; continue to follow Christ trusting that he will indeed meet you at your point of doubt and confirm his presence, power and peace. So, be faithful even when you are not full of faith!

NO RUGS

I Samuel 2:12-22

One can do cool things with a rug. If there is a stain of the floor, cover it with a rug! Instead of picking up all the dust on the floor, just sweep it under the rug! Our dishwasher broke. We had to break some ceramic tile to pull the dishwasher out to repair it. I thought for a second that instead of replacing the tile I could simply cover that place with a rug! The term, "sweep it under the rug" means to hide something hoping it will be forgotten or overlooked; to conceal something hoping no one discovers it.

Eli was a man of God. He was compassionate, spiritually sensitive and had a submissive spirit towards God. However, he swept some things under the rug. His sons served as priests! His sons were evil! They abused the sacrifices of God. They slept with the tabernacle women. Eli let it go. He had been told by God to deal with it, yet he did not. Instead he swept his sons' actions under the rug hoping the problem would some how go away. It did not, it got worse.

If you read the rest of I Samuel 2, you will see the judgment God called down on Eli. In other passages we read where Eli died and his entire lineage was cut down as a direct result of his refusal to deal with his sons' behavior. Eli thought sweeping the issue under the rug would be easier than dealing with it. He was wrong.



A couple of my fence posts had rotted so I had to replace them. After putting up the first one I thought it was set in perfectly so I went in to get a drink of water. When I came out later to look at it I realized it was not exactly level. I tried to move it but since I waited the cement had set some so I ended up creating space and the post was not sturdy. So, when I

erected the second post, I fixed all issues immediately. That post was exactly as it should be.

At times, you may think not dealing with issues in your life is easier and safer but in reality you are making matters worse by not dealing with them immediately. Whatever issues you may be facing today: marital issues, parenting issues, work-related problems, financial problems, sin or other personal issues, do not sweep them under the rug, deal with them! If you keep stuffing things under the rug, eventually they will come tumbling out and create a huge mess. Dealing with issues may be difficult but it is much better than the alternative! So, no rugs!

PASSION

I Samuel 13:14, 17:20-24, 45-47, II Samuel 6:14

David did many things, some of them great and some of them not so great. He was a multi-faceted man. He was a shepherd, a warrior, a king, a musician, a songwriter. He experienced many of the emotions we do: joy, anger, lust, pride, sadness. One of the strengths of David was that he was a man after God's own heart. That concept has always amazed me. What does that mean? I believe it means (among other things) that he loved God more than anything else. It speaks to his passion. David was undeniably passionate about his relationship with God. We see his passion all through scripture.

He fights Goliath because Goliath is defaming God. He is blaspheming God and God's people. David could not stand it. When every Israelite soldier was hiding from Goliath, afraid to fight him, young David walks out there with a slingshot and takes care of business. What motivated him to do that - his passion for God!



He dances down the street while the ark of God is being brought into the city of Jerusalem. He worships God without inhibitions. Passion! In Psalm 27:4, David asks one thing of the Lord: to dwell in the house of the Lord and to gaze upon his beauty all of his days. In Psalm 63:1, he says he longs for God, he thirsts for God like a dry weary land longs for water. Passion!

Are you passionate? What are you passionate about? Many people are passionate for fame or riches. Some are passionate about being the best in their field. Others may be passionate about being a great parent or a great athlete. None of these passions are evil in themselves. God, however, longs for people who are passionate for Him! John 4:23, says God is seeking true worshipers. He is seeking those whose greatest passion is to know God: those who are uninhibitedly in love with him: those who are unashamed to proclaim him and publically expose their affection for him.

David was not perfect. He had documented flaws and weaknesses. But he was passionate toward God and as a result God called him a man after his own heart. You are not perfect! God does not expect you to be perfect! But even in your weakness and humanity you can be passionate for God and have God call you a person after his own heart!

PATIENCE

1 Samuel 16:1, 11-21


I hate waiting rooms! After my knee injuries I had to wait in the waiting room writhing in pain seemingly being ignored by all medical personnel in the building. Hours seemed like days! My expectation for immediate attention was not met with the same urgency by the medical staff. I don't like waiting rooms! I don't like waiting!

Samuel anointed David king when David was 15 years old. David was 30 years old when he became king. So, David waits 15 years to take the position that God called him to. I wonder what David thought during those years? I do not know what he thought but I do know what he did - he waited! David displayed much patience as he waited for God's timing to unfold.

While David waited, he remained faithful to serve God. In today's passage we see where he served Saul by playing the harp for him. He ministered to Saul through his music. He also became Saul's armor-bearer. It took much humility to carry the armor of the one you knew you would replace. In chapter 17, we see where David continued to be faithful as a shepherd for his father's flock. He battled Goliath again showing his desire to serve God any way he could. In other words, he did not sit around waiting for the kingship before he did anything. He served where he was!

David was also respectful toward Saul. Twice (1 Samuel 24 & 26) David had an opportunity to kill Saul. Why shouldn't he, Saul was trying to kill him! He could have killed Saul and sped up the process to becoming king! He could have even claimed self-defense and not been held liable! But he did not. He waited!

In Psalm 40:1, David pens, "I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry." David was patient, waiting for God's plan to unfold in God's time. What about you? Will you wait on God's timing? Often there is time between the revelation and the realization! God puts a dream in your heart or gives you a word as to his will for you. But the realization comes later. Often there is time between your request and God's response! God always answers our prayers but not always in our timing. It is easy to want to speed up the process, to preempt God. Don't! Wait! Be faithful in the waiting room!



**WAIT FOR GOD'S
TIMING TO UNFOLD.**

PENITENCE

II Samuel 12:1-13

Boy did David blow it and blow it big! He has an affair with a married woman then puts her husband in harms way and deliberately sets him up to be killed. In other words David had him murdered. Nathan, a brave man of God, a man who feared God more than he feared the king, confronts David. After this confrontation, David has several response options. He could have denied the allegations. He could have rationalized the activity after all he is king. He could have had Nathan executed. How dare he come against the king! He does none of these. Instead he repents.

In verse 13 David says, "I have sinned against the Lord." In Psalm 51 we see his great plea of repentance: Have mercy on me; wash away all my iniquity; I know my transgressions; cleanse me; blot out all my iniquity. David no longer hides his sin, he confesses it and repents from it. He is even willing to accept the consequences of his sin as he accepts his son's death.



Are you penitent? How do you respond when confronted with sin? I have confronted several men over the years that were caught in an affair. Most of them denied or rationalized their action. Repentance is a blessed practice. It brings life to dry bones and joy to a downtrodden soul. It puts one back on the path toward spiritual growth.

Two signs of spiritual growth exist. One is that you are gaining victory over certain sin issues. You do not become sinless but you sin less. The other is that time shrinks between the sin, the conviction and the repentance. When you sin, conviction hits you immediately and you respond immediately in admittance and repentance. You no longer let days or weeks go by rationalizing your behavior.

Here is a truth: sin does not disqualify you from serving God. I am not condoning sin. I am saying we all sin. If sinning disqualified people then there would be no one left to serve God. The key is to realize your sin and deal with it immediately. So, do not discard people when they sin nor quit serving God yourself when you sin. Instead admit it and quit it and continue to pursue the God who has taken away your sin!

COVER ME (1)

Psalm 18:1-3

In *Lethal Weapon 4*, there is a scene where Mel Gibson, Danny Glover and Rene Russo are having a shoot out with bad guys. Rene all of a sudden yells to the two guys, "Cover me!" She then takes off and the guys stand up and provide firepower until she makes it safely to her destination.

What do the following six items have in common: An umbrella, clothes, gloves, sunglasses, an apron and insect repellent? Give up? They are all forms of coverings! They all provide protection! An umbrella gives protection from rain, clothes protection from nakedness. Gloves protect the hands while sunglasses protect the eyes. An apron protects clothes from being stained and insect repellent protects your body from bites. So, covering = protection.

In today's passage, we see that God has us covered. We see six word pictures as to how God is our protection. Let's look at the first one today. Verse 2, "The Lord is my rock... my God is my rock." Rock equates to stability. Huge rocks are unaffected by storms, they are immovable objects. The bigger the rock the more immovable it is. God is the Rock of Ages;

he is the immovable Rock that provides unwavering stability in your life.

Psalm 40:2 says, "He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand." He did that for you at salvation as he rescued you from the pit of destruction. He will do that everyday as

you allow him to protect you from the trappings of this world.

Natalie Grant's song, *In Better Hands*, starts with the phrase, "It's hard to stand on shifting sand." How true. God sets you on the Rock, himself, and gives you a firm stable place from which to build your life. In an ever-changing culture and world, we can stand on God's unchanging truth, his word, and be protected from the dangers of passing fads, false teachings and our present moral mudslide.

Don't trust anything or anyone else to provide the stability you need. Anything other than Christ is shifting sand, sinking sand. Remember the famous hymn, "On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand."

COVER ME (2)

Psalm 18:1-3

I have played golf at a few courses in New Mexico. Rainfall is quite common at these courses. In fact, during portions of the year it rains some almost daily. Sometimes the rain is light sometimes it pours. It may last 5 minutes or 30 minutes. Due to the prolific rains, the golf courses have several covered shelters that players can run under when it begins to rain. The golfers remain safe and dry while it rains, then when the rain stops they resume their play.

Proverbs 18:10 says, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe." When the storms of life come, the Lord supplies the covering we need to remain safe. In our passage today, we see five more "names" of God that create beautiful word pictures to how God covers and protects his children.



God is our Fortress - he provides protection against attackers. As he completely surrounds us he makes access to our heart difficult for the enemy to invade.

God is our Deliverer - he rescues us when we become ensnared and trapped. He delivers us from the snare of sin and the bondage of depression, fear, worry, guilt and the like.

God is our Shield - he extinguishes the fiery darts of the evil one. To get to us, the evil one must first go through Christ.

God is our Horn of Salvation - our strength. Animals' horns are their form of protection. My strength is in my salvation. Through my relationship with Christ I have eternal protection. Christ's blood has covered me.

God is our Stronghold - the ultimate place of protection. He places me in an inaccessible place. He is my high tower. He puts me out of reach of harm.

In verse 2, David says that in God he takes refuge. In other words, in times of danger David runs to God. Just like golfers run to the covered shelters on the course during the rain, he runs to God during the storms of life. The key is that we run to God! He is only our covering and protection if we run to him and allow him to be our covering. We can stand in the rain if we choose.

Today, allow God to be your covering! Call to the Lord in your time of need - He is worthy of praise!

CORPORATE WORSHIP

Psalm 33:1-5

I have read several blogs and posts and articles that discount the validity of what is commonly called contemporary worship. These writings declare the appropriate styles of worship - traditional or liturgical. Common themes include: only hymns can be sung, no new songs should be sung; no emotion should be expressed, worship should be quiet and "reverent"; excellence equals performance; organ and piano are more appropriate than guitars and drums. I disagree with these writers and more importantly the Psalmist disagrees. Psalm 33 gives great insight into how we should worship and why we should worship.

How We Should Worship

1. Sing joyfully! (v.1) Worship is a time for excitement and exuberance. Psalms says to praise him with dancing in his sanctuary, and to clap your hands and shout to God. Reflection, quietness and stillness are appropriate responses during times of worship, but so is joy and excitement.

2. Make music! (v.2) All instruments are OK! If we are to be legalistic we should only use instruments mentioned in scripture-flutes, strings, lyres, harps, cymbals, trumpets and tambourines. It is fine to have musical preferences but it is not OK to condemn the preferences of others.

3. Sing a new song! (v.3) Every song ever written was a new song at one time. David sang his songs (Psalms) right after he wrote them. Hymns were not put in a vault and let out 100 years later to be sung, they were sung when they were written. New songs are to be sung. Certainly there are bad new worship songs, but that doesn't negate using the good ones.

4. Play skillfully! (v.3) Some equate expertise or excellence as performance therefore it has no place in the corporate worship service. WRONG! God honors us as we seek to do our best. We do not strive to be skillful for our own glory rather so we can glorify God. A musician can be unskilled and still have a heart of self-glorification. What makes the difference between worship and performance? THE HEART! It is not the style of music and it is not the level of ability!

Why We Should Worship

One, for the Word of the Lord is right and true. (v.4) Two, the Lord is Faithful. (v.4) Three, the Lord expresses unfailing love. (v.5) The style of music one prefers is simply a preference. The heart determines whether a person is worshipping or performing. The heart determines if a person desires to worship or to be entertained. Consider today why you participate in corporate worship opportunities or why you do not. Be sure your involvement does not rest upon a musical style but rather on the condition of your heart!

SURELY GOD IS GOOD!

Psalm 73

In this Psalm, the Psalmist takes us on a journey as he pours out his thoughts. This journey begins with pain, confusion, anger and dismay and arrives at hope, faith, and peace. His journey is not unlike the journey of many. It may be similar to your journey. Let's look at four mile markers in this journey.

Mile Marker 1 - Envy! In verses 3-12 the Psalmist expresses his envy of the wicked! The wicked seem carefree, wealthy, healthy and untouched by grief. They are strong and prosperous. He wonders why God would allow these people to experience this kind of abundance and prosperity.

Mile Marker 2 - Discouragement! The Psalmist says in verse 13, "Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure." He becomes discouraged for he believes his attempt to follow God and walk in holiness is all for naught! He loves God and has troubles of all kinds and the wicked hate God and have nothing but abundance. He wonders why he should love God! Why not join in with the wicked?



Mile Marker 3 - Encounter! Verse 17 is the transitional point. What happens? He enters the sanctuary of God! He encounters God! He meets God in a supernatural experience! Something incomprehensible and unexplainable happens when we have an encounter with God.

Mile Marker 4 - Perspective! As verse 17 continues the Psalmist says that now he understands the destiny of the wicked. He now also understands his own destiny. He begins to see things from God's perspective and it changes everything!

Have you ever felt like this Psalmist? Have you ever been envious or discouraged? Have you ever wondered if following after God and living according to his word was actually profitable? If so, in those moments, enter into the presence of God. Go to him and share your heart. Allow his Spirit to minister to you and encourage you. In God's presence we experience and understand the joy and pleasures that God has for us.

That encounter will change your perspective. It may not change your present circumstance, but it will give you the reality of what awaits you as a believer and what awaits those without Christ. May that new perspective not only fill you with joy, but may it spur you to share the message of hope with those without Christ so they too can enjoy the eternal presence of the Father.

WHAT DOES GOD DESIRE?

Proverbs 3:1-6

Simply put, verses 5-6 in today's passage say that God desires your heart, your trust and your acknowledgement. Let's examine these ideas more closely.

God desires your heart! What do you think my wife's response would be if I went to her and said, "I love you but I love another woman too! Is that OK with you?" If I actually survived after making that statement, I can assure you it would not be OK with her nor should it be. God does not want you to split affections with him either. He wants you to be captivated by his love for you. He desires that all your worship, adoration and passion be directed toward him and not toward any other.

God desires your trust! As a youth pastor, I had our youth group split into teams and participate in a destination scavenger hunt. Each place they arrived at provided a clue to the next place. No one knew the next location and no one knew the final destination until they received the next clue. The fun was what took place during the journey. So it is with God. He wants you to trust him during the journey. He does not reveal to you all of your future. He reveals one step at a time. That way you must trust him for each step. If he gave you a map to the entire journey you might try to walk it alone. It can sometimes be harder to trust God when you can't see where he is leading you.



However, it is in those times when the joy of trusting is the greatest.

God desires your acknowledgement! In west Texas, many drivers, especially while on rural roads, give a friendly recognition to on-coming drivers. They may give a nod of the head or a raise of the hand on the steering wheel constituting a slight wave. They give casual recognition. "Acknowledge" does not mean casual recognition; it means to follow his ways. A deep commitment to relationship is involved. God desires more from us than to simply realize he exists. God wants us to love him so deeply that we follow him and his ways. He desires that we live our life according to his design.

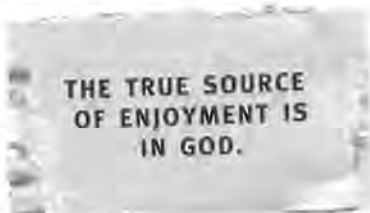
We want answers - God wants relationship! We are destination oriented - God is journey oriented! We want God to tell us - God wants us to trust him! Does God have your heart, trust and acknowledgement? If so, everything else will fall into place!

ENJOYMENT DEPRIVATION

Ecclesiastes 4:7-8

Rumspringa is a time when Amish teens, 16-18 years of age, can rebel from the Amish lifestyle. They can taste the modern world! The rules of the Amish lifestyle and the religious practices are "relaxed" so these teens can do most anything they choose. The purpose of Rumspringa is for these teens to decide if they want to leave the Amish way or be baptized into the Amish way. In other words it is a time of decision; it is time for them to choose for themselves their way of life.

In today's passage, the question is asked, "why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?" We could apply it and say, "why not live an extended Rumspringa?" Why not live an unrestrained, unrestricted life characterized by materialism and hedonism? Why not gratify all of my pleasure-seeking instincts?



At least four reasons exist why one should not spend their life pursuing worldly pleasures. **One**, these pleasures are temporary. Hebrews 11:25 reasons that Moses made a good decision when he chose to be mistreated along with the people of God. Why? The pleasures of sin last only a short time; they are temporary. **Two**, They are unfulfilling! In Ecclesiastes 2:1, the writer realizes that these pleasures prove to be meaningless. **Three**, they stunt our spiritual growth. As Luke 8:14 points out, riches and pleasures choke out our maturity. **Four**, this lifestyle is devastating. Proverbs 21:17 says, "He who loves pleasure will become poor." I Timothy 5:6 states, "But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she is alive."

The true source of enjoyment is not in stuff or pleasure it is in God. It is found through an intimate relationship with God through Jesus Christ. I Timothy 6:17 tells us to put our hope in God, "who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."

To me the real question is not why am I depriving myself of enjoyment but how can I find my enjoyment. How will I find fulfillment, contentment, peace, purpose, etc.? Will I seek these things in worldly riches and pleasures only to have them elude me, or will I seek them in the one place that I can actually find them - in Christ!

Don't deprive yourself of enjoyment; just be sure you pursue the real source of joy - Christ!

THE POTTER

Jeremiah 18:1-6

When preparing to preach about the potter in this verse, I visited a professor at our local university. He made pottery personally and he also taught several classes on pottery through the Art Department. He demonstrated for me the skill of manipulating the wheel and fashioning the clay into his preconceived image. During his demonstration I asked him several questions. His responses gave great insight into verse 4 of today's reading.

The end of verse 4 says the potter was shaping it (the clay) as seemed best to him. My professor friend noted that the potter decides the shape and the use not the clay. So it is with us. God determines what our spiritual gifts are not us. (I Cor. 12:11) God has a purpose for our life and determines what we will be used for. (Romans 9:20-21) We do not need to try to tell God how to use us or where to use us. We need to seek God's will desiring to be exactly where God wants us to be and doing exactly what he has purposed us to do.

Also verse 4 says the clay was marred in the potter's hand so he had to reshape it. Again, the professor gave beautiful insight into when a potter must reshape the clay. He related that three reasons exist for a need to reshape the clay. One, when something gets in it that should not be there: two, when there is a hard spot: and three, because clay has a memory. It remembers it's past shape.

The only way to create it anew is to "exercise the clay" until it forgets its past.

Wow! What an application! Ask yourself these three questions. Is there something in me that should not be there? Have I developed a hardened heart toward God due to rebellion or defiance? Is remembering my past failures keeping me from enjoying a present joy-filled relationship with Christ? Meditate today on these questions and allow the Spirit of God to reveal any issues that you need to deal with today.

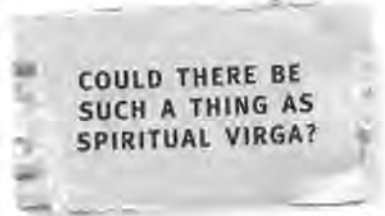
Let the potter's wheel remind you to yield to God's design for you, and to stay pliable so he can have his way in your life!

HEAVEN ON EARTH

Matthew 6:5-15

Virga is a meteorological occurrence when rain does not hit the ground. Rain clouds form and moisture in the upper atmosphere is enough to produce rain. However, the air closer to the surface is dry and warm. Consequently, the water evaporates before it hits the ground. Note-if the conditions were different at the surface, rain would hit the ground and what is developed in the upper atmosphere would be manifest at the surface.

Verse 10 says “your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”? Can the conditions in heaven manifest themselves on earth? If God’s kingdom is not being seen on earth, and if God’s will in heaven is not being done on earth, why not? Could it have something to do with the spiritual climate? Could there be such a thing as spiritual virga? Wouldn’t it be cool if we could experience heaven on earth!



We can experience heaven on earth by submitting to God’s will and surrendering to God’s work! Think about Jesus. What if Jesus did not submit to his Father’s will while on earth? If Jesus refused to be baptized would God have still been well pleased? What if Jesus surrendered to Satan’s requests rather than submitting to God? What if in the garden Jesus said, “Not your will but mine?” What if at the cross Jesus did save himself like the thief suggested? The willingness of Jesus to submit to his Father’s will helped usher in the kingdom of God. Our submission to God’s will is part of the process of bringing heaven to earth.

As we submit to God’s will we are more willing to surrender to his work. God’s work in you is two-fold. It is both internal and external. God wants to do a work in you and do a work through you. He wants to greatly impact your life and he desires that you be used by him to greatly impact the lives of others.

Picture this - a world with no poverty, no sickness, no homelessness, no hunger, no oppression, no social injustice. We may not be able to end it all but we can have an effect on it! You may not be able to stamp out homelessness but you can help one! You may not be able to end hunger but you can feed one.

Submit to God’s will and surrender to God’s work and we will see a little heaven on earth!

LET'S MAKE A DEAL

Matthew 10:37-39

The show, Let's Make a Deal, debuted on December 30, 1963 with host Monty Hall. It re-debuted in October 2009 with host Wayne Brady. The premise of the show is to decide if the contestant should trade what he has for something unknown. The contestants are always looking for the best deal and the host is always pushing the contestants to make the best deal. But what is the best deal? That is the question and the risk.

The issue in our passage is life. God offers a great deal - trade your life for life in him! The word "lose" in our passage means to destroy, kill. It pictures a violent death. To find new life in Christ one must violently kill the old self. That in essence is what salvation is. Christ says to die on your own cross and kill your old self. In return, Christ will give you real life through him and in him.

Also, once salvation is secured, being his disciple means you give him everything. You have your dreams, your money, your career, your future plans, your relationships and the like. To follow Christ, you must lose all of those things. You must give them up and say I want what Jesus offers. When

we give him all that we have and all that we are Jesus gives us all that he has and all that he is in return. What a deal!

In the movie, *Maverick*, starring Mel Gibson, there is a scene where 3 final players remain. The Commodore has 4 of a kind, Angel has a straight flush 3-7, and Maverick has the 10-king of spades.

He is one card away from a royal flush, but Maverick will not look at the last card. The final bet is to him and he goes all in not knowing the outcome but trusting the last card is what he needs, the ace of spades.

Do you trust that God is who he says he is? Do you believe he will do what he says he will do? Do you trust that God is all you need him to be? Do you believe he will supply everything you need? Are you willing to go all in? Are you willing to lay all the cards of your life on the table and say God these are yours; play them as you desire. This deal has no risk! The reality is that God will do a much better job with your money, your career, and your future than you will. So, lose your life! Make the deal!



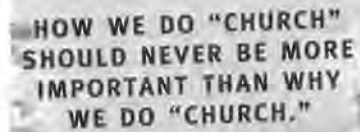
TRADITION

Matthew 15:1-20

Tradition and traditions are extremely important to many. They help form a secure foundation and practice. Some have Christmas traditions, some have family traditions and some have religious traditions. Much of religious traditions seem to revolve around what happens in a worship service or how a local church does “church”. Tradition is not bad but it can become bad. Religious tradition becomes bad when the way we do something outweighs why we do something.

Teachers of the law wanted to know why Jesus’ disciples broke tradition. (v.2) Jesus retorts with a question of his own, “Why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?” (v.3)

The teachers of the law had made hand washing a sign of righteousness. They made not washing one’s hands a sin. Not only must one wash their hands, but they must wash them a certain way and at certain times. These teachers also used a concept called “corban” to neglect the caring of their parents. They supposedly dedicated money to God, via the temple, which meant they got to use it, instead of using that money to care for their parents.



HOW WE DO "CHURCH"
SHOULD NEVER BE MORE
IMPORTANT THAN WHY
WE DO "CHURCH."

These traditions had produced vain worship. (v.9) The bottom line for these pharisaical teachers is that what they said had become more important to them than what God said. Their traditions actually blocked them from experiencing God and helping others experience God. They had rejected God’s commands for their own tradition.

We can make the same mistake! How can we tell if our traditions outweigh God’s commands? When we say things like, “We’ve never done it that way before!” Or, “We have always done it this way!” When we have sacred cows, untouchables like certain programs or rituals! When our denominational dogma outweighs biblical truth! When we are not willing to change how we do things in order to be more effective in reaching people for Christ! When how we do “church” is more important than why we do “church!”

Don’t let tradition or traditions blind you to the Word of God, the heart of God, or the purpose of God in your life.

ROUTINE + PURPOSE = GROOVE

Mark 1:35-39

Once had a dog, half Dalmatian and half Lab, named Perdy. She did not like to be left in the back yard while we were gone. She frantically and systematically ran around the fence line probably the entire time we were gone. As a result, she made a mud rut where she paced around the fence line.

A rut is defined as a track worn by habitual passage of anything. Know what the definition of a groove is? The same! However, we seem to look at being in a rut differently than being in a groove. Being in a rut evokes negative emotions while being in a groove exudes positive feelings. Consequently, I surmise that a rut is something one does not want to get into while a groove is something one does not want to get out of.

Routine for the sake of routine can become a rut. Routine with a purpose takes on a whole new meaning. Several professional basketball players admit to taking 1000 shots everyday. That is their normal routine. Why? They want to be great players and win a championship. Professional golfers have the exact pre-shot routine. Why? They want to hit good shots and win a tournament.

In today's passage we see that Jesus had a routine - he prayed in a solitary place every morning. (v. 35) Why? So he could effectively fulfill his purpose, which was to preach! (v. 38) Routine with a purpose results in living life in a groove.

There have been times in my life when I felt like I was in a rut. I was dry spiritually, bored and apathetic. I discovered that in those times I had either lost sight of my purpose or I had abandoned my routine. When we awaken to our purpose - to do what God created us to do, and re-establish our routine - our spiritual disciplines - life in a groove returns.

Ponder the following equations and meditate on what they say to you and evaluate what you might need to do in response.

Routine - Purpose = Rut; Purpose - Routine = Rut; Routine + Purpose = Groove



THE HOOK

Luke 5:27-32

The part of a song that catches your attention, that draws you in, that you find yourself remembering and singing is the hook. The hook is what the song revolves around. It is what the rest of the song leads to. Good songs have good hooks; that is part of what makes the song good. Commercial jingles contain hooks or in many cases the entire jingle is the hook.

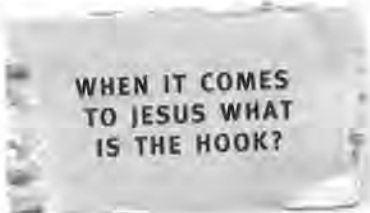
Our reading raises an interesting question, why did Jesus eat with sinners? The answer is easy; he loved them! To me an even deeper question must be asked. Why did sinners eat with Jesus? The answer - the hook! Jesus hooked them! When it comes to Christianity what is the hook? Jesus! When it comes to Jesus what is the hook? Love! When it comes to the love of Jesus what is the hook? It is unconditional!

Some suggest that non-religious people were drawn to Jesus because they had heard about his miracles or were curious to see him in action. I believe they were drawn to Jesus because of his unconditional love for them. Even though Jesus always spoke truth to them and never whitewashed their sin, people still knew that Jesus loved them. Jesus' love for them and acceptance of them drew them in like the hook of a song draws the listener in.

A third question seems appropriate. Do sinners want to eat with you? In scripture, it is interesting to note that the Pharisees are never recorded to have eaten with sinners. Why? Because the Pharisees did not love sinners and the sinners knew it. So, the sinners did not want to eat with the Pharisees either.

John 13:35 says men will know we are Christ's disciples by our love. Matthew 22:29 tells us to love our neighbor. John 15:12 reminds us to love like Jesus loved. Unfortunately, if I am honest with myself, I am often more like the Pharisee than I am Jesus. I wonder how the non-believing world would respond to us and our message of Christ if we were exceptional at loving them like Jesus loved them!

Is the hook of your life drawing in those who need to hear the song of life?



WHEN IT COMES
TO JESUS WHAT
IS THE HOOK?

THE TEMPLE


John 2:13-22

In this passage, we see two references regarding the temple: a structure and Jesus. In Judaism, the temple was the hub of activity and religious expression. The temple represented the corporate identity of their spiritual community. Jesus, as was his custom, places new meaning on the temple. Jesus proclaims that he is the temple. As noted in verse 20, the Jews had a difficult time understanding Jesus' new application of the temple.

In I Corinthians 6:19-20 we see another temple reference. "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."

These three temple references raise three piercing questions to consider today. One, How do you treat the "church"? Are you involved in a local, corporate expression of the body of Christ? Are you serving faithfully and participating joyfully and regularly? The organized church is far from perfect but it is the means by which Jesus has chosen to fulfill his purpose. It is easy to criticize it but that accomplishes nothing for the kingdom. The

better plan is to be a part of making it better.



**YOU ARE NOT
YOUR OWN; YOU ARE
BOUGHT AT A PRICE.**

How do you treat the members and attendees of that fellowship? I John 4:20 says, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he

has not seen." Are there people that you need to forgive or ask forgiveness from? It is important to love the body of Christ.

Two, how do you treat yourself? Your body is a temple. God dwells in you! This reality counteracts the, "It's my body I'll do what I want with it" philosophy. Does Jesus need to cleanse your temple? Are things going on in your temple that needs to be removed?

Three, how do you treat Jesus? Does he have the authority in your life that he deserves? Is he held in high honor and esteem? This story reminds us that cleansing is needed at times. Holiness and piety are important. Respect and reverence for the temple is vital.

THREE CONSTANTS OF JESUS

John 4:1-26

Today's story is one example of many stories in the Bible that reveal three constants of Jesus. Not every story reveals every constant. When these stories are looked at in total, one sees these constants.

Constant one: Jesus always spoke the truth! As Jesus spoke to individuals, whether they were Jews, Samaritans, Romans or Pharisees he never lied to them. He never told them what they wanted to hear. He did not say what would make him popular or well liked. He always spoke the truth! His truth however was always wrapped in love. People Jesus talked to, like this Samaritan woman, sensed his love for them so they were willing to hear the truth from him. (Excluding the Pharisees of course.)



Constant two: Jesus never whitewashed sin! Jesus told the woman caught in adultery, after he refused to condemn her, to leave her life of sin. He constantly confronted the Pharisees regarding their sin.

Constant three: Jesus encouraged forward movement! To the crippled he said to get up and walk. To the rich man he said to go sell everything. To some he said to go and tell what they had seen and heard. Jesus accepted people where they were but he also encouraged them to move forward in their faith.

Apply these constants to your life today as you meditate on these concepts. Jesus will never lie to you. Neither will he tell you what you want to hear. The word of God is truth and you must align your life to it rather than trying to make it fit how you want to live. We all sin! We must not allow that sin to reign in our life or to become comfortable with sin. Is there sin in your life today that you need to confess and deal with? Are you progressing in your faith? Are you moving forward in your relationship with Christ? Allow God to challenge you and draw you into a deeper walk with him and trust of him.

Remember, as the devotion from a few days ago mentioned, Jesus loves us unconditionally. He loves you unconditionally. In his love he speaks truth and desires growth in you. Meditate on what constant most applies to you today and respond to what the Holy Spirit wants to do in you today.

I A M

John 8:48-58

For the next several devotions, we are going to examine the “I AM” statements of Jesus in John. In verse 58 in today’s reading we see the foundational “I AM” statement of Jesus. His statement so ignited the rage of the Jews that they picked up stones preparing to kill Jesus for blasphemy. Jesus’ statement reveals several truths.

I AM means Jesus is...

...God! The Jews called Jesus demon-possessed. Jesus responds by saying he is not demon-possessed rather he is God. In Exodus 3:14 God said to Moses, “I Am who I Am.” He told Moses to tell the Israelites that I AM sent him. When Jesus said I AM he rightfully equated himself as God.

...Eternal! Jesus has always existed. He not only preceded Abraham but he preceded all things. Revelation 22:13 records Jesus saying, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.”

...Everywhere! Psalm 139:7-10 - Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

... Faithful! He is always with us; always present. He is our ever-present help in time of trouble. He will never leave us or forsake us. There may be times when it appears God is absent or he

is not listening. However, you can rest assured he is present and working.

...Constant! Psalm 102:27 - But you remain the same. Malachi 3:6 - I the Lord do not change. God cannot get more love, power or grace because he already has them in totality. He does not need to modify, upgrade or improve. He is perfect!

...Relevant! He is not “I Was” or “I Will Be”. He is “I Am!” He is alive and active in your life and situation right now. Jesus is everything you need him to be; and more!



I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:32-58

Bread is a staple food. Every culture produces bread. Some experts say that bread was the first food made. People of every age, generation and ethnicity eat bread. Obviously bread satisfies hunger and this is exactly what Jesus is communicating when he says he is the Bread of Life. Several differences exist between bread and “the bread of life.”

Bread

Feeds some/many

Costs money

Spoils/grows stale

Temporary satisfaction

The Bread of Life

Will feed everyone

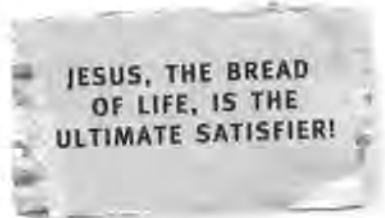
Free to all

Endures forever

Complete satisfaction

John 6 gives two reference points that foreshadow Jesus as the Bread of Life: the feeding of 5000 and manna from heaven during the wilderness experience. Both of these events serve as illustrations that Jesus, the Bread of Life, is the ultimate satisfier!

Jesus satisfies one's ultimate hunger! Many religious systems may fulfill spiritual hunger temporarily. But only Jesus can quench the eternal hunger issue. I John 5:12 says, “He who has the Son has life, he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” Verse 53 in today's passage says that only Jesus can give us life. Apart from him one has no life. Many types of bread exist today: rye, wheat, sourdough, 7 grain! However, when it comes to fulfilling the ultimate hunger of eternal salvation, only Jesus, the Bread of Life, can satisfy!



Jesus also satisfies one's daily hunger! Interestingly, as cultures and countries evolve, bread becomes less attractive and is eaten less. As soon as other food delicacies are provided and available, plain ole bread takes a back seat. I must admit, when I have been hungry, I have never craved bread. Likewise, in the spiritual realm, many look to other things to satisfy their daily hunger. They look to things that seem to be more appetizing than bread. However appealing those “foods” might be none are as fulfilling as the Bread of Life.

Jesus is the source of life! If you desire to experience abundant life today and eternal life with God in heaven, Jesus is the source! Are you allowing Jesus to satisfy your hunger?

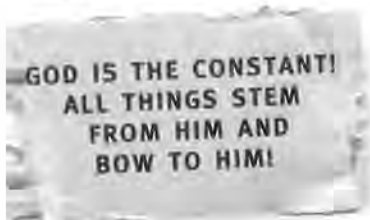
I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

John 8:12, 9:1-12

Light is one of the great metaphors for God. It is one of the best ways to describe his glory and majesty. I John 1:5 - God is light, in him there is no darkness. Psalm 76:4 - You (God) are resplendent with light. Psalm 104:2 - He wraps himself in light as with a garment. Why the use of light as a metaphor for God?

In Einstein's Theory of Relativity, the speed of light is the constant. Light travels at approximately 300,000 km per second, or 186,000 miles per second. It never changes! Since the speed of light is the constant, all of the laws of physics stem from and bow to that fact. God is the constant! All things stem from him and bow to him!

Light is a form of energy that travels freely through space. It is electromagnetic radiation, just like radio waves, infrared radiation and x-rays. We can only see part of the range of electromagnetic radiation (the spectrum). The part we see is light. God is vast and much of God we do not understand. However, God can be known and has revealed himself so we might "see" him and know him!



Jesus now proclaims that he is the Light of the world! He proclaims that he is God and he is the visible representation of God. He is God in human form, the exact representation of God. God has revealed himself in many ways, but Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God!

In our passage we see Jesus giving sight to a blind man. This man has walked in darkness for years, groping and feeling his way around, taking short timid steps, having to memorize where things are in his home, dependent on people and experiencing fear. Now, having gained sight, he walks differently! He lives differently! Surely, now that he can live in the light, he would not desire to continue to live as if he were still in darkness.

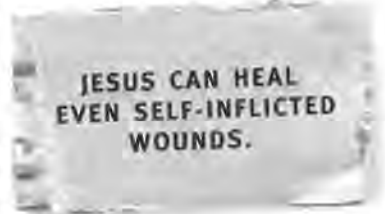
Jesus is the Light of the World. His light in us changes everything. Our life is different! Matthew 5:14 says every follower of Christ is also a light to the world. How can that be? The Light, God's light, shines in us and through us. May you walk in the light today and may you shine your light in the dark places!

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD (1)

John 10:1-21

For the next four devotions we will examine the statement of Jesus - I Am the Good Shepherd. You may connect better with some of Jesus' other statements as he calls himself light or bread. You are probably more familiar with these elements. Chances are you have not been around many shepherds or seen shepherds in action. Modern technology has advanced the duties of shepherds so shepherding today looks somewhat different than shepherding in biblical times. In biblical times, a good shepherd (as opposed to a bad shepherd) performed at least four duties for his sheep. Today we look at the first duty - Caring for the sheep.

Psalm 23:1 states that the Lord is our shepherd. God is called the Shepherd, so again we see Jesus affirming his deity through this statement. Verse 5 continues by adding that this shepherd anoints the head with oil. Back in the day, insects at times would lay eggs in sheep's ears and nose. This infestation would literally drive the sheep crazy. So the shepherd would use oil as a repellent against these insects. Oil also had medicinal qualities. Thorns, rocks or animals might wound sheep. They might self-inflict themselves by rubbing on trees or butting heads with other sheep. The shepherd would use the oil to mend the wounds. This treatment would keep the wounds from becoming dangerous infections.



In scripture, the anointing of oil refers to the pouring of the Holy Spirit. In John 16:7 Jesus said he must leave so that the Counselor may come. It is the Spirit of Jesus that resides in us upon salvation. This Good Shepherd, Jesus, cares for us and nurtures us by living in us through the presence of his Holy Spirit. He can heal our wounds, self-inflicted or those from external sources. He will minister to us in every need and every situation.

If you have been wounded, do not let those wounds become dangerous infections. Allow the Spirit of God to deal with you and bring the healing you need. May you experience a fresh anointing of the Spirit of God today! May you allow the Spirit to flow more freely in you and through you today!

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD (2)

John 10:1-21

Last devotion we looked at the shepherd's first duty-to care for the sheep. A second duty provided by the shepherd is provision. The shepherd provides for his sheep. The shepherd knows what the sheep need to eat, what they can and can't eat. He knows what will sustain them and what will not sustain them. Sheep evidently do not like bluegrass or fescue-they like coarser pasture-type grasses like canary grass or timothy grass. They cannot survive on burned out brown grass. So, the shepherd leads them to the places that provide the proper food. Shepherds also know how much grass sheep need so they lead them to places that are big enough to satisfy all the sheep in his care.

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus provides all that we need for spiritual nourishment. Let's refer again to Psalm 23. Verse 1 says, "I shall not want." He will provide all you need. The Psalm continues:

"He makes me lie down in green pastures." He will renew you!

"He leads me beside quiet waters". He will refresh you!

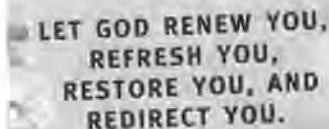
"He restores my soul". He will restore you!

"He guides me in paths of righteousness". He will redirect you!

This Psalm reveals a spiritual principle and practice. As he leads us to green pastures and quiet waters our soul is restored. The renewing and refreshing process restores our strength and brings us back to good spiritual health. We then are willing to be redirected and led in the way he desires that we go.

He knows what you need and when you need it. He leads you to the place where you can find it. If you need a specific word from God he will lead you to that passage. If you need a shoulder to cry on he will provide the perfect person to lend it. He knows your every need and he is able to provide the answer to every need. Philippians 4:19 - And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

So, today, what do you need? Do you have a physical need; an emotional need; a financial need or a spiritual need? Do you need to be renewed; refreshed; restored or redirected? Let the Good Shepherd provide for you! Let him be the supply for your need! He is big enough to satisfy your every need!



LET GOD RENEW YOU,
REFRESH YOU,
RESTORE YOU, AND
REDIRECT YOU.

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD (3)

John 10:1-21

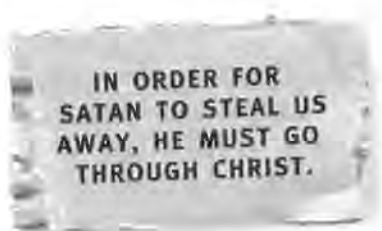
In the past devotions we have seen two important roles of the shepherd: he cares for the sheep and he provides for the sheep. A third duty of the shepherd is protection. A good shepherd protects his sheep! A great example of this practice is found in I Samuel 17:35. David is trying to convince King Saul that he can fight Goliath. As part of his defense, he recounts how he protected his sheep. He states when a bear or lion came to take sheep he went after them, struck them and killed them. We see vividly the protective instinct of the shepherd.

A good shepherd provided protection in at least three situations. One, he would protect the sheep from natural enemies. As bears, lions, wolves and other natural enemies sought to dine on the sheep they would be met with high resistance from the shepherd. He willingly placed his life in jeopardy on behalf of his sheep. We too have a natural enemy called the flesh or the sinful nature. Jesus gave his life to set us free from the bondage of our flesh. He has empowered us through his Holy Spirit to resist the urges of our flesh.

Two, the shepherd protects the sheep from extreme weather. In pleasant weather the sheep would reside outside. During extreme and violent weather, the shepherd would seek shelter for the sheep in a cave or a nearby structure. Life's circumstances can at times be extreme and difficult to bear. Our Good Shepherd promises to give us the ability to persevere in those times and to even be more than a conqueror in the midst of those situations.

Three, the shepherd would protect the sheep from thieves and rustlers; those who would want to steal the sheep away. One reason for the gatekeeper was to keep such people from succeeding at stealing the sheep. Jesus says he is the gate. In order for our enemy, Satan, to steal us away, he must go through Christ. Scripture, in multiple places reassures us that we are secure in Christ. As Hebrews 6:19 states, "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure." Our position in Christ, our salvation, our hope for eternity with Christ is secure and our spiritual adversary cannot steal us away.

Today, rest in the protection of your Good Shepherd!



I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD (4)

John 10:1-21

“**T**o the rescue” is a common cry declaring one’s intention to save the day! It is such an iconic saying that many organizations have claimed it as part of their mantra. There is now lawyers to the rescue, animal lovers to the rescue, and etc. Many desire to come to the rescue of those in need and of those in trouble.

We end our look into John 10 by discussing the fourth role of a good shepherd - rescue! Read Luke 15:4-6. In this passage we see how much love and concern the shepherd has for his sheep. If one strays, becomes lost or gets entangled in brush, the shepherd prioritizes a search and rescue operation. The shepherd knows every sheep. If one strayed he knew. He would leave the others just to retrieve the one!

Pastor, if you have a full church on Sunday, would you miss one individual who suddenly quit coming? Businessperson, if you had a full roster of clients providing a sizable income, would you mind losing that one deal? Professor, if your class was at full capacity would you seek out that one student who stopped attending? Jesus, the Good Shepherd loves

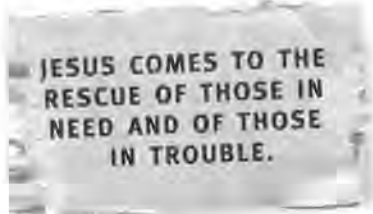
you so much that he has prioritized you. You are so significant to God that if you are in trouble he will notice and he will come to your rescue

So, are you in need of rescue today? Are you lost? Has there been that time in your life when you made a willful decision to give your life to Christ: To

allow him to be Lord of your life, to follow him? If not you can make that decision right now. I encourage you to seek out someone who can help walk you through that decision. Or, have you lost your way spiritually? Have you gone down the wrong path? Do you need help in returning to intimacy with Christ?

Are you hurt? Have you been wounded by life or wounded by someone? Have you been attacked by another sheep? Are you in trouble? Is Satan, the enemy, firing dart after dart at you? Is it becoming harder and harder to resist his temptations?

If the answer is yes to any of these questions, cry out to God. He hears the bleat of his sheep! Yield yourself to him, surrender yourself to his way and let him carry you to that place of safety.

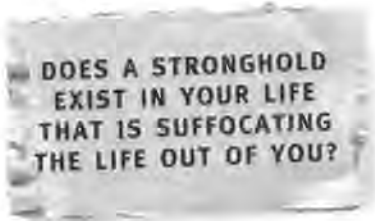


I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

John 11:1-44

Put yourself in this scene. Imagine what people must have been thinking when they see Lazarus walk out of the tomb! Imagine what was going through Lazarus' mind as he is being called back into the land of the living! I'm sure mouths dropped and minds were blown as eyewitnesses gazed on this phenomenon. A dead man is brought back to life; not one dead for seconds or minutes but dead for days! How can this be? Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life!

Life in verse 25 is the Greek word *zoe*. It is best defined as "life as God intended." It denotes absolute life. God has this kind of life and he offers this life to us. This life was lost at the fall but the cross and the resurrection made it possible to be re-attained. This life is made possible through Jesus (I John 1:2) and the shedding of his blood for us (Hebrews 9). John 10:10 says Jesus came that we might have life.



Consider two applications from today's story. First, God desires that you experience life. Lazarus is dead! All of a sudden he is alive again. While he is alive he still wears grave clothes. Do you sometimes feel like Lazarus? You know you are alive. You have given your life to Christ. You have experienced the new birth through faith in Christ. However, all of your grave clothes are not off. A stronghold exists in your life that is suffocating the life out of you. A particular sin is still holding you captive. Christ is the Resurrection and the Life - he can set you free from those forces!

Second, he desires that you help someone else experience life. The sisters sent word to Jesus (v.3) on behalf of Lazarus. They knew Lazarus was in need of Jesus' touch. Is there someone in your sphere of influence that may need Jesus' touch as well? Verse 39 has Jesus telling people to take away the stone. He could have moved it himself but he asked people to be involved in the process. In verse 44 he asks people to remove the grave clothes. God desires that you be involved in helping someone come to life as God intended. As the story indicates, no one is too far-gone for God to restore life to.

Meditate on these questions and respond appropriately. Am I experiencing life as God intended? If not, what do I need to do to come alive? Am I involved in helping others come to life? Is there someone specific God is drawing me toward?

I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, & THE LIFE

John 14:1-6

The most obvious and direct meaning of this “I AM “ statement deals with salvation and eternal life. It expresses the impossibility of having relationship with God apart from Jesus. This statement also, however, provides a broader concept of freedom. Because Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life we have freedom. In Christ, we have freedom *from*: the bondage of sin; the penalty of death; guilt, worry, fear, shame, condemnation; trying to earn God’s approval through works. In Christ we have freedom *to*: experience God’s best; become who he created us to be; experience life as God intended; be me, with no pretense. This freedom however does not imply we have a blank check to live anyway we please. Our freedom comes from submitting to Christ as our Way, and our Truth, and our Life!

Jesus as the Way means you will follow him! You will go where he leads and directs. It reminds you that you are not to be the leader or ultimate decision-maker in your life, Jesus is. Picture a field full of land mines. The only way to maneuver through that minefield successfully is to follow the one who knows where each mine is. Following Jesus, going where he leads, successfully directs you through life’s “mines.” It is easy to determine our own plans and actions and ask God to bless what we are doing, rather than seeking God’s direction. Let God determine the path and follow him.

Jesus as the Truth means you believe him! You will willingly do as he says. It says you know God’s Word is true and you

will live your life according to God’s principles even when it seems difficult and counter-cultural. It says absolute truth does exist and it is embodied in the person and teachings of Jesus. It declares that you will set your life’s standards on what God says rather than on what culture or your feelings declare.

Jesus as the Life says you trust him! You believe God is in control, that he knows what you are going through and will bring you through every trial. You believe He will never leave you or forsake you. You believe he knows what is best for you, so you will trust in his faithfulness. As a result, you will enjoy life as God intended. You will cast off that which weighs you down and place it on Jesus knowing he can and will carry your burdens. You will seek him and him alone for your source of joy, purpose and fulfillment.

Jesus came to give you freedom! This freedom begins when you invite Christ into your heart and continues as you give him permission to rule your heart and life. Praise the Lord this freedom continues through all of eternity! Today let him be your Way, your Truth, and your Life!

I AM THE VINE - PRUNING

John 15:1-17


In Jesus' discourse about he being the vine and his followers being branches, we gain two insights into fruitfulness. One, we cannot manufacture fruit. Authentic fruit must be grown from the source. Try tying apples to a tree and see how long they last. One can't fake fruit, at least not for very long. True fruitfulness is lasting because it is grown from and connected to the source. Two, fruitfulness is not the goal it is an outgrowth. Intimacy with Christ is the goal. As we stay connected in intimacy, we become fruitful.

We will spend the next three devotions looking at this statement of Jesus, "I am the Vine". Today we focus on the concept of pruning. To maintain a viable intimacy with Christ, producing continual fruit, we must be willing to be pruned.

My oldest son and I pruned my neighbor's tree. The couple was elderly and the man could no longer do that kind of yard work. We used three tools to trim the tree. First, we used clippers. These were adequate for the small branches. We also used loppers. These were for the bigger limbs. Finally we got out the chain saw. This bad boy handled the big limbs. It would have been overkill to use the chain saw on the small branches and it would have been futile trying to down the big limbs with little hand clippers. So it is with us!

God desires and needs to prune us at times if we are to be conformed into the image of Christ. His pruning tools include his Word, his Spirit, people and circumstances. He uses the appropriate tools for the necessary pruning job. He may use clippers for those areas that we deal with quickly. As soon as we know we have sinned, we confess it so they never grow to be large issues in our life. Loppers may be needed for the tougher jobs—those areas that we have ignored. They have now become strongholds and habits in our life. God's chain saw may be necessary for the hard to reach places; those things we have shoved deep into our spirit that have produced character flaws and sinful patterns.

The key is to stay in such connection with God, that he never has to use more than little hand clippers to prune you. May you stay so sensitive to the Spirit of God that you never allow the flesh to take root in you and grow into large sinful patterns! Today, ask God if and where you need pruning.



ONE CAN'T FAKE FRUIT,
AT LEAST NOT FOR
VERY LONG.

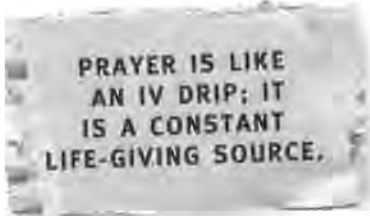
I AM THE VINE - PRAYER

John 15:1-17

The term “connectivity” is used in business, telecommunications and technology. It means the condition of being connected: the ability to maintain a connection between two or more points: the ability to transfer data back and forth. This concept is consistent in whatever specific area it is being used - the better the connection, the better the result or experience.

Jesus is really speaking about spiritual connectivity in this passage. The better connection between the vine and the branch, the more effective, fruitful and productive life is for the branch. One of the main means of maintaining good connectivity with God is prayer.

Ephesians 6:18 - pray in the Spirit on all occasions. Philippians 4:6 - in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. I Thessalonians 5:17 - pray continually. These verses reflect the idea of connectivity. We need to stay in constant contact with our Creator. We must maintain an open line of communion. Prayer is like an IV drip-It is a constant life-giving source.



In one of the churches I served in, I had a tremendous ministry assistant named Karen. She was so in tune with the ministry that she often knew what I needed her to do before I asked her. It seemed as if she knew what I was thinking and she wanted to meet that need. Wouldn't it be cool to be so

connected to Christ, so in tune with his heart and purpose, that you know what he desires for you and from you.

Allow me to challenge you in regard to your prayer time! Whatever time you spend in prayer, increase it. If you do not pray daily, for the next week pray every day. If you pray each night before you go to bed, add a prayer time in the morning as well for the next seven days. You can adapt the challenge to fit your specific situation, but for the next week increase your spiritual connectivity. Also, practice intercession! Praying for others is actually serving as an agent of connectivity for someone. The greatest thing you can do for others is to pray for them. Pray for those you know who do not know Christ. Pray for those going through difficult situations that they might experience the power, love and grace of God.

I AM THE VINE - PERSEVERANCE

John 15:1-17

As you read today's passage again, focus on verses 9-10. The NIV uses the word "remain." KJV uses "continue." NASB - "abide." These words carry the idea of perseverance. In your relationship with Christ and in your desire to experience intimacy with him, your attitude must be to never let go. Your desire must be to never sever the connection!

In 2012 we experienced plumbing problems at our house. Sinks and showers started backing up. Once the plumber was on the job he realized the problem was due to our sewer line that goes from the house to the alley where the main city tie in was located. The issue developed because tree roots had tunneled their way into our line and completely blocked the flow. The cost to replace the sewer line was extensive. Replacing a sewer line was the last thing I wanted to spend money on. However, the job had to be done. One cannot live in a house where everything stays in a constant state of "backed-up-ness! The waste needs to flow out!



The branch must remain on the vine. You must decide not to let anything clog the flow between you and God. It is easy to get mad at God for allowing trials and tribulations into your life. It is easy to become weary in living out the Christian life. At times, in our anger and weariness, we can sever the connection. These issues become like tree roots in the line and create blockage restricting the flow between you and God. Do not allow these things to create a state of spiritual "backed-up-ness."

Perseverance includes both patience and endurance. The idea behind perseverance is that whatever I might be going through presently, it is only a season. I can wait it out and I can stand up under it. This season will not last forever. The ability to persevere in the midst of trials and tribulations actually equips one to persevere in the determination to stay connected to the vine.

Examine your heart today. Are you angry with God? Are you weary in well doing? Have you allowed anything to cause you to no longer persevere in maintaining connectivity with God? If so, take the appropriate action to reestablish the flow!

L I M B O

Acts 1:3-9, 12-17, 21-26, 2:1-4

Limbo! Many define this term as a place of neglect or a place of oblivion. I choose to define it as a time of waiting! Limbo is that time between the job interview and hearing word as to getting the job. It is the time between the medical test being run and receiving the results. It is the time between planting something and seeing it bloom. Limbo is that time between telling your children something and the words actually sinking in!

Limbo is that place and time that most people do not enjoy. Spiritual limbo is the time between your request to God and God's response. It is the time between God's declaration and his demonstration. Some may tend to see spiritual limbo as a place of neglect or oblivion: a time where God has forgotten about them or abandoned them. However, limbo is neither of those. Spiritual limbo is a time where one waits on God.

When you find yourself in spiritual limbo, waiting on God, remember these three truths. One, Don't react. Peter did not like limbo. He was told by Jesus to go to the room and wait! Not even seven days past and he is already impatient and thinks he needs to act. Jesus did not tell him to

elect a new apostle, he said wait until the Spirit comes. When in limbo only do what God has told you to do. Don't react impatiently and do something outside of God's design for you.

Two, don't give up! God is going to respond so keep waiting. David waited 15 years from his anointing to become king.

Abraham waited over 20 years before experiencing God's promise. Noah waited 50-60 years before he saw the pronounced flood he had prepared for. God is on a different timetable than you. There is almost always a waiting period with God. But, his timing is always perfect.

Finally, enjoy the process! The process is more important than the destination. God is working in you during the waiting period. He is positioning you to be ready for the response. As was the case with Peter, God often needs to do something in you before he does something through you. Limbo is preparation time. Limbo is not simply biding time it is abiding in the time. If you are in limbo, abide in God and wait for his perfect timing!



THE ACTS 2 CHURCH

Acts 2

If you were in a gathering and people appeared to catch on fire you would start screaming, running out of the building or go help put the fires out! Why? That would be unnatural! If you were gathered with others inside a building and you felt a violent wind blowing through, you might say welcome to West Texas; or more likely you would wonder if doors were open! Why? That would be strange! These kinds of things do not happen so if they did happen it would freak people out.

Those meeting in the upper room that day were not freaked out at all.

On the contrary, they began to proclaim the message of the gospel in languages they did not know as the Spirit of God enabled them. Birthed by the Spirit of God, these newly empowered followers of Christ now spoke with boldness. The reactions to this phenomenon were mixed.

Some were intrigued and desired further examination. Some mocked! They accused the followers of being drunk and out of their minds. Yet, others embraced this experience and received the Spirit of God themselves. On that day many gave their life to Christ and the church was born!

As the story unfolds and the church grows, four dynamics became an essential part of the early church that contributed to its success. One, Christ was central! They preached one message clearly, boldly and without apology - Jesus is the way to the Father. The gospel story was their central theme. Two, the Word was priority! These new believers devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching. Three, prayer was practiced. They did not have bible studies on the importance of prayer - they prayed! Four, they were united. They were not perfect people but they dealt with their issues and were determined to love one another.

What if today's church could replicate the Acts 2 church? What if we as present-day believers were as filled with the Spirit of God and as bold as those early believers? As one believer, you cannot dictate what the church as a whole does. But, you do control what you do! Today, examine your heart to see if you align with these four characteristics. Keep Christ central in all you do and say. Make the Word of God a priority in your life. Pray! Seek to be united with fellow believers. Be a unifying presence not divisive.



NEW

Romans 6:1-11

New is nice! My wife and I have an ongoing debate when it is time to purchase a car. I lean toward buying a used car. It is cheaper and there is less depreciation. My wife leans toward buying new. She loves the dependability a new car provides. She usually wins! I love new cars too though. They smell good, nothing is broken, they have all the new tech upgrades and come with a good warranty. So new is nice!

Sometimes new is necessary. In Texas, cars must have an up-to-date vehicle registration sticker. It is not optional it is necessary. Verse 4 says through Christ we can have new life. This life is nice but it is also necessary. Eternal life and abundant life are given to us through a relationship with Jesus Christ. This life is only made possible through Christ. If we are to experience this new life it is necessary that we give our heart to Christ. Once this decision is made, this new life can blossom and we can experience the newness and grow in newness of life.



This new life is the result of a new birth. I Peter 1:3 says that God, in his great mercy, has given us new birth. We mature in this newness by developing a new mind. Ephesians 4:23 says we are to be made new in the attitude of our minds. This new life also affects how we relate to others. John 13:34 says that God

has given us a new command - love one another.

Today, are you experiencing new life? Wouldn't it be cool if everyday were a new day and we could experience God in new ways! Guess what - everyday IS a new day! Plus, God's mercies are new EVERY morning! Ponder these questions:

What if I expected God to do something new in my life every day?

What if God gave me a new opportunity every day to impact someone's life?

What if I spent time in God's word every day renewing my mind?

What if I allowed God to renew my spirit every day?

What if I saw every day as a new day to experience the goodness of God?

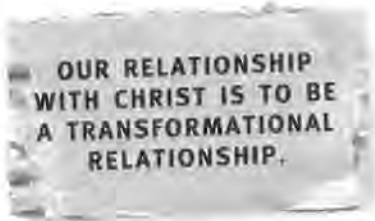
TRANSFORMATIONAL RELATIONSHIP

Romans 12:1-2, II Corinthians 3:17-18

Transformation! This concept is intriguing. What does it look like? How is it accomplished? What is required to experience it? Today we will not answer all of these questions. Let's look at this word in the context of relationship. Two types of relationships are presented in scripture: transactional and transformational.

Transactional relationships include affiliations like slave and master, employee and employer, and buyer and seller. In these kinds of relationships no intimacy exists, no connection is present and no real involvement in each other's lives is required. These relationships are built on the concept of completing a transaction. Give me what I want, do what I want, be here when I want you here but otherwise leave me alone.

Transformational relationships on the other hand are completely different. They require and promote intimacy, connection and an ongoing involvement. Our relationship with Christ is not a transactional one where we get "saved" and then we tell him to leave us alone. It is to be a transformational relationship where intimacy and mutual participation is present.



OUR RELATIONSHIP
WITH CHRIST IS TO BE
A TRANSFORMATIONAL
RELATIONSHIP.

Scripture gives us three transformational expressions. *Friend!* John 15:5 says that Christ no longer calls us servants but friends. *Son!* Galatians 4:7 says we are no longer a slave, but a son. *Disciple!* Jesus called his disciples to follow him and to become like him. All of these terms promote an intimate, interactive, ongoing relationship. As we pursue this type of relationship with Christ, the natural result is transformation. If we tell Christ to leave us alone after negotiating our spiritual transaction, we will never be different. Our life will never change. We will wind up being conformed to this world. But, as we walk daily with him as friend, Father and mentor, we experience the change that he desires in us.

Examine your present relationship with Christ. Are you relating to him as friend? Father? Teacher? The prodigal son, upon his coming to his senses and deciding to return to his Father, is willing to settle for being a slave. His father said no and gave him the full rights as a son. May you not settle for a transactional relationship with Christ! Let him transform you through relationship with him!

DELIGHT IN WEAKNESS

II Corinthians 12:7-10

Have you noticed how many things have weight limits? My ladder has a 250 lb. weight limit! Our smallest church elevator has a 2,000 lb. weight limit. A bridge on a golf course I play allows no carts only people because it has a weight limit. Semis are not allowed on certain roads because of the weight limit of those roads. These things are only capable of handling a certain weight and no more. We as humans have a weight limit and the issues of life far exceed that load.


Paul makes a profound statement when he says he delights in weaknesses (v.10). Now, it is one thing to admit that one has weaknesses. It is even a bigger gesture to accept one's weaknesses. However, it is entirely different to delight in one's weaknesses. Interestingly though, before a person can delight in weaknesses he must first admit and accept them.

In verse 7 Paul says he is given a thorn - he admits his weakness. In verse 8 he says he pleaded three times for the Lord to remove the weakness. Finally he quits pleading and accepts the weakness. Now in verse 10 he is at a place of being able to actually delight in the weakness. Why? So he could experience God's grace and God's glory!

The Lord's words to Paul were powerful, "My grace is sufficient." Grace means divine favor, kindness. Sufficient means to be content, satisfied, or to have enough. Paul experienced the all-sufficient kindness of God and it satisfied him. He realized that in his weakness

God's grace engulfed him and empowered him and that was much more satisfying than having the thorn removed. He comments that it is for Christ's sake that he will delight in his weakness. His heart's goal was to glorify God and he saw that God was more glorified in his weakness than in his so-called strength.

Dave Busby, a youth evangelist who died in 1997 of cystic fibrosis, in his last message described a conversation he had with God earlier in his life and ministry. He asked God, "Why did you make me this way?" He states God's Spirit responded to him, "I'm strong right in the middle of your weakness!" SO, let God be strong right in the middle of YOUR weakness!



WEAKNESS ALLOWS
ONE TO EXPERIENCE
GOD'S GRACE AND
GOD'S GLORY.

WALLS & BRIDGES

Ephesians 2:11-14

Paul relates that a wall of hostility existed between the Jews and the Gentiles. They did not like each other and there was little interaction between the two. Through Christ, he continues, this wall was destroyed. Jesus was the bridge that connected these two groups of people. Through the sacrifice of Christ, both parties were invited to partake in salvation. Later as the church develops, we see where Jews and Gentiles worshipped together in the same churches verifying the reality that this dividing wall between them had indeed been demolished.

Today many "walls" still exist that unfortunately divides groups of people: black & white, straight & gay, rich & poor. Walls even divide those in the church: traditional & contemporary, conservative & liberal, the church & the un-churched, believers & non-believers. As followers of Christ, we must realize that Christ,

through his death and resurrection has destroyed these walls and we must intentionally and lovingly keep these walls down, and in their place build bridges.

Walls isolate and insulate. Walls are erected out of fear or from a desire to live segregated from those not like me. Bridges on the other hand are instruments of invitation and interaction. It is a unifying structure that allows access from both directions. The question of the day is what are you building, walls or bridges? Are you intentionally finding ways to connect with a lost world or trying to insulate yourself from its woes?

We have a bridge in our back yard. It is colorful, about 16 feet long with a rock bed cut out underneath it. Interestingly, the first object every person is drawn to when they come into our backyard is that bridge. They walk across it and talk about how beautiful it is. People are drawn to bridges and repelled by walls.

Are you drawing people to Christ or repelling them away? Are people drawn to Christ because of the beauty they see in you? Are you intentionally seeking ways to connect with those who need to know Christ? May no hostility exist in you regarding people! May you be a bridge!



CHURCH MARQUEE

Ephesians 3:4-11, 16-21

I am sure you have seen a variety of church marquees as you drive around your city. One sign I saw said, "Honk if you love Jesus! Text while driving if you want to meet him!" If you search "church marquees" online you will find thousands of sayings, some good most bad! The purpose of these marquees is to communicate something. However, I am not sure these signs always deliver the intended message. Another sign said, "Don't let worries kill you, let the church help!" I know what the intended message was, but I fear an entirely different message was conveyed. One sign, "What is missing from church? - u r!", was meant to be inviting. I hope those that saw that sign took it as an invitation and not condemnation!

Followers of Christ are actually church marquees. Sometimes the messages we as marquees deliver are good sometimes they are not so good. You, as a follower of Christ, are constantly delivering a message to the world. Hopefully that message is an accurate representation of Christ!

Today's passage speaks to the purpose of the church. By church I mean the body of Christ, those that claim the name of Christ. As the church,

our purpose is to communicate some things. What are those things? First, we are to communicate the glory of God. God has displayed his glory in multiple ways including through creation, the incarnation, his plan for salvation and his wisdom. Second, we are to communicate the purpose of God. That purpose is

redemption - the gospel: His desire for all to experience life through his Son. Third, we are to communicate the love of Christ. He wants all to know how wide, long, high and deep his love is.

The question to consider today is what kind of marquee are you! What, by your words and actions, are you communicating? When people see you are they seeing an accurate representation of God! Today may you be used to communicate God's glory, God's purpose and God's love! Meditate on how you can effectively communicate these things to those you encounter today. The next time you see a church marquee may it remind you that you are a marquee as well.



BLIZZARD OF '09

Philippians 1:1-11

My family survived the blizzard of '09! It was Christmas Eve and we were leaving Ft. Worth where we had been spending time with extended family. We knew it was supposed to snow, but being from Amarillo I was used to driving in snow. We stopped in Decatur, TX to eat lunch. When we got back into our car to head home it had started snowing pretty significantly. The four of us debated whether to drive home or return to Ft. Worth and wait out the storm. It was a split vote so I made the executive decision. We headed for Amarillo!

As we drove the snow fell more intensely! The wind blew more violently! Visibility was nearly extinct. I was beginning to regret my decision. With Wichita Falls only a few miles ahead we encountered traffic at a stand still. Not knowing the problem, I figured we would be stationary for only a short period. We came to realize that traffic was stopped for miles because disabled semi trucks were blocking the road. Because of the 14 inches of snow on the ground little could be done to rectify the situation. Ten hours later we are still sitting unmoved on highway 287. During that ten-hour nightmare, we tried to keep from freezing, we were almost attacked by five crazy men and we reluctantly made use of the world's longest port-a-potty! I made a choice and we all had to live with that choice!



In life we live by the choices we make. We see in Philippians that Paul made choices and he lived by those choices. Paul chose to follow and exalt Christ, to be content regardless of the situation, to forget the past and focus on the future, to suffer for the gospel rather than deny Christ, to think on good things and to rejoice. All good choices by the way!

For the next several devotions, we will be in Philippians dealing with choices. On that snowy wintry day, I had a choice. I could have chosen "A" to stay or "B" to go. I chose unwisely. Likewise, you often have choices, "A" or "B". As we walk through these choices in Philippians may you be encouraged to see what the best choices are and be wise enough to choose the best choice. As verse 10 proclaims, may you be able to discern what is best. May your choices lead you in the right direction so that God can complete the work he has started in you!

DEAD END OR DETOUR

Philippians 1:12-14

Blood and water have something in common—they will both alter their tracks. Blood flowing through veins will find new routes when blocked. Water as well will create new lanes of flow. These examples give great insight to the journey of faith; what seems like dead ends are in reality only detours.

A dead end indicates the end of the road; no proceeding beyond this point! A detour however, is an alternate route. We must never see events and situations as dead ends, only detours. Judas betrayed Christ. In his shame, he felt like he had come to the end of his road so he took his own life. Peter denied Christ. Though he too felt shame in letting Christ down, he allowed Christ to reinstate him. Peter went on to have a tremendous ministry. Judas saw his failure as a dead end while Peter saw his failure as a detour. In your spiritual journey there are no dead ends only detours.

Paul was in chains. He could have seen that situation as a dead end and withdrawn from ministry. But he realized his circumstance was simply a detour. His persecution actually produced an alternate avenue of ministry. Paul's ministry began to flow via multiple streams, as brothers in Christ were encouraged to share the gospel more courageously.

Four obstacles can create detours in our spiritual journey.

One: God's Will! We sometimes have our own plan or direction, dreams and ambitions, but God has a different way. He may block our way in order to redirect us according to his way.

Two: Sin! At times we may detour ourselves. We take wrong roads and proceed in a direction that does not please God. But, even when we blow it and fail, we should see that sin as a detour not a dead end. In your sin know that God still loves you and desires to use you. Simply confess that sin and return to the right path.

Three: Persecution! As we see in our passage today, Paul's persecution resulted in new avenues of ministry. So will yours! If you are called upon to endure persecution know that God will use your persecution to impact people beyond your imagination.

Four: Tragedy! Wayward children, job loss, death of a loved one, natural disaster may cause us at times to doubt God or blame God. It can cause us to decide to stop advancing on our journey. Do not let it! God will prove his faithfulness if you will continue the journey.

May you realize as Paul did that everything that happens to you can serve to advance the gospel if you will see your obstacles as detours and not dead ends!

FISH OR CUT BAIT

Philippians 1:12-18

“**C**ut bait” is a literal term that means to chop up fish as bait for larger fish. The common figurative meaning is “do something or get out of the way” or “make a decision”. My meaning combines the two: prepare to fish. Expanded the connotation is prepare to fish because you are going fishing! So, the question to ponder today is spiritually speaking, will you actually fish or spend your life preparing to fish? Will you fish or just cut bait?

Paul loved to fish, **for men!** Verse 12 indicates Paul’s desire to advance the gospel. Verse 14 expresses Paul’s excitement that others were sharing the gospel. Verse 16 gives Paul’s life purpose of defending the gospel or preaching the gospel. Paul was a fisher of men! Like Paul, God has called every believer to share the gospel; to fish!

I am not a fisherman! I have fished only a handful of times. Grandmother Jennings (my wife’s grandmother) made fun of me because I did not fish. She loved to fish and fished often! In talking to those who do fish, I discovered 4 traits of fishermen.

1. PASSION! Fishermen love to fish! They arrange their schedule to make time to fish. They buy equipment to enable better fishing. Paul loved to share the gospel! His heart beat for sharing Christ with others. As a believer in Christ you may love to worship and study, but you also should love to fish, to share the gospel of Christ.

2. PATIENCE/PERSISTENCE! Guys I talked to love to fish not just to catch fish. The highlight is to catch fish but they love the process of fishing. They keep fishing even when they are not catching anything. Fishing requires patient persistence. Fish do not bite every time you cast. Keep casting. Every person you share Christ with will not accept Christ. Keep sharing because some will!

3. PLACE! Many fishermen have a favorite fishing spot. Your spot is where you are. It is your work, your school, your neighborhood.

4. PREFERENCE! Some prefer fly-fishing, some deep-sea fishing. Some fish from the dock some wade in the water. Some fish in streams some in the ocean and some in stocked fishponds. People share Christ differently as well. Some go door-to-door, some serve, some build relationships, some are conversational in their approach.

Here is the point. You are expected to fish. Matthew 28:19-20 tells us to share the gospel of Christ. But the good news is you can fish. My grandmother Jennings said you don’t need fishing lessons just cast and you will catch fish. Great advice! Tell people about Christ and people will come to Christ! So don’t just cut bait: Fish!

SURFACE OR SUBSTANCE

Philippians 1:20-24, 3:10

We all know the difference between a surface relationship and a relationship that has substance. In a surface relationship, you might know the person's name or where they work, but you do not know anything about their family, what their goals are, or their inner thoughts, beliefs and feelings. With substantive relationships, you become intimately in tune with one another. Do you desire a substantive relationship with God or is a surface relationship with him enough!

Paul was not content with a surface relationship with God. He says in 1:21 that to live is Christ and to die is gain. His whole purpose for living was to know Christ and serve him. Here is the difference between a surface relationship and one that has substance.

SURFACE

Self-centered

What can God do for me?

Christ is one of many things

I try to fit God in

SUBSTANCE

God-centered

What can I do for God?

Christ is the main thing

Everything revolves around Christ

In 3:10 Paul expresses his desire to know Christ in his power and in his suffering. Paul recognized that suffering played an important role in deepening his relationship with Christ. Paul embraced suffering so he could experience the deepest level of relationship with God.

Albert Barnes says that most believers:

Want to reign with Christ but are unwilling to suffer with Christ.

Want to wear the crown of glory but not wear the crown of thorns.

Want to share in the triumph of redemption but they do not want to walk the path of persecution.

In other words, many are content with a surface relationship with Christ. Though suffering is never pleasant, it can move us into a more intimate awareness of God and a deeper dependence on God.

One will never discover the real treasure of Christ and knowing Christ if he is content with a surface relationship. Just like digging for oil or natural gas, one must go deep below the surface to find what is desired. The riches of God are found as you seek him with all your heart. I pray your desire is to know Christ deeply and that you will spend your life pursuing the depths of his love, grace, power, majesty, glory, and beauty.

CLOSET OR MANTEL

Philippians 1:27-28, 2:12-16

Most of the houses our family has lived in have had a mantel above the fireplace. One house did not, so one of the first things we did after we moved in was to put up a mantel. We love fireplace mantels. They add beauty to the living room and allow you to place desired items on display.

All of our houses have also had closets, several! Closets are different than mantels. Closets hide things! Mantels display things. Most people put things they do not want seen in their closets while mantels are reserved for those items we desire others to see. What if my wife and I decided to put closet items on the mantel and mantel items in our closet?

Spiritually speaking, do you have the wrong things in the closet? Have you placed items in the closet that should be displayed on the mantel? Today, think about the following five elements and determine whether you need to relocate them. Do any of these "items" need to be moved from the closet to the mantel? If so, are you willing to place them in full view of everyone on the mantel?



1. **Sin** - At times, we may try to hide sin from God and others. The former is impossible and the latter is not advisable. I John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and he will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." James 5:16 encourages us to confess our sins to each other.

2. **Struggles** - Everyone has them why not share them so we can practice Galatians 6:2 - "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

3. **Gifts** - I Peter 4:10 - "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." Are you using yours?

4. **Good Deeds**- I Peter 2:12 exhorts believers to live good lives so those without Christ will see our good deeds and glorify God.

5. **Light** - Matthew 5:15 is a reminder not to place a lamp under a bowl, but instead to put it on a stand. Translation, don't stick it in the closet; place it on the mantel!

Today's choice-Closet or Mantel? Hide it or display it?

SACRIFICE OR OFFERING

Philippians 2:17, 3:7-8, 4:18-19

Genesis 22 records the story of Abraham as he offers Isaac on the altar as a sacrifice to God. Mark 12 recounts the story of the widow as she places her last two coins into the temple treasury. John 3:16 reminds all that God loved us so much that he gave Jesus as a sacrifice for our sin. How is this possible? How could Abraham place his son on the altar? How could the widow place her last coins in the offering plate? How could God offer his Son on the cross?

Sacrifice and Offering are the same yet different. Sacrifice means to forfeit, give up or forgo. Offering means gift, donation, contribution. In other words, sacrifice, to many, carries the idea of giving up something whereas offering denotes giving something. The characters in the previously cited stories maintained an outward focus of giving rather than an inward focus of giving up something.

Abraham loved Isaac but he loved God more. He did not focus on what he was giving up rather on whom he was giving to. The widow hungered for food but she hungered for God more so she too focused on whom she was giving to. God "gave" his Son; he did not "give up" his Son.

HOW COULD
ABRAHAM PLACE
HIS SON ON
THE ALTAR?

Sacrifice can promote an inward focus. It becomes about me and what I must give up. Offering yields an outward focus. It becomes all about whom we are giving to! One's perspective here is important. The question to ponder today

is whether you see your life as an offering or a sacrifice. When it comes to serving God and living out your faith, do you see it as a sacrifice, giving up stuff for God, or as an offering, giving yourself to God.

Do you see your financial giving to the church as an offering or a sacrifice? Do you see your service and involvement in church and ministry endeavors as an offering or a sacrifice? Romans 12:1 says, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices." The verse indicates that we should offer ourselves as a sacrifice, not sacrifice ourselves as an offering. The emphasis is on being an offering!

II Timothy 4:6 mimics Philippians 2:17 - "I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is at hand." Verse 7 continues, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." Will you say like Paul, I am an offering to God! I will give my money, my service, my time, and my life to Him as a gift!

FIT OR FIT IN

Philippians 3:1-6

Paul and the believers in the early church at Philippi were bombarded with the demand to conform. Philippi was a Roman colony. Inhabitants and citizens of that city were pressured to be fully Roman. They were to be loyal to Caesar and to act as Roman citizens. Also, Judaizers in that day were constantly pressuring them to live fully as Jews. They stressed the importance to continue to practice the law, to observe the dietary rules and to participate in all of the festivals. At the same time, they were trying to discern what it meant to be a follower of Christ. They were seeking to live a life that would honor Christ and be obedient to his teaching. Consequently, they were faced with a decision - to fit or fit in! Would they succumb to the pressure to conform to the Romans or to the Judaizers, thus fit into their man-made mold, or would they seek to fit God's heavenly design for them.

We face the same pressure today. Our culture tries to shape us into its mold. The world seeks to tell us how we should look, how we should act, and what we should think. Likewise, the church can be guilty of the same thing. Religion can overpower relationship. The institutional dynamic can overshadow the personal dynamic.

Many religious persons try to dictate what style of worship is appropriate, what theological dogma is to be followed, and what kind of behavior is acceptable or expected. So, with people's desire to want to "fit in" either with the world or the church, they surrender to the onslaught.

How about you? Do you desire to fit or fit in? Do you want your life, your thoughts and your actions to be shaped by what the world says, what the church says, or what God says? Do you want to fit into culture's mold or the church's mold? Or, would you rather fit God's design for you?

In verse 10 of our Philippians reading Paul says he wants to know Christ and he wants to become like Him. In verse 8 Paul says he considers everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ. Not only does he want to know Christ, but he would willingly and joyfully remove everything else from his life to know Christ. All of his earthly credentials, his heritage and his education seem worthless compared to the opportunity to know Christ and to become like him.

May your desire be the same as Paul's! May the driving force of your life be to know Christ and to become like Christ! May the temptation to conform to the world or to the religious fade and weaken as the desire to conform to the image of Christ grows and strengthens!




DOWNLOAD OR DELETE (1)

Philippians 3:7-9, 12-14, 4:8-9

Computers have made great advancements from the vacuum tube years of 1946-1958 to the age of the microprocessor. Future computer advancements speak of robot technology, quantum computers, nanotechnology and AI. However, with all of the advancements in computer technology, two things remain constant - the need to delete and download!

The same is true in life. Amid constant advancement in medicine and technology and social development we too maintain the need to delete and download. Today we will look at deleting; tomorrow we will discuss downloading. We delete items on our computer either when the computer is full or it is in danger. In other words, we delete when we have too much stuff on our computer that it becomes bogged down or runs less efficiently. We also delete when something is on our computer that should not be there like a virus or infected files.

In life, it is easy to become overwhelmed with life's activities. Recreation, work, family, school, bills, chores, charity work, can all pile up and saturate our schedule. As a result we become less effective. We are doing so much that we are not doing anything well and may be neglecting what is most important. In those times we need to delete some things.



**THROW SOME
STUFF IN THE
TRASH BIN TODAY.**

We also may have allowed things in our life that has infected us. Sin is like a virus. What seems harmless or appealing is actually destructive. That destructive force needs to be removed. The Psalmist in Psalm 139:23-24 gives God permission to search his heart to see if there is any offensive way in him. I John 1:9 says if we will confess our sin, God will delete it.

Paul says in verses 7-8 that what he once considered things to keep, he now considers things to be removed, deleted. He counts them as loss! He even calls those things rubbish! Trash! He in essence has taken out the trash. In verse 13 he says he practices forgetting what is behind. He has deleted the shame of his past life as a persecutor of Christians. He deleted the guilt of his past sins even as a believer.

You may be good at deleting old emails and documents, but are you good at deleting sin, the shame of your past, and those things that clutter your life? Throw some stuff in the trash bin today. Examine your life and heart today. Do you need to delete good things from your life so you can experience God's best? Do you need to delete any bad things that if left will become a destructive force? If so, hit the delete button!

DOWNLOAD OR DELETE (2)

Philippians 3:7-9, 12-14, 4:8-9

In the last devotion we discussed the need to hit the delete button to rid our lives of unnecessary or unwanted items. Today we look at the opposite need of downloading that which is necessary and desired.

Computers are great and they can do many things. They can make life easier and the workload lighter. However, if nothing has been downloaded on the computer it is useless. The downloaded software and programs facilitate the effectiveness of the computer. Our lives are the same. We must download some essentials if we are to effectively live out our faith.

Paul said in Philippians 4:8-9 that we should download certain features into our lives. He used the phrase "think about." What features should we download? Those things that are reliable, worthy of respect, in line with God's standards, morally excellent, pleasing and appealing! We are to continually think on these things. We should be continually updating these features. As we think on these characteristics they become a part of who we are. In other words, we do not simply think on these things, but we actually become more and more reliable and worthy of respect and in line with God's standard and morally excellent.



Along with these characteristics here are a few more things we should be continually downloading into our lives.

1. The Word! We do not download the Word just so we have it or know it. Rather, we download it for what it will produce in us. It will change us and prepare us for life's events. It will help us stand firm and strong, giving us stability in an unstable world.

2. Habits! Samuel Smiles said, "Sow a thought, and you reap an act; Sow an act, and you reap a habit; Sow a habit, and you reap a character; Sow a character, and you reap a destiny." Sow godly habits and you reap godliness. If you want to fulfill what God has called you to do, download those habits that help draw you into intimacy in Christ like prayer, scripture reading and memorization and worship.

3. Thoughts! We discussed what Paul said we should think on. Thoughts are powerful; they lead to actions. Positive actions start with positive thoughts. If you think you can resist temptation you can! If you think God can use you to make a difference He can and He will!

When it comes to appropriate downloading and deleting, may you heed Paul's exhortation in verse 9 - "put it into practice."

CHOKED OR YOKED (1)

Philippians 4:2-7

In today's passage, we see one group of people apparently striving against one another while another group is working together, side by side. One group is choked; the other group is yoked! To choke means to stifle, suppress, smother, obstruct, impede. Word pictures include a person choking on food, or weeds choking out the grass. To yoke means to unite or work as one. The reality is we must be careful what or who we are yoked with because being yoked to the wrong thing will actually wind up choking us. As a result spiritual progress becomes impeded!

Today we will discuss being choked. Several things can choke us and impede our spiritual progress. We must resist the urge to become yoked with these.

1. The Pleasures of Life! Matthew 13:22 reminds us that the seed that was sown among the thorns represents the person who let the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making the seed unfruitful. Hedonistic cravings will choke out the love of God in your life. Money, pleasure, material things are not wrong but they can be deceitful. An insatiable appetite for wealth and the lifestyle wealth can bring will weaken your desire to pursue your relationship with God.

2. The Issues of Life! The Matthew passage also identifies the "worries of this life." Family issues, financial issues and health issues can dominate our attention and create stress and anxiety. Matthew 6:25-34 exhorts us not to worry about our life, what we will eat or drink. God takes care of the birds and he will take care of us. Don't yoke yourself to worry. God will give you what you need to deal with the issues of life.

3. The Wrong People! II Corinthians 6:14 directs us not to be yoked together with unbelievers. Deuteronomy 22:10 gives us the word picture of a donkey and an ox yoked together and says not to plow like that. Close association with the wrong people can choke our productivity and create problems in our lives.

4. Religion! One can be religious and miss Christ all together! Religion is not a replacement for relationship! Don't let the legalism of religion choke out the life of Christ in you.

When we yoke ourselves with the wrong things we get choked! Our journey becomes a burden and our progress is impeded. Today, meditate on these four aspects. Are any of these aspects creating problems in your life? Have you inadvertently yoked yourself with any of these aspects? If so, remove the yoke!

CHOKED OR YOKED (2)

Philippians 4:2-7

Our last devotion focused on not being choked. Today we look at being yoked! Remember, to be yoked means to be united or to work as one. The obvious example is the literal wooden bar used to unite two animals as they would work in the field. We as well need to yoke ourselves to those who will help us fulfill our task and complete our spiritual journey.

Yoke Yourself with Appropriate People! In our previous devotion we discussed how damaging it can be for us if we yoke ourselves with the wrong people. However, being yoked with the right people will empower and enable us. Galatians 6:2 encourages believers to carry each other's burdens. Hebrews 10:25 exhorts us to encourage one another because difficult days are approaching. Proverbs 27:17 - "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."

When yoked with the right people, these people can serve two vital roles in your life: dependability and accountability! You can depend on them when you encounter the difficult days. They will come along side you and help you carry the load. They will lift you up when you cannot stand on your own. They will also be the ones to correct you when necessary and will lovingly identify those things in your life that should not be there.

Yoke Yourself with God! Have you seen the hotel commercial where the person is lying on the bed? When he sits up all kinds of craziness, turmoil and noise is going on. When he lies down everything is quiet and peaceful! In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Farmers used to yoke a young ox with an old experienced ox to train them. The old ox would take the major load as the young ox walks beside. When we are yoked with Jesus, He carries the load, which is why his yoke is easy. He is carrying it not us! He carries the load of salvation because it is by His grace not our works. He carries the load of living the Christian life because it is empowered by His Spirit not our flesh. The great news is He will never grow weary or tired. (Isaiah 40:28-31) Imagine being yoked to one who will never tire and will increase your strength. So it is when we yoke ourselves to Christ!

Verses 4-7 give us some characteristics of a life yoked with Christ. These characteristics include: Joy (v.4), Gentleness (v.5), Prayer (v.6), and Peace (v.7). Are these characteristics of your life? Be yoked with Christ and they will be!

GIVE THANKS

Colossians 1:3-4, 9-14

Psalm 107:22 says, "Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of his works with songs of joy." In Old Testament times, the children of Israel would offer thank offerings. All of the thank offering had to be consumed that day. It could not be carried over. The application - be thankful today!

Scripture exhorts us to be thankful always (Ephesians 5:20) and in all circumstances (I Thessalonians 5:18). Today, let's get more specific!

Today - Be thankful for what God has done!

Verse 12 encourages us to joyfully give thanks to the Father. Then the passage gives multiple examples of what God has done for us all of which are reasons to give thanks.

Give thanks because he has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints!

Give thanks because he has rescued you from the dominion of darkness!

Give thanks because he has brought you into the kingdom of God!

Give thanks because in Him you have redemption!

Give thanks because your sins have been forgiven!

Today - Be thankful for the people in your life!

In verse 3, Paul expresses how thankful he is for these believers at Colossi. In Philippians 1:3 Paul says he thanks God every time he remembers the believers at Philippi. In I Thessalonians 3:9 Paul can't thank God enough for the Thessalonian believers. He expressed thanks to those who trusted him, who accepted him and who provided resources for his mission efforts. He is thanking God, but he is thankful for the people in his life. God has put people in your life to bless you, to guide you, to come along side and walk with you, to minister to you, to counsel you and to love you.

I have had many people in my life and as a result of knowing them I am better. Spiritual mentors like Jerry Morris, Ralph Gibson, Steve Moore, and Jackie Newton each invested in my spiritual maturity. Their examples made a life-changing impact on my life. My parents loved and cared for me and were my first spiritual mentors as they shared Christ with me and followed Christ themselves. My wife Denise, who is the best person I know, has given unconditional, selfless love to me. Her willingness to speak truth to me along with her godly wisdom has been transformational in my life.

Today, take the time to thank God for what He has done and for those He has brought into your life. Go a step further. Write, call, email or text those who have impacted your life and spiritual journey! Let them know how thankful you are for them and for how they have blessed you.

ASSURANCE

II Timothy 1:8-12

Can you say with Paul, "I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day." Do you struggle with the certainty of your salvation? Have you questioned the assurance of your salvation?

One time after pulling out of my garage and driving down our street, I had a question as to whether or not I shut the garage door. I drove back to the house and sure enough the door was wide open. Since then, I find myself often questioning if I lowered the garage door. At times I find myself driving around the block to come back by the house to be sure I lowered it. Sometimes I just need assurance!

Lack of assurance can be a faith issue - Is Jesus the way of salvation? In other words, have I chosen the right "faith"? Though there is not room today to discuss this in detail, scripture is abundantly clear that Jesus is the only way of salvation. It can also be a theological issue - Can I lose my salvation? Again space is limited but the answer to this question is No! In Christ, I have a new nature and I have been born again. I cannot be unborn! Paul even says in verse 12 that he knows Jesus is the way and that he will keep him safe until that day when we meet him face to face.



Thirdly, lack of assurance can be an experiential issue - Have I given my life to Christ? Have I truly experienced new birth? Did I truly ask Christ to forgive my sin and come into my life? Sometimes we doubt the reality of our new birth because our humanity gets in the way. We don't always "feel" saved. Also, Satan and our flesh are continually attacking us. When we succumb to the temptations we wonder how we can truly be saved and do these things.

Here is a two-part test. Part one - Do you know for sure there was a time when you asked Christ into your life and you know you meant it? If not, do that now! If so, claim verse 12. Don't let feelings or failures create doubt. Part two - When you sin, are you convicted? If so, rejoice! As a believer, you will not be sin-free. But, as a child of God, when you sin, God will convict you through His Spirit who lives in you. Conviction signifies that you belong to Christ.

You can rest in the truth that Jesus is the way of salvation. You can trust that your salvation is secure under the guardianship of Christ and the guarantee of the Spirit within you. When necessary, ask God to affirm your salvation. It is ok! Sometimes we just need assurance!

PERFECT BUT NOT PERFECTED

Hebrews 10:1-14

I preached a sermon series entitled “Signs” and I asked people to email me pictures of signs they saw along the road or around town or from some other source. Many people sent me signs and most of them were great. I received funny ones, stupid ones, ones that made no sense whatsoever. I also received some that were confusing. They seemed to be sending mixed messages. Here are a few examples of those signs that sent mixed messages.

* Along one road two signs were together. One sign said “keep right” the one under it had a left arrow.

* A store had two signs in its window. One said, “store closing” the other said “now hiring.”

* A sign in a fast food parking lot stated, “parking for drive-thru service only.”

Today’s passage gives us a seemingly mixed message. The message is: we are perfect but not perfected! Verse 10 says that we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus. Verse 14 says we are “being made holy.” Which is it? Are we holy or are we being made holy? Both! Our passage also uses the word “perfect.” Verse 1 reminds us that the law can never make perfect those who draw near to worship. Verse 14 however, says that by one sacrifice he has made (us) perfect forever.

This word perfect means to be accomplished, finished or completed. The idea is that through the shed blood of Christ, and our receiving him as our Savior, we are now in right standing before God. Everything needed to unite us to God has been done. The work is finished. So, our position in Christ is perfect. “Holy” means “set apart”. Upon salvation, God set us apart from sin and for himself. In that sense we are holy. But as verse 14 states we are still being made holy or we are still being perfected.

We are holy and perfect in our position but we are still in need of being perfected and made holy in our condition. Romans 12:2 says, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” In truth, as we commit to being more like Christ, we are choosing to look like what we are declared. In other words, our condition begins to match our position. This concept can be confusing. But the point is that you believe that since you are in Christ, God sees you as perfect and holy, because he views you through the perfection of his son. Each day, may you commit to allowing God’s Spirit to transform you so that people can see the same Jesus in you that God sees.

DISCOMFORT ZONE

Hebrews 11:8-10, 24-26

Two chairs are placed side by side. One looks like an extremely comfortable chair while the other seems hard, small and uncomfortable. Which chair would you sit on? Probably you would choose the comfortable chair. Why? Because it is comfortable! If given a choice, most would choose to sit in a comfortable chair. Likewise, if given a choice, most would prefer to live a comfortable life. Let's change the word "uncomfortable" to the word, "discomfortable." You may not want to be uncomfortable, but are you willing to be discomfortable?

Discomfort is usually viewed as a negative. But what if we view discomfort as a good thing? For today, let's see discomfort as disturbed comfort. Most people prefer to live life in their comfort zone. The comfort zone is that invisible boundary, that place of presumed security where we can live without a sense of risk. It is also that place, which once established, is hard to get someone out of. The only way to get some people out of their comfort zone is to convince them that it is safe to get out of it. However, highly successful people routinely step out of their comfort zones.

M. Scott Peck, author of *The Road Less Traveled*, said, "The truth is that our finest moments are most likely to occur when we are feeling deeply uncomfortable. "Propelled by our discomfort...we are likely to step out of our ruts and start searching for different ways or truer answers."

Abraham left the comfort zone of his homeland to go to a land unidentified. Moses left the comfort of Pharaoh's protection to identify himself with his people, the people of God. Becoming discomfortable is the best motivation to help one leave the comfort zone. Here are a few things that should make you discomfortable.

1. **Evil, sin, wrong in the world.** Your discomfort should propel you to stand up and speak out against these injustices.

2. **The plight of people.** You may not know exactly what to do for the homeless, the hungry, victims of natural disasters or others in perilous situations, but you should be discomfortable enough to care and try to do something.

3. **Your life situation.** Being discomfortable in a present situation may be the spark to prepare you for a new situation. That discomfort may lead you into new areas that you would never engage in otherwise.

4. **Your spiritual condition.** Your spiritual maturity and forward movement wane when we become too comfortable where we are in our intimacy with Christ.

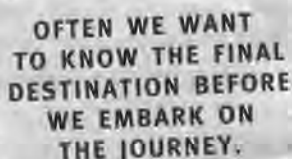
Are you willing to live life in the discomfort zone?

DISCOMFORTABLE FAITH

Hebrews 11:1-8, 35-37

The previous devotion gave a challenge to live life in your discomfort zone. Today we examine one ultimate discomfort zone - Faith!

Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This word "sure" means assurance, substance, confidence. An example of the usage of the word would be a car title. I have the title to my car. This document is the guarantee that I own my car. The title says three things: the car exists, the car is paid for and the car is mine. Faith is my spiritual title.



OFTEN WE WANT
TO KNOW THE FINAL
DESTINATION BEFORE
WE EMBARK ON
THE JOURNEY.

It says God exists, my salvation is paid for and God is mine. Faith is the assurance or the belief that gives me confidence that my relationship with God is real.

Here is the uncomfortable part. My assurance, my certainty, the proof if you will is in things unseen, in things hoped for. Verse 13 says, "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance." Verse 39 says, "none of them received what had been promised." They lived by faith in a yet to be realized reality.

Hebrews 11 reveals what uncomfortable faith looks like.

Discomfortable Faith...

V.3 - believes something happened that you did not see and cannot scientifically prove. Many say creation created itself but we believe God is Creator!

V.6 - trusts someone that you cannot see. Many say there is no God but we say there is!

V.7 - prepares for something that has not happened. Noah lived his life as if a flood was coming even though a flood had never happened. His belief led to action!

V.8 - embarks on a journey without knowing the destination. Often we want to know the final destination before we embark on the journey. We want to know step ten before taking the first step!

V.17 - gives God what is most valuable and trusts him with it.

V.24-25 - chooses persecution over prosperity. We believe sin has a price and righteousness has a reward!

V.35-37 - stays faithful to follow Christ knowing it will lead to persecution or death.

Meditate on these faith characteristics and ask yourself this question: Is my faith discomfortable enough?

DISCOMFORTABLE LOVE

I Corinthians 13

Today we examine a second ultimate discomfort zone - Love! This is the word "agape." Agape is unconditional love; it is an active word. There is no passivity in agape. John 3:16 says God so loved that he gave. True agape requires and results in action! Today's passage shows what uncomfortable love looks like.

1. Discomfortable love realizes my gifts are not enough! v.1-3

I can be a great preacher, a gifted prophet, full of faith and I can give all I have to the poor. I can even give myself up as a martyr. But that is not enough without love.

2. Discomfortable love realizes love is a long-term commitment! v.4

When people continue to reject you or ridicule you, you continue to love. When those close to you continue to make huge mistakes and you are tempted to give up on them, you continue to love. Love is patient.

3. Discomfortable love puts others ahead of myself. v.5

Love does not do what is best for me it does what is best for others. It is not self-seeking.

4. Discomfortable love forgives those who do me wrong and mistreat me. v.5

Love does not keep score. It keeps no record of wrongs.

Curt Rosengren, a Seattle based Passion Catalyst, wrote a blog entitled, "Thriving in the Discomfort Zone." In this blog he gives two practical insights. First, he says you should question your comfort often. Ask yourself, he says, "Am I uncomfortable enough?" So, is your love uncomfortable enough? Are you reaching beyond those who are easy to love?



Second, he says to practice discomfort. Make it a regular habit to take action that takes you out of your comfort zone. So, take action! What can you do today that will take you out of your comfort zone and into uncomfortable love?

Living a life of biblical faith and love is the most uncomfortable place to live. BUT, it is where you will experience the greatest joy, peace, victory and fulfillment. So, you have a choice. Will you choose to live life in your comfort zone, or will you dare to live life in the discomfort zone and express vibrant faith and extravagant love?

DOES GOD EXIST?

Hebrews 11:1-6

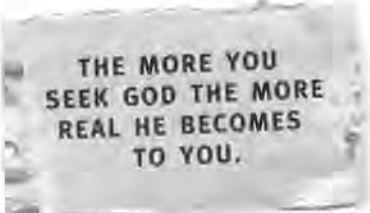
Marilyn Adamson was an atheist at one time. And like many atheists, the issue of people believing in God bothered her greatly. She notes that as she challenged those who believed in God, she was curious to see if they could convince her otherwise. Part of her quest was to become free from the question of God. She states, "If I could conclusively prove to believers that they were wrong, then the issue is off the table, and I am free to go about my life." It seems, that even as an atheist, Marilyn Adamson, deep within her being wondered, "Does God exist?"

Christians have been trying to prove God's existence for centuries. Some use a logical argument like intelligent design; some use a philosophical argument while others stick strictly to a religious perspective. Some say one cannot prove God so therefore he does not exist. Others say that you cannot disprove God therefore he does exist. I say proof isn't the answer, faith is!

Verse 1 says faith is being *certain*. That word means evidence or proof. In non-religious uses in that day the word was used in a court setting. It means that one has gathered enough evidence and support for the reality that God exists. Faith replaces proof. Faith is the conviction, which based on the evidence, says I know God exists and I will live for him. Verse 6 reminds us that we must believe (not prove) he exists. The verse continues and says God rewards those who earnestly seek him. The key to knowing God exists, and to knowing God, is not in proving him but in seeking him!

I am sure you are familiar with the shell game. Three shells are moved around. One of the shells has a marble or something under it. After the shells stop being moved, you must guess which shell the marble is under. Unless you actually see the person put the marble under a specific shell, you do not know where the marble is or even if it exists. Maybe there isn't even a marble there! The only way you can know for certain if a marble exists and where it happens to be, is to look for it. You must seek it, looking under each shell until you find it.

The more you seek God the more real he becomes to you; the more he reveals himself to you. Can you prove God exists? No! But you can know he exists by what he does in you, through you, and for you. Don't let people say faith is bad or lame or insufficient. One either has faith that God exists or they have faith that he does not exist. You can't prove either way. Choose, because of the evidence, to believe he exists and spend your life seeking after him!



THE MORE YOU
SEEK GOD THE MORE
REAL HE BECOMES
TO YOU.

MESSED - UP - NESS

James 4:1-10

James 4:6 refers to Proverbs 3:34 when it states, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." A proud person relates to God differently than a humble person does. Pride says: I've arrived; I don't need God; I have no issues; I can do it myself. Pride denies messed-up-ness! Humility on the other hand says: I'm journeying; I desperately need God; I have issues; Will you help me? Humility readily admits messed-up-ness.

God relates differently with the proud and the humble as well. Scripture says he opposes the proud. His opposition is a result of the pride in one's heart. The prideful one is resistant to God's intervention. So actually the proud oppose God. God gives grace to the humble. I would much rather be a recipient of God's grace than his opposition! How about you?



Grace is strength in the midst of weakness. II Corinthians 12:9 says, "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'" "When I admit my messed-up-ness God offers his assistance.

Grace is forgiveness in the midst of sin. Romans 3:23-24 reads, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are freely justified by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." In short we are all messed up! However, when we confess that to God, rather than condemning us for our messed-up-ness, he forgives us and makes us as if we had never sinned.

Grace is life in place of death. Titus 3:7, "Having been justified by his grace, we have become heirs having the hope of eternal life." Grace is given to those who admit their messed-up-ness. Those who admit it enjoy God's strength, forgiveness and life.

When I played basketball, I made mistakes at various times. I turned the ball over, missed shots, let the man I was guarding get a rebound or make a lay up. A few times the coach pulled me out of the game because of those errors. However, he did not leave me out. He took a moment to teach me and encourage me, then he sent me back in. Your messed-up-ness does not disqualify you from serving Christ. Let him teach you and comfort you and encourage you. Then, because of God's grace and by God's grace get back in the game. Don't let your messed-up-ness bench you!

GOD'S REMODEL

I Peter 2:1-6

My wife and I have bought and remodeled a few houses over the years. Two particular houses required extensive work. The flooring was filthy and all of it had to be immediately removed; new flooring was installed; old, dirty wallpaper stripped; walls textured and painted; doorways extended; light fixtures changed; exterior doors replaced; etc. The work took months to accomplish. The tricky part was we lived in those houses while we remodeled them! It was an adventure to say the least; walking around on cement floors with sawdust flying everywhere, inhaling paint fumes, trying not to step on nails. In one house, our entire family slept in the master bedroom while the rest of the house was getting its makeover.

Our oldest son and his wife bought their first house a few years ago. It was also a "fixer-upper." We helped them redo their house in much the same way we had worked on ours with one huge difference: The work was done before they moved in. They were able to move into that house without living through the daily mess associated with a remodel. In life, most of us would prefer this second scenario, but life is like the first example. We desire upon salvation, that God will remodel our life, fix everything immediately, so we can live life untouched by the messiness of life's issues. That is not how it works. Life happens as we live it. God remodels us as he lives in us!

Verse 5 says we are being built into a spiritual house. We are the temple of God. The Spirit dwells in us. While living in us, his home, he is building us into the dwelling he desires. God is remodeling his home! He bought you, moved into you, and now he is beautifying you! As a part of our home remodels, we had to pull out stuff, throw away stuff, repair stuff and replace stuff. God needs to do the same in us. Just as we used a variety of tools to do the work, God does as well. His tools include tribulation, persecution, trials, conviction, loss, as well as victories, comfort and encouragement.

God bought you through the blood of his Son. He paid a high price! He did not buy a new house that needed no work. Rather, he bought a "fixer-upper." At salvation, you were made new, but the entire remodel was not completed. He continues to work on you, making you into the beautiful residence he has planned for you. Remodeling at times can be messy and time consuming; it can cause discomfort. It can tax your patience and consume your resources. The result is wonderful but the process can be difficult. The end result of God's remodel of you will be beautiful; the process will at times be difficult. Will you let God continue his remodel of you so you will be the spiritual house God desires?

DISCERNMENT

1 John 4:1-6

Today's passage raises a question - why discern the spirits? The answer is fairly obvious; so we will not believe the wrong stuff and so we do not miss the right stuff. Picture three items, a sponge, a filter and Velcro. Each item provides a useful application. Sponges absorb, filters evaluate (filters simplistically stated decide, or evaluate, what can be let through and what needs to be blocked. Water and air filters block unwanted particles, spam filters prevent unwanted email, electronic filters remove unwanted frequency components) and Velcro sticks! These physical items provide spiritual application as it relates to discerning spiritual truth from lies.

Verse 1 reminds us that false teachers and false teachings exist. Some intentionally try to trick while others may be sincere but wrong. Verses 2 and 3 give us a litmus test for discerning the truth. Verses 5 and 6 identify two sources of information, or two viewpoints: God and the world. The first represents the Spirit of truth and the second the spirit of falsehood.

How can one correctly and effectively discern truth from lies? Our passage says to test the spirits. This testing involves examination and interpretation, then making a decision based on your examination. In other words, does that viewpoint or teaching pass the test as truth. If the teaching claims Jesus as Messiah it is truth. If it does not then it is not truth.

In your discerning process, be a sponge, a filter and Velcro.

Be a Sponge - Be spiritually absorbent. Be open to truth. Be open to the Word of God. One of the worst things you can do is harden your heart to God's truth. Don't become so skeptical of everything that you believe nothing. Spend your life soaking in the truth of God's Word.

Be a Filter - Filter out what is not good or right. With the Spirit's wisdom, decide what is useful in your life and what is not. Use the appropriate filters however. Bad filters include: It is a popular belief; it sounds good; it feels right. Proper filters include: Does this draw me closer to Christ; does this exalt Christ; does this affirm Christ as God; does it match up to the Word? If it does not promote Christ and it clearly contradicts scripture, filter it out.

Be Velcro - When you discern the teaching is from God and profitable for you, let it stick! Incorporate the teaching into your life. Allow the truth to become a permanent part of how you live and what you believe.

Don't believe every religious idea or thought you hear. Don't reject everything you hear either. Practice the skill of discernment, keeping the truth while discarding the lies!

OPEN UP

Revelation 1:1-7

For the next several devotions, we will look at segments from Revelation. We will look at this book probably not in the way you might expect. We will not spend time on symbols or numbers. We will not try to figure out all the specifics or align with a particular system or interpretation. Rather, we will focus on the original intent as to why Revelation was written.

One purpose of the book of Revelation is to reveal Jesus Christ. Verse 1 says this book was written to disclose who Jesus is and what he will do. He discloses this information to those close to him, his servants. All through Revelation, John describes who Jesus is.

Jesus is...

1:8 - the Alpha and the Omega, the Almighty;

1:17 - the First and the Last;

3:7 - the Holy One;

3:14 - the Ruler of God's creation;

5:5 - the Lion of Judah and the Root of David;

5:5 - the only one worthy to open the scroll;

5:6 - the Lamb that was slain;

19:11 - Faithful and True;

19:16 - King of kings and Lord of lords;

22:16 - the Bright Morning Star

The application for you today is the need to keep your focus on Jesus. Keep in the center of your attention who Jesus is and what he has done for you. Remember that one day he is returning. It is easy to get sidetracked and to live for self. It is easy to get caught up in "churchianity" and lose focus. Paul said, "for me to live is Christ." Remember, it is all about Christ!

A second purpose for the writing of Revelation is to encourage the believers. This book was written around 96AD. Nero had been persecuting followers of Christ and now Domitian was. Also, the early believers thought Jesus would return in the early first century. When he did not believers became discouraged. For these two reasons, believers needed to hear that Jesus was indeed returning and believers win!

The second application for you today is to receive and give encouragement. Maybe life for you is difficult presently. Maybe you have become weary in well doing. Maybe you are questioning the reality of the return of Christ. Be encouraged today: Christ is alive, he is returning, and a great reward awaits you as a follower of Christ. May you be encouraged by these words and may you use these words to encourage others.

LINK UP

Revelation 1:1-7

The 1968 Three Dog Night song says, "One is the loneliest number that you'll ever do!" An old Lays Potato Chips commercial boasted, "Bet you can't eat just one!" The age-old adage states, "Two heads are better than one!" Chains have limited usefulness if they have only one link. Notice a common thread?

The events in Revelation underscore a corporate environment. 1:4 has John addressing churches, not individuals. 4:4 reveals 24 elders surrounding the throne. 4:6 discusses four living creatures. 7:4, 144,000 servants of God receive the seal. 7:9 tells of a great multitude too numerous to count worshipping. In 11:3 there were two witnesses.

In 19:1 we see a great multitude shouting. Heaven will be a corporate experience. Revelation indicates that people from every tongue and tribe will join together to celebrate the one who sits on the throne, our Creator and Redeemer.

Certainly as followers of Christ, we can do more together than we can do apart. As followers of Christ, we must resist the urge to be spiritual lone rangers. We need each other. We need to join together and work together as we seek to impact a lost world for Christ. We need to link up!



We need to **LINK UP in prayer.**

Matthew 18:20 says, "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." We certainly should pray individually in our prayer closets, but something powerful happens when God's people gather together to pray.

We need to **LINK UP in worship.** Hebrews 10:25 states, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Today, some see the corporate worship experience as unnecessary or irrelevant to their spiritual growth. In my opinion they are mistaken. Joining multitudes of other followers of Christ in corporate worship experiences offer an opportunity to be encouraged by others as well as being an encourager to others.


We need to LINK UP in service. Serving and ministering to others can be draining and discouraging. As we serve individually, it is easy to think that we are making little difference in the world. However, as we join with others we see a greater impact taking place. We are energized by the accountability and the fellowship provided by fellow servants. We experience a refreshed sense of joy and a renewed determination. So, LINK UP!

LOOK UP

Revelation 1:1-7

Verse 7 says, "Look, he is coming with the clouds and every eye will see him." All will look on that blessed day, but as believers, we need to look up every day. Are you familiar with horse blinders? Horses can tend to run off course due to their peripheral vision, unless they are made to remain focused. Blinders, attached to the bridle at the side of the horse's head, can help keep the horse from becoming distracted and help the horse stay focused on the right thing.

Sometimes, we need spiritual blinders. We need something that keeps us focused and free from distraction. The best way to keep one's spiritual focus is to look up! You have probably heard the familiar saying, "He's so heavenly minded that he is no earthly good!" I have a better saying: "He's so earthly good because he is so heavenly minded!"



TO BE OF TRUE
EARTHLY GOOD,
MAINTAIN A
HEAVENLY FOCUS.

C.S. Lewis said, "If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished

the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven." (*The Joyful Christian*, p. 138)

So, to be of true earthly good, maintain a heavenly focus by looking up! Looking up does two things. It keeps you from doing the wrong thing and it helps you do the right thing. As you look up your perspective changes and your priorities are realigned. It keeps you focused on the spiritual rather than the physical. It reminds you what is real and what is important. It affects your behavior. Not only will you stop doing certain things as you place your attention on the eternal, but you will start doing certain things.

Looking up keeps in the forefront of your heart and mind that eternity is real. It reminds you that one day Jesus will return and those without Christ will be eternally separated from God. Looking up sustains an urgency of sharing Christ and serving Christ.

Have you been looking back, reliving past mistakes and walking in the shame and guilt of those events? Have you been looking so far into the future that you are idle today? Have you been looking at others becoming either judgmental or jealous? Have you been looking at the world and all that it seemingly has to offer? If so, begin looking up and see the difference it makes!

HEAT UP

Revelation 2:1-7

Microwaves are wonderful. Many even say they are one of life's necessities. One great thing about a microwave is the ability it has to reheat refrigerated food. A few seconds in the nuke box and the food is hot and ready for consumption. It is amazing to be able to heat up cold food that fast!

In today's passage we see Christ's words to the church in Ephesus. Ephesus was the crown jewel of Asia Minor. The city was powerful and wealthy. It was, however, the heart of the worldwide worship of the fertility goddess, Artemis. Life and the economy in Ephesus revolved around Artemis, so much that the Temple of Artemis became a bank so Artemis could protect their money.

Christ's words to this church are largely positive. He affirms them for their good deeds, hard work and perseverance. They are commended for not tolerating wickedness or false prophets. They suffered hardships for Christ' sake yet did not grow weary. Yet in the midst of these affirmations, Christ confronts them regarding one issue; they had lost their first love. The fire had waned!

It was not easy being a follower of Christ in Ephesus in the first century. Many were persecuted. Some lost their business while others lost their lives. Somewhere along the way, as years passed from the time Paul visited Ephesus and helped begin the church there, and the time of John's writing, things changed. They became less passionate, less vocal! Maybe the persecution took a toll on them. Whatever the cause of the spiritual cool down, the encouragement in this passage is to heat up!

It is not easy being a follower of Christ today. It is quite easy to fall in line with the natural flow of life. It takes intentionality and determination to be a spiritual salmon and flow up stream. The greatest asset that causes us to live radically for Christ and boldly proclaim Christ to a dying world is love. Therefore, John tells these Ephesian believers to return to their first love.

Paul reminds Timothy in II Timothy 1:6 that God has given us a spirit of love. Consider your spiritual condition today. Are you manifesting a spirit of love? Is your love for God empowering you to live out your faith boldly? Is your love for people motivating you to share the good news of Christ? May you be motivated by love today and not fear! There is no such thing as a spiritual microwave but if the Spirit's fire inside you has waned, ask God to reignite the Spirit's fire within you!



WAKE UP

Revelation 3:1-6

I can sleep through almost anything: storms, sirens, crying children, alarms! Sleeping is a good thing, but sleeping so soundly that nothing wakes you is not so good.

Sardis sat at the intersection of a mountain and two rivers. It was one of the wealthiest and plushiest cities in its day, but it was also one of the most pagan cities in Asia Minor. Several unique structures were discovered in excavations. A mall housed multiple shops evidently including Christian stores. The gym was their center of secular life. It housed a university, a large athletic training room and a bathhouse where men and women bathed together after working out. A Jewish synagogue was found inside the gym. There was also a temple to Artemis, the goddess of fertility and sexual immorality. Inside the temple of Artemis was a church. Secular, pagan, religious, and Christian culture mixed together as one.

Finding a church in the middle of a pagan temple is interesting. No one really knows how, when or why that happened. One can only surmise. Could it be that this church started invading culture then ended up integrating culture? Their reputation for being alive had become tarnished. They at some point slipped into spiritual slumber.

I had been married for less than a year. I came home late from a youth event and found my wife asleep on the couch in the living room. When I approached her to wake her, she started screaming, "Get away, don't touch me!" over and over while throwing sofa pillows at me. She then stood and approached me with her arm raised like she had a knife and was going to stab me. I grabbed her arms, threw them down to her side, and I started shaking her as I shouted, "Wake up! Wake up!" So now we are screaming at each other. I am sure the neighbors wanted to call the police.

Finally she stopped fighting and relaxed. I asked her, "Who am I?" With a huge smile on her face she replied, "Steve!" My name is not Steve, so I started shaking her again. Finally she relaxed again. I asked the question again and this time she responded, "You're Darrell, stupid!" I knew she was awake. The entire time Denise was asleep. She was oblivious to the reality of what was going on. She remembered nothing from our encounter.

Verse 2 says, "Wake up!" This letter is a wake up call to Sardis! It should serve as a wake up call for all believers. May we not sleep while the enemy invades our world! May we stand alert, ready and willing to fight against the evil one! Romans 13:11 says, "And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber."

LAY UP

Revelation 4:1-11

In verse 10, the elders lay their crowns before the throne and worship the Lord. Laying down crowns was an act of respect and homage during the days of kings and Emperors. Kings of cities or provinces would lay their crowns before the Emperor as a reflection of an attitude of humility and gratitude. These elders, by laying their crowns down at the throne, are saying all belongs to God. He alone is worthy of worship! It is a gesture of thanksgiving for God's grace and generosity. Scriptures speak of believers receiving crowns. A crown of righteousness is in store for those who long for His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8). A crown of life is promised to those who love God (James 1:12). We will receive the crown of glory that will never fade (1 Peter 5:4). Our crowns are a result of life and faith on earth but carry over into eternity. When I think of the concept of laying down it brings to mind the idea of laying up. Before we "lay down" might we need to "lay up?" Matthew 6:19-20 says, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your heart is, there your heart will be also."

H. A. Schult, a German "artist" known best for his artistic work with garbage, created a masterpiece entitled "Trash People." It highlighted how wasteful we are and how much trash we produce. He also built the first hotel out of trash from trash found alongside a coastline beach. This work caused me to wonder, "Have we become trash people?" You are surely familiar with the saying, "One person's trash is another person's treasure." Could many be accumulating what they consider to be treasure, when it is actually trash? A popular phenomenon currently is to take other people's trash and turn it into someone else's treasure. Old thrown away items are being repurposed and made into treasured furniture or decorative items. Spiritually speaking, how many people are spending their life trying to turn trash into treasure? Some of the things we may consider treasure will be burned up and rotted. It is really trash. It makes more sense and it is eternally more profitable to spend our life laying up treasure.

How do we lay up treasure? Matthew 19:21 says we are to sell our possessions and give to the poor and we will have treasure in Heaven. 1 Timothy 6 tells us to be rich in good deeds, be generous and willing to share, and in this way we lay up treasure in Heaven. In essence, we lay up treasure when we invest in people, when we connect the love of Christ with the needs of people. The greatest need of people is to know Christ personally. Today, is your heart set on treasure or trash? Lay up treasures today knowing one day you will joyfully lay them down in worship!

REV UP

Revelation 11:15-18

Before God called me into ministry I planned on being a basketball coach and a Math teacher. I was actually a Math major my first semester in college. Two things happened in that first semester: God called me into ministry and I realized I was not qualified to be a Math major. Concepts and formulas flew over my head early. However, I still appreciate Math because it does deal with absolutes. Two plus two equals four! Today I want to talk about a spiritual equation that is a spiritual absolute. The formula is as follows:

FEAR + AWE = REVERENCE → WORSHIP

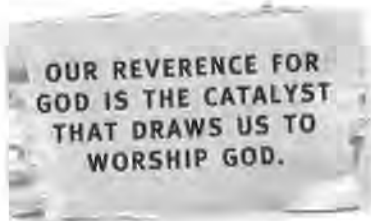
Fear and Awe are like to sides of a coin. A coin must have both heads and tails to be a real coin. True reverence must include both fear or a healthy respect, and awe or a sense of amazement. Fear without awe leads to legalism while awe minus fear leads to emotionalism. Fear and awe combine to help us realize the magnitude of who God is and what he has done for us.

FEAR - God could have killed us: AWE - instead he died for us!

FEAR - God could have condemned us: AWE - instead he redeemed us!

FEAR - God could have rejected us: AWE - instead he chose us!

FEAR - the power and judgment of God: AWE - the mercy and grace of God!



This reverence in turn leads us into worship. Our reverence for God is the catalyst that draws us to worship God. Psalm 33:8-9, "Let the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere him. For he spoke and it came to be; he commanded and it stood firm." Psalm 89:7-8a, "In the council of the holy

ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him. O lord God Almighty, who is like you?" Psalm 5:7, "But I, by your great mercy, will come into your house; in reverence will I bow down toward your holy temple."

True worship is all consuming and God-centered. The elders fell down on their face and worshipped God! Worship is not something we do once a week in a corporate environment. Worship consumes my very being and my entire life. All I do becomes an act of worship as I seek to glorify God.

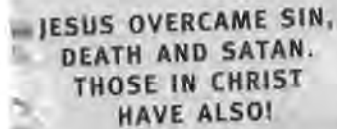
Is a healthy respect for who God is affecting your behavior? Do you maintain an awareness of God's greatness? May you worship him today and all through the day as you walk in fear and awe of God!

GIRD UP

Revelation 12:1-17

To gird means to prepare for battle or prepare for an attack. The meaning has broadened to apply to any kind of confrontation. It can also mean to encircle or tighten. Runners back in the day would gird their robes, tying them up so they could run or fight. Today, as followers of Christ, we must gird up; preparing ourselves for the spiritual battle that is inevitable. Ephesians 6:12 reminds us that we are in a struggle and that struggle is against the spiritual forces of evil.

Today's passage reveals Satan's desire; destroy the work of God. His attempt to thwart the plan of God and the work of God through Christ was unsuccessful. We see in verse 17 that now Satan is making war against those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. Presently, Satan is on a rampage. He is on a mission. That mission is to destroy anyone who claims the name of Jesus. As a follower of Christ, you are being and you will continue to be attacked by Satan. He wants to deceive you, derail you, destroy you and devour you. So, gird up!



JESUS OVERCAME SIN,
DEATH AND SATAN.
THOSE IN CHRIST
HAVE ALSO!

I Peter 5:8 says, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." To be alert means to keep watch, to constantly be on guard. Do not let your guard down. Self-control in this context means to keep a clear head. Don't lose your head and do something crazy. Be aware that Satan is pursuing you, but also be aware that Jesus has already pursued you and rescued you.

Verse 11 is a declaration of the victory that you have over the evil one. The blood of the Lamb and the word of your testimony made that victory possible. When you received Christ as your Savior and Lord, when you surrendered your life to Christ, you were washed white. Your sins were forgiven, erased, removed! Revelation 7:11 says that your clothes were turned white when dipped in the blood of the Lamb.

As a follower of Christ, you are released from the penalty of sin and you have been given power to overcome the temptations of the evil one and the lure of your flesh. The great story of Revelation is that you have overcome. Jesus overcame sin, death and Satan. All those who are in Christ have also overcome sin, death and Satan. So, brace yourself for a fight, but know it is a fight that you can win. In fact, the ultimate fight has already been won.

Today, may you walk in spiritual victory! May you believe in and rely upon the power that is in you!

T I M E ' S U P

Revelation 21

Evangelist Harold Camping predicted that on or around September 6, 1994, Christ would return and the world would end. He was wrong! He then adjusted his math and predicted a new end date - May 21, 2011. He was wrong again! Many have inaccurately forecasted the end of the world. Future predictions will surely be made. Two realities exist in regard to the coming of Christ and the end of this world. One, no one knows the date. Two, both will happen!

If you knew for sure that Jesus would return in one year, what would change in your life? How would you spend that last year? Your life might possibly have a different perspective with radically different priorities. Our passage in Revelation gives good wisdom in how one should live. Since we do not know when Christ will return or when we might leave this Earth, we should live as if time is up! How do we do that?

One, **step it up!** John wrote to seven churches, and several of these churches shared a common scenario. People were on fire at first; they were radical followers of Christ. As time passed and Jesus did not return, some

became lax. So John writes to them and says step it up! Remember and return to the former passion and fire and urgency that was once evident.

Two, **keep it up!** Verse 7 talks about the one who overcomes. That word is used 11 times in Revelation in the NIV.

The word means to overpower, prevail or triumph. The word infers a battle. The early churches faced persecution from government and rulers and non-believers as well as facing spiritual warfare against the evil one. John knew the tendency to become weary so he encourages them to not only reignite their fire but to keep it lit, to keep it up.

Three, **live it up!** Eternity is a reality! Heaven is real and Heaven is indescribably beautiful and wondrous. Life in Heaven will truly be the greatest experience imaginable. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain (v.4). The glory of God will provide the light (v.23). Gates remain open for there is no night (v.25). Nothing impure will enter it (v.27).

So, live today as if time's up! Step it up, keep it up, and prepare to live it up!

As the hymn says, "One glimpse of his dear face all sorrow will erase, so bravely run the race til we see Christ."



GET UP

Revelation 22:1-11

Can you imagine John's emotions and thoughts as he heard and saw the things expressed in Revelation? The images and the experience must have been overwhelming! We see the effect this experience had on him in verse 8. His primal response was to fall down and worship. The angel stopped him however. The angel told John, "Do not do it!" My translation - GET UP! John had already fallen down to worship, but before a mistake was made the angel in essence says GET UP! Why? The angel knew he was not to be the object of worship. In fact, he states clearly and emphatically in verse 9, "Worship God!" God and God alone is to be the object of our worship!

Today, many people have the tendency to worship the wrong thing. It does seem that our desire to worship is instinctive. We seem to seek out something or someone to worship. It is as if we must worship. I believe God has put in us the primal instinct to worship. The problem lies with the object of worship. We must constantly be on guard that we do not find ourselves falling down at the wrong feet and worshipping the wrong thing.

We must fight the urge to worship:

A Person! Movie stars, athletes, political figures are all targets of many people's worship. Likewise, believers can idolize Pastors, Mentors or other high-profile Christian leaders. No person, regardless of their credentials, character, or positive impact on the world is worthy of worship.

An Experience! Mountaintops are beautiful. They offer a priceless perspective and view of the surroundings. Spiritual mountaintops are incredible as well. They can help push us toward deeper encounters with God. However, the experience is a means not an end. It is easy to begin to worship the experience instead of allowing an experience to move us to greater worship of God.

The World! The things of this world have a great draw for many. Who doesn't love nice things right? Remember, one cannot love two masters.

Worship God! That is the declaration of the angel in Revelation. These are great words to remember and follow. Today, examine your worship. Be sure you are falling at the right feet. Be sure your worship is directed to the only one worthy of your worship - the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End!

If you have fallen down and are worshipping at the wrong feet - GET UP!



GEAR UP

Revelation 22:12-20

Remember actor Arnold Schwarzenegger's classic line from the 1984 movie, *The Terminator*? "I'll be back!" This line made #37 on the AFI's 100 years...100 Movie Quotes. The terminator held true to those words.

Jesus made an even more compelling proclamation. In verse 12 he says, "Behold, I am coming soon!" In verse 20, Jesus says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Rest assured he will hold true to his word! Some teach that the world will get worse and worse then Christ will come to set up his 1000-year reign. Some teach that the world will get better and better and flow into the 1000-year reign. Some say that the 1000-year reign is figurative, not literal. However, all of these scholars agree on one point - Christ is returning!

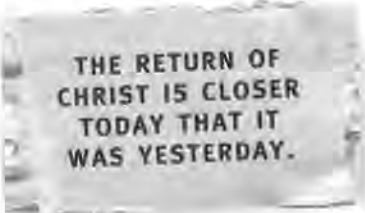
Matthew 24 gives some signs of Christ' return. These signs include the coming of "false Christ's", wars and rumors of war, famines and earthquakes, persecution, increase of wickedness and the gospel being preached to all the nations. We know wars continue to mount, earthquakes are happening in places where they have never occurred before. Present persecution is real with over 45 million people being persecuted in the 20th century. Wickedness abounds and with technology we have the capability of spreading the gospel to all nations. This is not deemed to be a timeline or a prediction rather an observation - Christ' coming is nearing!

No one knows when Christ will return, but one thing is sure, his coming is closer today than it was yesterday! So - Gear Up! Be ready! Live as if today were the day! This is the message of Revelation. We should not worry about when he is coming, we simply need to know he is coming and be ready. The reality of

his return should be a motivating force that causes us to stay faithful, to persevere, so that at the end he can say to us, "Well done faithful servant."

You may not know when Christ is coming. You may not know exactly what Heaven will be like. You may not know exactly what transpires between when a person dies and the ultimate return of Christ. You may not know all of the specifics of what is involved in his return. However, one thing you must know for sure - He is returning! He will be back!

So as you wait for his return, serve him faithfully and with reassurance claim John 14:2-3 when Jesus says: "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."



THE RETURN OF
CHRIST IS CLOSER
TODAY THAT IT
WAS YESTERDAY.

COME UP

Revelation 22:12-17

One of the most important things you must do before going on a trip is to pack your suitcases with the appropriate items. If you were going on a beach vacation you would pack your swimsuit, shorts, suntan lotion, probably a hat, and lots of “warm weather” clothes. If you were taking a snow ski trip you would pack gloves, thermals, ski pants, and lots of “cold weather” clothes. What a shock it would be to end up on your ski trip with your beach vacation suitcase. Where you are going determines what you pack. Also, how you enjoy your vacation partly depends on how you packed.

Every person is bound for a permanent one-way trip. We all will leave this life and enter the next life. We each will need a spiritual suitcase if you will. We all are packing up certain items that we believe we will need at the new location. What we put in that suitcase will determine where we spend eternity and how well we enjoy eternity.



Revelation tells us that we all will face an accounting of our life while on Earth. Books will be opened and we will be judged according to what we have done. Scholars differ some on exactly what this means and what it will look like. However, clearly we will all open our suitcases, as it were, and reveal what we brought to this destination.

Some will unfortunately open a suitcase full of sin. They gave no thought and made no preparation for this trip. Some will open a suitcase full of good deeds and good character qualities believing their goodness qualifies them for a luxury room in Heaven. However, they will discover that their goodness is as filthy rags and they will be left out of Paradise.

Others, however, will have a suitcase with a white robe that has been washed by the blood of the Lamb. By the word of their testimony, by the confession of their mouth that Jesus is Lord, they will have adequately prepared for this eternal rest. Revelation 12:11 says, “They overcame him (the evil one, the accuser) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.”

Today, if you forgot to pack something for your trip you could simply buy it there. Not on this trip. On that day, you will have no opportunity to obtain what you need. So, be sure you pack the proper items! Be sure you are prepared for the trip! Be sure you tell others about this ultimate trip and help them to pack the right items.

THE WEDDING

Revelation 19:6-9, 21:1-3

I married Denise on January 14, 1984. The road to the aisle had its obstacles and detours however. Denise and I met in college. She asked me to a sorority event, which was actually our first date. We had become friends but we had not spent a lot of time together at that point. The event was several weeks away, so I went to her dorm lobby several evenings each week so we could talk and get to know one another better. As time progressed, we decided to upgrade our relationship from just being friends to dating each other exclusively.

I knew this relationship was different from all the others and it scared me! I was going into full-time ministry and believed God was calling me to be single. Also, even if I was supposed to be married, is Denise the right one? As a result of these thoughts I broke up with Denise three times in a matter of just a few months. Unbelievably, Denise was extremely patient with me during those days. Finally I realized I could not do this again. It was decision time; would I ask Denise to marry me or forever end the relationship?

I went to spend a weekend at Denise's house, and that Friday night I broke up with her for the third time. The next morning I prayed and said to God and to myself that I would not leave this room until God confirms in my spirit what I should do. I was in there for hours. Denise thought something had happened to me. Fortunately for me, I made the correct decision. A few weeks later I proposed. The wedding was wonderful and our marriage has continued to flourish. Our love has grown and the strength of our relationship has deepened.

As a follower of Christ, you are the bride of Christ. He is the bridegroom. Presently he is preparing a place for you so that you may live together for eternity. His death proves his love for you and his resurrection verifies that he is indeed "the right one!" Union with Christ is the way to the Father. The time of your salvation, when you received Christ into your heart, serves as the "wedding." Your present relationship with him can be viewed as the marriage. So, let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come and the bride has made herself ready (v.7). And, blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb (v.9).

So, do you remember the wedding? How is your marriage today? Are you still madly in love with the bridegroom? Rest assured he loves you and nothing will ever separate or diminish his love for you!

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