

Devotionals
from
God's Daily Word Ministries

May 2006

These devotionals are provided by God's Daily Word Ministries. They may be freely copied and distributed. If you would like to receive daily devotionals via email, send a request to devotions@gdwm.org or subscribe on the internet at <http://www.gdwm.org>

Scripture references are from: The Holy Bible: New International Version.
Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society.

Scripture references for lessons on John: The New King James Version.
Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by Permission.

Christ-Centered Analysis

5-1-06

In the message "Promotion to Servant" we saw our need to turn aside from the self-advancement mentality of the world and become a humble servant of Christ. We also acknowledged this was no trivial task. Every morning, we must decide which analysis method we will use to guide our decisions. We must either choose the method given by the world, or the method given by Jesus. It's unfortunate so much of our "training" has been in the method of the world.

As children we are taught that more is better and one plus one equals two; and as we become adults, we are trained to make decisions based on a spreadsheet type analysis. We learn to choose a direction based on which path will bring the greatest pleasure, or which path will add the most to the "bottom line."

But Jesus, as our supreme example, was never constrained by our finite way of thinking. He taught us the correct path is the path of simple obedience; and He demonstrated that one plus one will always equal whatever God desires.

John 6:5-7

"When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward Him, He said to Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?' He asked this only to test him, for He already had in mind what He was going to do. Philip answered Him, 'Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!'"

I imagine Philip sitting beside Jesus with his laptop computer, frantically entering numbers. After analyzing the data, he points to the screen and says: "Look Jesus, it just doesn't compute. Your plan cannot be accomplished!"

Of course, Jesus then swept aside Philip's analysis, blessed two fish and five loaves of bread, and proceeded to feed over 5000 people.

Our Heavenly Father has given us various tasks for today, as well as for the coming weeks, months and years. Many of these tasks will be challenging and require serious decisions. In our finite, number-crunching mentality, we will often shake our head and say the task isn't practical or can't be done. But Jesus is calling us to a new analysis - one centered on Him - one that believes "all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27).

When we face our challenges, let's learn to "Trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). Let's live each and every moment by faith and allow each step along our path to be guided by a Christ-centered analysis.

Have A Great Day!

Believe and Be Restored

5-2-06

When God created man, He gave him dominion over all the earth; "fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28). Man was created with a great amount of freedom. He was to take care of God's Garden and obey a single command: "You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Adam did not believe what God said was true and he ate fruit from the tree. His sin (failure to believe) caused man to be separated from God.

When God used Moses to lead His chosen people out of Egypt, He gave them rules for their personal, social, and spiritual life. If these rules were obeyed, God promised to restore His people to a right relationship with Himself; "If we are careful to obey all this law...that will be our righteousness" (Deuteronomy 6:25). But the people did not obey God's law and so remained separated. Their lack of obedience demonstrated a lack of belief that what God said was true.

When God sent His Son as the final sacrifice for our sin, He gave one basic command: "Believe in the one He has sent" (John 6:29). Those who do not obey this final command (those who do not believe) are condemned to an eternal separation. But those who believe in Jesus Christ are restored!

Hebrews 8:10

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Relationship with God has always been based on belief - a belief that what God said is true. But for this belief to be real it was always expected to produce obedience. The wonder of our relationship today is that God gives us His law written on our heart AND He gives us His Spirit to guide and strengthen us to obey; "And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws" (Ezekiel 36:27).

Through belief in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sin, we become a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17) with a new heart and new strength. What an awesome blessing!! By His grace we are completely restored into the relationship for which we were created - a relationship of love, a relationship of trust, and a relationship of obedience.

God's Word is true! If He is calling, do not turn away; "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 3:7). Today, if you hear His voice, believe and be restored.

Have A Great Day!

Living A Holy Life

5-3-06

In the message "Believe and Be Restored" we considered our need to believe that what God said is true. He said the death and resurrection of Jesus was the final sacrifice for our sin, and that those who believe would receive the gift of eternal life.

Clearly, our Salvation is a gift from God; "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). We did nothing to earn our Salvation and there is nothing we must now do to keep it, we simply must believe; "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

Though our sins are forgiven and Jesus is 100% sufficient for Salvation - though we walk in grace and are absolutely free of condemnation - sin in our life still causes temporary separation and tension in our relationship with God. Therefore, over and over in scripture, we are called to a life of holiness: "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do" (1 Peter 1:14-15). Holiness is to receive top priority in our life; "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy" (Hebrews 12:14).

So why such an emphasis on holy living? After all, if we are saved by grace, then our effort toward holiness plays no part in our Salvation. The answer is found in examining our purpose for life beyond Salvation: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship" (Romans 12:1).

2 Peter 1:5-7

"For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love."

After we are saved, we live to worship and glorify God; but this can only be done by growing in our faith and presenting ourselves as a living sacrifice. For any sacrifice to be pleasing to God, the sacrifice itself must be pure, and the one who presents the sacrifice must be holy. So when we "make every effort" toward a life of holiness, we don't do so in order to earn or maintain our Salvation: we strive for holiness because we desire to truly worship our Heavenly Father with every heartbeat of our life.

We must never lose sight of God's wonderful gift given purely by His grace. But now our Father's plan is for us to be conformed to the likeness of His Son and live in a continual state of worship. His design for our life is that we mature in our faith and worship Him by living a holy life.

Have A Great Day!

A Faithful And Loving Bride

5-4-06

In the message "Living a Holy Life" we saw that though we have freedom in Christ, we are also called to live a life of holiness. As we continue to walk with Jesus, we are called to strive for purity in our worship while understanding that nothing we do can ever add to His gift of Salvation.

Perhaps this relationship is best understood by considering our "marriage" to Christ; "I promised you to one husband, to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). Jesus demonstrated His love for us, His eternal bride, when He gave His life; and NOTHING "will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:39). He promised to never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), and even "if we are faithless, He will remain faithful" (2 Timothy 2:13). His love is perfect!

However, His perfect love must never produce complacency. We have no fear of losing our Bridegroom or driving Him away, and we need not earn His acceptance. But if we truly understand His love, we ought to be compelled to return His love in everything we do and live to bring Him glory and honor.

When the people of Israel turned their hearts away from God, it caused Him great pain. They were His chosen people - His chosen bride whom He dearly loved - and yet, they continued to seek a life apart from Him.

Ezekiel 6:9

"How I have been grieved by their adulterous hearts, which have turned away from Me, and by their eyes, which have lusted after their idols."

This pain still occurs today whenever we withhold even a portion of our heart. We are married to a loving God who gave His life so we could live; but He is also "a consuming fire, a jealous God" (Deuteronomy 4:24). When we allow our heart to become attracted to the things of this world or controlled by its set of values, we become an adulterous bride; "Don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?" (James 4:4).

Many of our discussions of what is "acceptable" behavior for the bride of Christ, miss the true essence of our relationship. We are to be passionately in love! Our greatest desire should be to do those things which please the Bridegroom - not to cause Him grief as we live on the cold edge of what is "allowable." Everything is allowable, but what things properly express our love?

Let's keep our heart pure and devoted to Him. Let's abide in Him and love Him with ALL our heart. Let's commit to living the remainder of our days as a faithful and loving bride.

Have A Great Day!

John 4:46-49 - Lesson #47
5-5-06

After a long and eventful journey, Jesus arrived in Galilee. This ought to have been a time of excitement and anticipation, He was returning to the region of His childhood, a region filled with family and friends. But instead, Jesus knew this would be a difficult task; "For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country" (John 4:44). And yet, this was a region that needed a Savior.

John 4:46-49

"So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him, 'Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.' The nobleman said to Him, 'Sir, come down before my child dies!'"

It is commonly believed that this nobleman was a high ranking official in the court of Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. This man of authority and high esteem, was facing a serious crisis - his son was close to death. He came to Jesus out of desperation, grasping when all else had failed.

Was this a shallow faith? Absolutely! But how many of us initially came to Christ with similar circumstances - with a burden far too heavy to carry? "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). We may not have known what it meant to be a child of God, but we seemed to know that Jesus could help carry the load. We cannot call this a saving faith, and there is great danger for one who becomes comfortable and fails to mature, but God can clearly use such faith to draw people closer to Himself.

Notice that a desperate and shallow faith does not imply weak character. The nobleman had humbled himself in approaching Jesus; and as he made his plea, he showed determination and resolve. He was persistently making his request known and refused to be deterred even when rebuked. Jesus accused the nobleman, as well as many others, of seeking after signs and wonders and not the true Wonder of Wonders.

Jesus spoke strongly against those who made signs and wonders the basis for their faith. Miracles were an important part of Jesus' ministry; but they were always to point to God and His plan of Salvation, not to be sought after and worshiped. Such belief continually seeks something new and externally exciting but neglects the deep roots of truth which last a lifetime and hold us secure in the storm.

When trials come our way, let's see them as opportunities to present our requests to God. Let's use our limited faith to draw close to His side, and grow by knowing Him better through the study of His Word and true intimate fellowship. Let's come as we are, but then let's continually grow and become like Him.

Have A Great Day!

Don't Strike The Rock

5-8-06

Moses was chosen by God to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. Through Moses, God demonstrated His awesome power and magnificent holiness. At the time, there was no one closer to God than Moses. However, even with this wonderfully close relationship, Moses still struggled at times with trusting God.

After being led out of Egypt, the people often brought their complaints to Moses. On one occasion, the people complained about their lack of drinking water; "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place?" (Numbers 20:5). When Moses entered the presence of God with this concern, he was given clear direction for solving the problem: "Gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water" (Numbers 20:8).

Moses gathered the people as he was told. But rather than simply speaking to the rock, Moses tried to accomplish God's work with a method of his own choosing.

Numbers 20:10-11

"Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?' Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank."

Moses had seen God's power and knew how much He hated disobedience; yet at this moment, Moses did not follow God's command. Moses may have become prideful while leading the Israelites through the desert; "Must WE {Aaron and I} bring you water out of this rock?" Or, he may have thought God needed help from the same staff used to turn the Nile river into blood and part the Red Sea. Either way, his disobedience stemmed from a lack of trust in God.

God still loved Moses and will fellowship with him for all eternity, but his failure to obey was severely punished; "Because you did not trust in Me enough to honor Me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them" (Numbers 20:12). God's perfect plan for Moses clearly included a trip into the Promised land; but, even after 40 years of faithful leadership, Moses' lack of trust caused him to miss out on God's very best.

God knows our needs and has a detailed plan which is unfolding according to His perfect timing. Let's listen intently for His direction and then fully obey. Let's take the steps to ensure all we do in our ministry - all we do in our family and in every area of our life - is done to bring Him glory and honor. Let's trust Him with ALL our heart and always remember...don't strike the rock!

Have A Great Day!

Our Perfect Destiny

5-9-06

In the message "Don't Strike The Rock" we saw how Moses disobeyed God's command with obtaining water from the rock. God called Moses' disobedience a lack of trust and punished him quite harshly; "Because you did not trust Me enough to honor Me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them" (Numbers 20:12). God did not destine Moses for failure; rather, He sovereignly allowed Moses to choose which path he would travel.

Nearly forty years earlier, God allowed the entire nation of Israel to make a similar choice. When God brought the people out of Egyptian slavery, His plan - His destiny for His chosen people - was to lead them into the promised land of Canaan. But when the twelve spies gave their report, the people chose the path of fear and disobedience.

God always attributes disobedience to a failure to believe and trust; "How long will they refuse to believe in Me?" (Numbers 14:11). God was about to "strike them down with a plague and destroy them" (Numbers 14:12), but Moses pleaded for mercy; "In accordance with Your great love, forgive the sin of these people" (Numbers 14:19). God heard Moses and was indeed merciful.

Numbers 14:20-23

"I have forgiven them, as you asked. Nevertheless, not one of the men who saw My glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed Me and tested Me ten times - not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated Me with contempt will ever see it."

Today, those who receive the gracious gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus are God's chosen people. We have believed and promised to walk in obedience; and He has promised to forgive us when we disobey and even when we fail to trust Him with ALL our heart. But God also has a plan - a destiny - for His chosen people; "For those He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29).

Our Heavenly Father knew us before the foundations of the world and, in His perfect plan, has destined us to walk in faith and become more and more like Jesus. But He also gives us the freedom to choose. Every day we must choose to walk in faith - choose to trust and believe. Every day we either walk down a path of obedience or down the destructive path of sin. Yes, God will forgive; but He also will not withhold His discipline!

Let's live each day in obedient faith and continue to believe His Word is true. Let's submit our lives to His conforming Hands and trust Him to guide us down the path of our perfect destiny.

Have A Great Day!

Serve Him in Obedience

5-10-06

In the last two messages we've considered our need to walk with God in continued obedience in order to honor Him and allow us to experience His very best. God's plan is that we learn to live in His presence and become "conformed to the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29). This means we must listen intently for God's direction and follow where He leads, not just blindly walk down what appears to be His path.

David was crowned king of Judah soon after Saul died in about the year 1010 BC. About seven years later, all of Israel acknowledged David as their new king. One of David's first actions as king was to attempt to move the Ark of God from the home of Abinadab to Jerusalem. David and all the officials believed that by making the Ark a more central focus for the nation, God would bless all of Israel.

This was a very exciting time. The Ark was being transported on a new cart pulled by oxen, and over thirty thousand people were "celebrating with all their might before the Lord, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals" (2 Samuel 6:5). But even during this time of great excitement, God clearly demonstrated the need for obedience.

2 Samuel 6:6-7

"When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the Ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the Ark of God."

Uzzah's intentions were good, but God considered his actions "irreverent." Uzzah desired to serve God by keeping the Ark from falling to the ground, but his enthusiastic and well intentioned actions were not directed by God. In fact, Uzzah's actions were in direct conflict with God's Word.

During the time of Moses, God had given instructions that the Ark should be moved with poles (Exodus 25:14-15) and that anyone who touched the Ark must be put to death (Numbers 4:15). Uzzah served where he thought there was a need, but he served at the expense of true obedience.

We must learn great sensitivity to God's leading. Seemingly godly action, if done outside the will of God, is sin. We must never assume that what "looks" good and godly is truly of God. Our Heavenly Father will always be faithful to lead us in His perfect will. But we must be willing to spend time (often, lots of time!) worshiping at His feet, communing with Him in prayer, and waiting patiently for His direction. As we serve our Lord, let's do so with great enthusiasm; but let's always allow Him to lead and serve Him in obedience.

Have A Great Day!

Immeasurably More

5-11-06

Prayer is a vitally important part of our Christian walk, but it's often greatly misunderstood. Prayer is how we talk with our Heavenly Father. It can never be used to manipulate God nor cause Him to do anything outside His perfect will. God is not our magic genie who has to grant our wishes!

Our attitude toward prayer reveals much about how we view God and the closeness of our relationship through faith in Jesus. If we continually wait for a crisis before we pray, we actually demonstrate a lack of love. A man may say he loves his wife but if he only occasionally talks with her, he reveals a shallow relationship. True love will always be reflected by a desire to spend time together.

And if we lift our problems to God in prayer but also give Him our expected solutions, we demonstrate a lack of trust and reveal a misunderstanding of His sovereign nature and limitless ability.

Ephesians 3:20

"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us."

The consistent message through all of scripture is that God is calling us to a closer relationship - calling us to love Him with ALL our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30). Therefore, our prayers MUST begin from a position of love. He wants us to continually know Him more and understand the true meaning of: "My God will meet all your needs" (Philippians 4:19), and "with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). He wants us to love Him and trust Him to provide!

It's foolish for us to limit God to our own understanding. He created the Universe and knew the end of time before the beginning. He can, and will, "perfectly" solve our problems. He is working all things together for the good and using all situations to conform us to the likeness of His Son (Romans 8:28-29).

Through a proper attitude of prayer, we acknowledge and submit to God's sovereignty. We praise Him because we know He is able to do much more than anything we ask, and we submit to His perfect understanding and purpose: "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). Our prayer is not a matter of "working things out" with God - not of wrestling until we obtain OUR solution - rather, prayer simply becomes submission to His direction and trust in His perfect plan.

We must present ourselves as empty vessels and allow God to work through us each and every day. Let's love Him enough to "pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Let's make our requests known, but then let's submit and humbly acknowledge that He can do immeasurably more.

Have A Great Day!

John 4:50-54 - Lesson #48
5-12-06

The son of a nobleman lies in bed, dying. The boy's mother tries her best to provide comfort, but all hope is fading. The nobleman stares into the distance feeling useless, helpless. He has always been a good provider and protector of his family, but now....there is nothing he can do. He has heard of a man named Jesus who seems able to perform miracles. Perhaps this man can save his son. And so, the journey of faith begins.

It's difficult to say how much the nobleman knew about Jesus, but he knew enough for there to be a spark of hope. When he heard that Jesus was in Cana (about 18 miles away), he quickly set out with the goal to bring this man back to his house so his son could be healed. As the nobleman approached Jesus and began to urgently ask Him to come to Capernaum, he was not fully prepared for Jesus' response.

John 4:50-54

"Jesus said to him, 'Go your way; your son lives.' So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, 'Your son lives!' Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, 'Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.' So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, 'Your son lives.' And he himself believed, and his whole household. This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee."

The nobleman was challenged to evaluate what he really believed. If he continued to beg Jesus to come to his house, it would say he didn't believe what Jesus said. And yet, if he did what Jesus said - if he released control - he would be making the long trip back home empty handed, perhaps to find a dead son. The nobleman believed and "went his way," but his was a very tentative belief filled with turmoil.

Mark writes of another father who brought his sick boy to Jesus and clearly captures the turmoil of belief; "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). I wish I could say this is simply an example of immature faith, but I can't. As my faith continues to grow and to be challenged by God, I am often brought to decision points where I fall to my knees and cry "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"

The nobleman's belief was confirmed and further strengthened when he asked the hour when his son recovered. By the time the nobleman returned home his faith was so strong that it compelled his whole household to believe. Our faith is never adequate for someone else, but the power of testimony and example are very strong - especially when a true example comes from a believing father.

As difficult as some decisions of faith may be, we must consider them as opportunities to learn and mature and draw closer to God. His claims and promises are true - He CAN be trusted. Let's accept the challenge to trust Him with every single step. Let's truly live by faith and strengthen our belief.

Have A Great Day!

Be Clean 5-15-06

The term leprosy, as used in the Bible, actually refers to a whole variety of skin conditions ranging from rashes, to open sores, to various infectious diseases, and includes true leprosy as we know it today.

According to God's Law given through Moses, a person with leprosy was ceremonially unclean and not allowed to take part in any form of worship. They were to live in isolation or cry out "Unclean! Unclean!" as they walked about the community (Leviticus 13). Lepers were strictly avoided since even accidental contact would cause a person to become unclean. Therefore, imagine the turmoil in the crowd as a leper boldly approached Jesus.

Matthew 8:2-3

"A man with leprosy came and knelt before Him and said, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.' Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' He said. 'Be clean!' Immediately he was cured of his leprosy."

Yes, imagine the turmoil as many in the crowd scattered to get out of the leper's way. Some must have been calling out warnings, others delivering harsh rebukes. But even more importantly, consider the faith of the leper as he stepped forward. He knew he would face ridicule and scorn, but he had heard about Jesus and his faith propelled him into action.

Jesus looked past the ugliness of the man's condition and saw directly into his heart. In the heart, Jesus saw a beautiful man of faith reaching out to be made clean - He saw a heart which reflected the heart of king David; "Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin" (Psalm 51:2).

Our sin creates an ugliness far greater than any skin disease. Sin caused man to be repulsive to God and totally separated from His presence. But while we were in this terminal state, "God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

No matter how bad we think we "look" - no matter how much sin is covering us and making us unclean - Jesus sees directly into our heart. No amount of sin can keep Him from rescuing those with a repentant heart and a desire to be cleansed.

If there is anything causing us to be separated from the presence of our Lord today - any past sin, any current temptations, or any lack of obedience - we must kneel before Him and seek forgiveness. Others may turn away and not understand, but Jesus stands ready to lovingly touch us with His outstretched hand and say, "Be Clean!"

Have A Great Day!

An Eternal Perspective

5-16-06

The path of a "successful" Christian walk is one of daily commitment to Christ and submission to the leading of His Spirit. Jesus said: "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). Paul understood this commitment when he said: "I die every day" (1 Corinthians 15:31). Our old nature died when our heart was transformed by the Spirit of God; yet, there remains an on-going death which occurs as we continue our walk and battle temptations from a world which seeks to pull us away from Christ.

But if our eyes remain focused on today, our daily commitment, denial, and "self-death" will become a painful burden. If our walk is ever characterized by self-pity, and our trials viewed as the heavy cross we must bear for Jesus, then we have missed the true joy and peace - the true success - that Jesus desires for our life.

1 Corinthians 15:19

"If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."

If our hope in Christ is only for today's protection and blessings, then we have grossly underestimated the power of the gospel. This limited view of a Christian life will always fall short of our expectations. Through faith in Jesus, we have been given eternal life. This means the life we now live must be viewed on an eternal time scale.

When we place our faith in the sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of sin, our life begins anew. But this means far more than a fresh start. In an instant, EVERYTHING has changed. The burdens that were once so heavy must now be weighed against the magnificent glory of Heaven. And our "never-ending" trials must now be timed on the clock of eternity.

The world screams at us to focus on the here and now - on immediate gratification from what we can see and feel. It tells us life is short so fill it with sensual pleasures and tangible possessions. God's Word agrees that our earthly life is short: "A mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (James 4:14). But it teaches that our Spiritual life continues forever! "What is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

We have been given new eyes! Let's begin to view our life in the context of eternity and gain the greater hope and power this view can provide today. Let's carry our cross with greater joy, live with more peace and contentment, and experience new victories in life's many battles, as we begin to evaluate all areas of our life from an eternal perspective.

Have A Great Day!

A Taste of Eternity

5-17-06

In the message "An Eternal Perspective" we saw the need to consider our life on an eternal time scale and to weigh our current burdens against the eternal glory of Heaven. But there are many believers who are unable to gain strength or comfort from this view of life. Although they know the concept, they lack anything on which to base their hope.

This is unfortunate, but understandable. If our view of Heaven contains no real foundation, the thought of eternity will never make our troubles seem "light and momentary" (2 Corinthians 4:17). And while it's true that "faith is the substance of things hoped for" (Hebrews 11:1), we still need some understanding or our faith will never generate the hope which can truly impact our life.

When Jacob was looking for a wife, he found Rachel. Jacob quickly fell in love and promised to work seven years in exchange for receiving Rachel as his wife.

Genesis 29:20

"So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her."

Jacob worked hard for many years, but the hope of being with the one he loved eased any burden he might have felt. But Jacob had an understanding of the one he hoped for - and this brought him great comfort. Jacob saw Rachel's beauty every day and was certainly permitted to talk with her often. He knew Rachel and probably spent many hours dreaming of her and holding her in his arms. There was undoubtedly a longing inside Jacob which he knew only Rachel could fill.

God gave His Son so we could be brought back to a full and right relationship with Him for all eternity. But God did not leave us with an empty view or ask us to cling to a blind hope. He allows us into His presence and gives us the ability to know Him NOW! We will never grasp all that Heaven has to offer until we see Him face to face. But God allows us to taste eternity if we will only draw near and ask.

Let's dedicate our lives to knowing the One with whom we will spend eternity - the One on whom we base our hope. Let's commune with our Father in prayer and learn of His nature through His Word. Let's strive for an all-consuming love - a love complete with the empty ache which only His presence can fill. Let's rejoice, receive comfort and gain strength, as we draw near and are allowed a taste of eternity.

Have A Great Day!

Gifts To Be Returned

5-18-06

After Joshua led the Israelites into the promised land, the nation was governed by a series of judges. The period of the judges lasted several hundred years and ended with the prophet Samuel. Samuel lived his entire life dedicated to God. In fact, Samuel's mother dedicated him to God before he was even born.

For many years Hannah and her husband had tried to have a child, but God did not allow her to conceive. The desire for a child continued for several years and became such a consuming portion of Hannah's life that she could think of little else; "In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord" (1 Samuel 1:10).

Finally, Hannah's heart softened and she made a vow that if God would give her a son, "then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life" (1 Samuel 1:11). God honored Hannah's vow and she soon became pregnant. A few years after Samuel was born Hannah brought him to Eli, the priest.

1 Samuel 1:27-28

"I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of Him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord."

When Hannah made her vow, she no longer desired a child to satisfy her own needs but truly desired to honor God by returning her son to Him. In turn, God blessed Hannah with five additional children after Samuel (1 Samuel 2:21). God did not bless Hannah because of her vow (we can never "bargain" with God); rather, God blessed Hannah because her heart desired to glorify Him with her blessing.

We must learn to consider everything in our life from the same perspective as Hannah. We have created nothing of lasting value with our own hands. Everything we have - everything which defines who we are - is a precious gift from God. This includes our possessions, family, business, school, special skills, and talents. ALL we have is by the grace of God.

And just as it's prideful sin to take self-credit for God's many blessings, it's equally shameful to shun His gifts - to pretend they don't exist - and fail to use them for His glory. God always blesses with a purpose; and we live a shallow life if we ignore His gifts or use them solely for our own benefit and pleasure.

Let's bless our Heavenly Father by fully receiving His gifts, and then by giving back what we've so graciously been given. Let's praise Him and determine to use even the gift of our own life to bring Him glory and honor. God has showered us with many wonderful gifts, but they are ALL gifts to be returned.

Have A Great Day!

John 5:1-6 - Lesson #49
5-19-06

We have seen Jesus minister to "a ruler of the Jews" in Judea (John 3:1), "a woman of Samaria" (John 4:7), and "a certain nobleman" in Galilee (John 4:46). These three recorded times of ministry have covered the widest possible range of physical territory as well as social status. Jesus quickly taught that neither political nor social boundaries should hinder the sharing of His message. These, and many other encounters through the gospel of John, also help us to understand what it means to believe and the maturing nature of our faith.

John 5:1-6

"After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, 'Do you want to be made well?'"

We're not told which feast was being observed when Jesus went to Jerusalem, but the city would certainly have been extra busy. The portion of scripture about an angel stirring the water is not found in any of the earliest Biblical manuscripts. Although the text was most likely added for clarity hundreds of years after the gospel was written, it accurately reflects the beliefs of the day. This was a very superstitious time and people commonly believed that certain waters held miraculous healing power.

When Jesus approached the "great multitude of sick people," He chose a man who continued to be brought to the pool but had long since given up hope of being cured. Perhaps the main reason for his time at the pool had become social, a place to share with "friends" the sorrows and unfair twists and turns of life. Perhaps the reason had become economical, a place to receive a little food. Or perhaps the man no longer even knew why he was brought to the pool. This had simply become his life, a life without reason or hope.

Jesus stepped into this man's life and, without criticizing his superstitions or futile routines, asked a seemingly ridiculous question - do you want to be made well? But this question was far from ridiculous. It was, and is, the necessary question of all beginnings with Christ. In the broader context the question can be phrased, "Do you really want what Jesus has to offer?" For without desire, our relationship with God cannot begin; and without an on-going desire, our relationship will cease to grow.

Do we really want the life Jesus is offering? Do we really want to leave our zone of relative comfort and follow Him who calls? Life with Him will not be the same, and that can be scary. Let's truly examine each area of our life and learn to trust Him more. He can set us free! But first we must want to be made well.

Have A Great Day!

Refuse To Be Afraid

5-22-06

As wars continue around the world, we must remember our true battles are not against flesh and blood - not against terrorism or weapons of mass destruction, nor against an oppressive boss or unappreciative spouse - but "against the spiritual forces of evil in the Heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12). The real battles occur in a world which is real, but unseen; and yet, the battles we see and hear everywhere we turn are the ones which tend to consume our thoughts and cause us to fear.

As Jesus was teaching and healing around the Sea of Galilee, large crowds of people began to come out to Him. One evening, Jesus decided to leave the crowds behind and sail with His disciples to the other side of the sea. As Jesus slept in the back of the boat, a terrible storm soon developed. The disciples woke Jesus and cried out in fear, "Teacher, don't You care if we drown?" (Mark 4:38).

Mark 4:39-40

"He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to His disciples, 'Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?'"

The disciples had seen Jesus cure a man with leprosy, heal a paralytic, and teach with the authority of Almighty God; but now they thought Jesus didn't care. When Jesus rose, He rebuked the storm as well as His disciples. These men who were chosen to walk with the Son of God were now accused by Jesus of being afraid and living without faith.

This same event occurs in our life today. Jesus climbs into our boat and directs us to a distant shore. We've heard about His miracles so we joyfully cast off, expecting a smooth sail. Suddenly, the wind begins to blow and the waves turn white - this is probably not the voyage we had in mind. No longer able to see the shore, we begin to wonder why we ever set sail. Did we really hear His voice? And in our desperation we pathetically cry out, "Don't You care if we drown?" ... Is our faith really so weak?

In the midst of our fears, we must remember: He is the same God who created the Heavens and the earth, sent His Son to die for our sins, and gave us His Spirit "with whom we were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30). He is the same God who chose us to walk by His side!

Jesus is still committed to our journey, and still in complete control. In His perfect timing He will calm ALL the wind and waves - ALL the roaring seas. When doubts begin to surface, we must draw even closer, hold on even tighter, and trust Him even deeper. No matter what battles we see with our eyes and hear with our ears, we must be determined to live each moment by faith and refuse to be afraid.

Have A Great Day!

The Search

5-23-06

We have come to that wonderful place where our only desire is to do God's will. We have begun to view our time on earth with an eternal perspective and are now in the process of aligning our life with His desires. This is a significant step of maturity for any believer, but it can also be a time of great frustration. We truly desire to do the will of God, so we desperately (and often unceasingly) search for His will.

Before we were saved, we were controlled by a sinful nature. This nature manifested itself in a variety of ways; "sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like" (Galatians 5:19-21).

Through the Spirit of Christ, we now have the power to break free from the control of the sinful nature. And, though most of the sinful nature is clearly out of character with a Christian walk, the sin which is often the hardest to recognize is that of selfish ambition. Even in our striving to live according to God's will, we continually battle the desire to achieve and accomplish.

The deception sounds so good and spiritual: "God, let me do something really great....for You! I'm ready to have a MAJOR impact in Your Kingdom." We look for God's will as if it's some sort of mountain to climb, and then we become frustrated when we never seem to arrive at the summit. But God's will is never a destination. His will is always a process - always found in the journey! His will is that we love Him, trust Him, and seek Him with all our heart.

Psalm 9:10

"Those who know Your name will trust in You, for You, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek You."

Anyone who earnestly searches for God's will has a strong desire to please Him. They love God with all their heart and are leaning on Him for guidance like never before. This love and trust mean more to God than anything we could ever accomplish. But God allows us to search, because the search is what brings us to His throne.

We must continue to seek His desire for our life and always be prepared to follow where He leads. But we must also strip back the layers of pride which require an achievement of something grand. We have found His perfect will when we walk in humble submission, with a thankful heart, and are actively involved in the search.

Have A Great Day!

The Promised Land

5-24-06

In the message "The Search" we saw how searching for God's will is a natural step of Christian maturity. As we become more like Christ, we naturally desire to do only those things consistent with the will of our Heavenly Father. But we also saw that this can be a frustrating time as we search...and wait! But it's a time where we learn more about trust, more about submitting our own desires to His will, and more about preparing to go when He calls.

Abraham was a man of great faith. He was chosen to begin the covenant relationship between God and man. Through Abraham's son Isaac and his grandson Jacob, the nation of Israel was born. However, when God's Word first introduces us to Abraham, he is already 75 years old and settled with his family in the land of Haran. Then, with absolutely no warning, God calls...

Genesis 12:1

"The Lord had said to Abraham, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.'"

God wanted Abraham to move to the land of promise; "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you" (Genesis 12:2). We're not told that Abraham was searching for God's will or even preparing for the call, but he was definitely ready. Abraham had no idea where he was going, how long he would be gone or how he was going to get to where God directed, but he trusted God's promise and went.

It's interesting to note there was no further discussion or clarification from God after the call was made - God gave direction, and Abraham obeyed; "So Abraham left, as the Lord had told him" (Genesis 12:4). Abraham may have left with a slight uncertainty in his decision - a slight hesitation in his step - but he had faith enough to trust and obey.

God has a promised land to which He's calling us today. It's a land where we find contentment in all situations (Philippians 4:12), rejoice in our trials (James 1:2), and give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18) because we KNOW God is working all things together for the good (Romans 8:28). It's a land of united families where marriage vows represent an unbreakable covenant; a place where children honor their father and mother; and a land where parents lead their children by following Christ. Most of all, it's a land where we love Him with ALL our heart in ALL we do, say and think!

He's calling us to trust Him and follow where He leads. Sometimes His call is very specific - and we must diligently prepare to hear and obey this call - but often His call is simply to let go of our own understanding, search His Word for truth, and follow Him to the Promised Land.

Have A Great Day!

Build According To The Spirit

5-25-06

When the armies of Babylon made their final invasion of Jerusalem, they took many captives into exile and completely destroyed the temple - destroyed God's dwelling among His chosen people. After many years, a group of Israelites were allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild.

This group began the work with great excitement: "With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord, 'He is good; His love to Israel endures forever'" (Ezra 3:11). But they soon encountered opposition; "The peoples around them set out to discourage the people of Judah and make them afraid to go on building" (Ezra 4:4). The opposition grew until all construction came to a standstill.

God sent a message through the prophet Haggai to encourage His people to return to their important task.

Haggai 2:4-5

"Be strong, all you people of the land," declares the Lord, "and work. For I am with you," declares the Lord Almighty. "This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And My Spirit remains among you. Do not fear."

God encouraged the people by reminding them He was still with them. He had rescued His people from slavery so He could dwell among them, and He had given His Spirit as a guide and comforter; "They were given rest by the Spirit of the Lord. This is how You guided Your people" (Isaiah 63:14).

Today, WE are His temple: "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). The same Spirit who was given to be with God's chosen people of the past is the same Spirit who now fills us and gives us the power to live a victorious life in Christ - gives us the power to build according to God's perfect plan.

Jesus said the Holy Spirit will "remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). We have all heard and read the truth - we know how Christ desires for us to live - but the Spirit is given to "guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). The Truth is our only building material, and the Spirit holds the only plans. He will guide and direct as we listen and prepare our heart to follow.

God sent His Son to set us free from sin, and He gave us His Spirit so we may live in freedom and build a temple which glorifies His name. There are many in the world who seek to discourage and make us afraid to continue building, many who create fierce opposition. But let's continue the work He has already begun. Let's continue to walk in victory and daily build according to the Spirit.

Have A Great Day!

John 5:7-10 - Lesson #50
5-26-06

When Jesus went to the pool of Bethesda, He saw "a great multitude of sick people" (John 5:3). But Jesus passed through the multitude and approached a man "who had an infirmity thirty-eight years" (John 5:5) and asked him, "Do you want to be made well?" (John 5:6). Why did Jesus single out this particular man?

John 5:7-9

"The sick man answered Him, 'Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me.' Jesus said to him, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk.' And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath."

Everything Jesus did during His ministry was for the purpose of presenting the glory of God and His gospel plan of Salvation. His presentation was often in the form of direct teaching, but He also taught truth through confrontational exchanges and the miracles He chose to perform.

Jesus passed through the multitude and chose one. The man chosen for healing did not show ANY understanding of Jesus. Nicodemus, the woman at the well, and the nobleman from Capernaum all showed some level of understanding, but this man knew nothing! And yet, He was chosen; "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). Praise be to God!

This miracle was a physical healing and says nothing about the Spiritual condition of the man. However, it certainly teaches us many Spiritual truths. The first truth is simply that God does the choosing, not because we deserve to be chosen; "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5). The second truth is seen in the utter hopelessness of the man. He knew he was sick and knew he had no ability to heal himself. There is no room for the Savior of true Salvation while we still believe there is hope in our own ability.

Finally, Jesus healed the man and told him to do what was impossible in his own strength, "stand, pick up, and walk!" The fact that Salvation is a complete gift does not remove our responsibility. We are given the faith to believe and yet told, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 16:31). Those who are in Christ are cleansed of all sin and yet exhorted to, "be holy in all your conduct" (1 Peter 1:15). Our gift of forgiveness is always accompanied with a call to holiness and to a life which would not be possible without Christ.

Jesus continues to call those who have reached the end of themselves - those who recognize their need for a Savior and desire to be saved. He then performs a Spiritual healing through the transformation of our heart and the indwelling Holy Spirit. And with each new creation, He tells us to do what would otherwise not be possible - to stand and begin to walk as a new creation! Let's stop placing our hope in the solutions of man. Let's place our trust in Him alone and begin to walk as one who has been completely healed.

Have A Great Day!

A Greater Love 5-29-06

In one of the last messages Moses gave to the people of Israel, he told them to obey all the commands of God and to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5). About fifteen hundred years later, Jesus referred to this as the greatest of all commandments and then added: "And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commands" (Matthew 22:39-40). The commands to love God and love others summarize how God desires us to live.

On the evening before He was crucified, Jesus gave His disciples a final command.

John 15:12-13

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

In this command, we're not all being called to physically die for one another. This one time action would actually be relatively easy. Rather, the general call from Christ is for us to daily "lay down" our lives by dying to our self gratification and considering the needs of others more important than our own (Philippians 2:3-4). And as opposed to a one time event for a select individual, we are being called to daily lay ourselves down for ALL - even when others are not deserving...even when they have not earned our love.

We are commanded to love as God first loved us. His love was with total commitment and sacrifice; "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son" (John 3:16). His love was with absolute compassion and forgiveness; "God demonstrated His love in this! While we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

The Apostle John spent almost 60 years pondering the words of his Savior and then concluded that love was the one characteristic which identifies us as a true believer; "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death" (1 John 3:14).

Yes, we are to love as Jesus loved. This means we should love without consideration of economic, social, or ethnic class. We should love cross gender, cross race, cross culture, and EVEN cross religion! Without ever compromising the message of Truth, we must begin to view others through the eyes of Jesus and remove the barriers of our love. Let's begin to truly love! Let's begin to open our heart, lay down our life, and love with a greater love.

Have A Great Day!

Hiding Among The Baggage

5-30-06

When Samuel became too old to be an effective judge, the leaders of Israel asked for a new kind of ruler; "Appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have" (1 Samuel 8:5). This request was actually an indication of the sad decline of God's people. By requesting a king, "as all the other nations," they were rejecting God's plan and choosing to follow the ways of the world.

God was disappointed with the heart of His children; but He granted their request and told Samuel to anoint Saul as Israel's first king. Saul was "an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites - a head taller than any of the others" (1 Samuel 9:2). Saul's external appearance was a perfect match for the superficial values of the nation.

When Samuel spoke with Saul, he was quite surprised to hear he had been chosen by God: "But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?" (1 Samuel 9:21). Saul's insecurities were so great that when it came time to officially anoint him as king, he was nowhere to be found.

1 Samuel 10:22

"So they inquired further of the Lord, 'Has the man come here yet?' And the Lord said, 'Yes, he has hidden himself among the baggage.'"

Although Saul made many mistakes as king, we must not forget he was specifically chosen by God and empowered to do His will. But Saul lived with a great sense of inadequacy and was never able to effectively lead. He continually stepped out of God's will because his focus remained on his own limitations rather than on the limitless ability of the One who called him to serve.

Each of us who enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are also chosen to do His will - empowered by His Spirit to accomplish everything He desires for our life; "His divine power has given us everything we need" (2 Peter 1:3). Unfortunately, most of us enter this relationship carrying bags from our past which weigh us down and hinder our ability to serve.

What baggage are we still carrying or using to hide from God's call? There may be sins and failures in our distant (or even very recent) past which make us feel unworthy to serve. We may still carry the pain and mistrust of a broken relationship. We may have even made a sincere attempt to serve but taken a few wrong steps and fallen flat. But **NOTHING** must keep us from doing His will. Nothing must keep us from following where we know He is leading. Let's trust Him with all our heart and answer the call today. Let's keep our eyes on Christ and stop hiding among the baggage.

Have A Great Day!

With You Always 5-31-06

Soon after the death of Joseph and his brothers, the descendants of Israel were forced into Egyptian slavery. For several hundred years, the Egyptians greatly oppressed the Israelites: "But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly" (Exodus 1:12-13).

God heard the prayers of the Israelites and answered by calling Moses to lead the people to freedom: "So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring My people the Israelites out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10). Moses felt inadequate to answer God's call and began to tell God that maybe He had chosen the wrong person for this leadership position; "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11).

At this point, God could have given Moses a motivational speech aimed at building up his self confidence. He could have told Moses of his great potential, and encouraged him to think positively and be more assertive. But Moses' lack of "self" confidence actually made him ideal for this task. Moses would need to trust God, not his own understanding, with absolutely every step he took. But there was one truth Moses still needed to receive.

Exodus 3:12

"And God said, 'I will be with you.'"

The one thing Moses needed to fully believe in his heart was that he was not alone - he needed to truly understand that God would always be at his side.

When Jesus spoke His final commands, He said, "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Jesus didn't need to remind His followers how to present the gospel message or how to fight discouragement - He simply said, "And surely I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20).

When we answer God's call, we can be assured we have (or will be provided) adequate ability. God NEVER calls without also providing the tools to accomplish everything in His plan. But even with all the tools, we're often filled with doubts and fears - uncertain of our next step. And yet, we WILL step. We will continue to step along the path of the world or we will trust God and step out with Him in faith.

Today, as with every day, we must make a choice. As we choose which way to step, let's remember our Heavenly Father is by our side to love us and guide us along His path. Let's remember He has called, equipped, and given us His promise: "I will be with you always!"

Have A Great Day!