

# Devotionals from God's Daily Word Ministries

June 2007

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 [Closerwalk@gdwm.org](mailto:Closerwalk@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.

## Opportunity of Our Words

6-4-07

Every day we are given the opportunity to make a difference in someone's life. Every time we open our mouth to speak, we send forth words which have an effect on those around us. Our words, which come "out of the overflow of the heart" (Matthew 12:34), will either cause a positive or negative reaction - our words are rarely neutral. Knowing the power of our words ought to cause us to use them with great care.

Ephesians 4:29

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

This means that every time we speak, we have the opportunity to encourage and minister. With just a few moments of our time and very little effort, we have the opportunity to brighten someone's day, to ease their burden, and possibly draw them closer to God. This precious opportunity must not be taken lightly; "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken" (Matthew 12:26).

Though our careless words are eternally forgiven, they are also a reflection of our heart. If we have received Jesus as our Lord and Savior, our heart ought to be filled with devotion, and our words should be filtered through a desire to bring Him glory and honor. I'm afraid we will one day be deeply ashamed to see how much damage our words have caused.

We seldom realize how harmful and discouraging our words can be: "Like a madman shooting firebrands or deadly arrows is a man who deceives his neighbor and says, 'I was only joking!'" (Proverbs 26:18-19). Sarcastic and joking words are "deadly arrows" which are never useful for "building others up." Over time, this mode of communication is sure to destroy a relationship.

Before we speak, we must carefully listen. What is the real question? What are the real needs? "He who answers before listening - that is his folly and his shame" (Proverbs 18:13). We may only be given the opportunity to speak a few words, but we can make every effort to use our words wisely; "The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil" (Proverbs 15:28).

Our words are a powerful gift. Let's honor our Heavenly Father by effectively using this gift to encourage. Let's speak so those who listen may benefit and be built up in their faith. Let's continually encourage one another to draw closer to our Heavenly Father and never squander the opportunity of our words.

Have A Great Day!

## Dedicate His Temple

6-5-07

The Old Testament adds wonderful richness to our faith. In the very first verse of the Bible we read "God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). By reflecting on this wonderful truth we can better understand the words of Jesus that "with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). Throughout the Old Testament we see God use common people to accomplish His plan and point the way to Christ. We also learn to appreciate the purpose of a life of absolute reverence for God.

After the Israelites were led out of Egypt, God gave instructions to Moses for constructing the Tabernacle. This was to be the central place of worship and where the presence of God would reside. It was made of cloth, animal skins and poles, so it could be easily moved.

After several hundred years, the people of Israel settled into the promised land and God gave King David the vision for a permanent Temple to replace the mobile Tabernacle. David made plans and collected material, but God waited for Solomon to become king before construction began.

It took Solomon seven years to construct the Temple using over 150,000 workers (2 Chronicles 2:1-2). When the Temple was complete, the dedication began. Sacrifices were made to honor and worship God. Music was played and songs were sung "to give praise and thanks to the Lord" (2 Chronicles 5:13). The grand dedication said that this was to be a place to honor God forevermore!

2 Chronicles 5:13-14

"Then the Temple of the Lord was filled with a cloud, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the Temple of God."

The purpose of the Temple was to lead the children of Israel to a closer relationship with God through an understanding of sin, sacrifice, forgiveness and worship. It was also designed to lead them toward Jesus and provide us with an understanding of who we are in Christ.

One thousand years after the Temple was dedicated, Jesus died on the cross and we entered into a new covenant with a new Temple; "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's Temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). When we enter into a covenant relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, we become the Temple of God. He now resides in the heart of every believer.

The Old Testament shows us the great honor and responsibility of being God's Temple. He resides in us and we must be so filled with the glory of the Lord that we no longer perform "our" service but glorify His name in all we do. Let's set aside the entirety of our life as a holy place of worship...forevermore! Let's give praise and thanks to the Lord and begin today to dedicate His Temple.

Have A Great Day!

## Ever-Increasing Glory

6-6-07

In the message "Dedicate His Temple" we saw that through the forgiveness of Jesus and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we are now God's Temple; "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's Temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). And as with the Temple during the reign of King Solomon, we are to dedicate ourselves for worship and be filled with His glory (2 Chronicles 5:13-14).

The glory of the Lord first appeared to the people of Israel after they were led out of Egypt; "They looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud" (Exodus 16:10). Then, when Moses was called up Mount Sinai to receive the law, the glory of the Lord settled over the mountain; "To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire" (Exodus 24:17).

When Moses came down from the mountain, "his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord" (Exodus 34:29). The presence of God did not cause Moses' face to simply shine with a joyful glow, it beamed with a fear-causing glory; "When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him" (Exodus 34:30). After Moses spoke to the people, he "put a veil over his face" (Exodus 34:33) to ease their fear as well as cover the fact that "the radiance was fading away" (2 Corinthians 3:13).

These examples of God's glory give us a sense of awe. God's glory reflects His character - His majesty, holiness, and awesome power. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are now God's Temple and "ministers of a new covenant" (2 Corinthians 3:6). We are no longer like Moses who had to cover his face with a veil. Jesus has removed the veil and we can boldly reflect His glory into a lost and dying world.

2 Corinthians 3:18

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory."

When we believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we begin to reflect the glory of the Lord from within as we are transformed into the image of Christ. This transformation produces a glory which is intended to increase for the rest of our days. We will never attain the full likeness of Christ until we join Him in Heaven; but, with every step along God's path, we become more and more like His Son. And as the radiant-blocking "self" is slowly removed, we are better able to reflect His glory.

We must continue down His path. We must take daily steps toward a life which reflects the glory of the Lord into the darkness that surrounds us. Heavenly Father, we pray for the strength to more fully surrender and reflect You into this world with an ever-increasing glory.

Have A Great Day!

## Enter His Rest

6-7-07

In the last two messages, we've considered the glory of the Lord. We saw how we are now God's Temple and are to "reflect the Lord's glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18) into the world as we are transformed into the likeness of Christ. It is a great honor to be in the presence of the Lord and we have been given the awesome responsibility to reflect an "ever-increasing" amount of His glory.

But what does this really mean? How can we increase the glory which our life reflects?

When we place our life in the Hands of God through faith in Jesus Christ, we are given His Spirit "with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30). We reflect His glory as we submit to His leading and allow the fruit of His Spirit to be evident in our life; "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). As we further submit and allow His fruit to define the character of our life, God's glory will shine with ever greater intensity!

Notice that the focus of reflecting His glory is on submission, not on our effort. When the glory of the Lord filled Solomon's Temple, "the priests could not perform their service" (2 Chronicles 5:14). God's glory and the work we perform through our own effort are incompatible - our work hinders His reflection.

Hebrews 4:10-11

"For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest."

God created the heavens and the earth in six days; "By the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all His work" (Genesis 2:2). God was satisfied with His work and entered His rest for all eternity. He is still intimately involved, but God accomplishes everything from a confident and calm position of rest because He KNOWS the final outcome.

Likewise, we must not cease from doing what God calls us to do, but we must cease from working in our own strength and for self-righteous rewards. God will certainly keep us active, but the focus of our effort must be on serving and growing from a position of rest with a true desire to do ALL for the love of God.

Many of us are attempting to walk His path in our own strength by working hard and carrying the burdens which are rightfully His. This is not our call! We must love Him with all our heart and serve Him with all our strength. But we must do so through joyful surrender, daily submission, and obedience. He will accomplish His work in His time and according to His purpose. Let's continue to reflect more and more of His glory. Let's draw closer into His presence and make every effort to enter His rest.

Have A Great Day!

John 9:6-12 - Lesson #95  
6-8-07

The Light of the world was questioned about the relationship between sin and the blindness of a man; "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). While it is true that sin can lead to some painful consequences, it is foolishness to assume that all suffering is the result of personal sin. The friends of Job gave this foolish counsel and were met with a sharp rebuke from God; "My wrath is aroused...for you have not spoken of Me what is right" (Job 42:7). Jesus told His disciples that the blindness was not the result of sin, and then He glorified God through a miraculous act of compassion.

John 9:6-12

"When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing. Therefore the neighbors and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, 'Is not this he who sat and begged?' Some said, 'This is he.' Others said, 'He is like him.' He said, 'I am he.' Therefore they said to him, 'How were your eyes opened?' He answered and said, 'A Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, "Go to the pool of Siloam and wash." So I went and washed, and I received sight.' Then they said to him, 'Where is He?' He said, 'I do not know.'"

Jesus used a variety of methods when He healed. He healed a deaf man by putting His fingers in the man's ears and spitting (Mark 7:33) and He healed a blind man by spitting directly on and then touching the man's eyes (Mark 8:23-25). But He also healed the Nobleman's son from a distance by simply speaking (John 4:50). The variety ought to shift our focus away from the method and onto the Healer. Perhaps Jesus used the clay to make a link with creation. Or perhaps the clay gave the man a reason to go wash. We can't be sure why the specific method was used, but we can know with certainty that Jesus was and is the mighty Healer sent from God.

The pool of Siloam was located near the southeast corner of the city wall. The man needed to leave the spot from where he was begging, ask someone to guide him, and travel to the pool in order to wash his eyes. The healing was definitely initiated and made complete by the hands of Jesus, but it also asked for an outworking of genuine faith. Salvation is a gift initiated and made complete by God, but God works through a faith which is strong enough to obediently follow.

Some tried to explain away the miraculous with a mistaken identity. And then when they asked about the healing, the focus was on the method, the how, and not on the Healer, the Who. The man only knew that he was once blind, and after being touched by Jesus he could now see. We are all born spiritually blind in desperate need of a touch from God. Let's never try to explain away the miraculous. Let's receive His offer of true sight and then give all glory and honor to the Healer.

Have A Great Day!

## Strong, Courageous, and Humble

6-11-07

Joshua was Moses' field commander in the fight against the Amalekites (Exodus 17:9) and his assistant when the Law was given at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:13). After initially exploring the land of Canaan, Joshua was one of only two men to advise the Israelites to trust God and enter the promised land (Numbers 14:6-9). When the people refused, Joshua received an additional 39 years of leadership training from Moses while the Israelites were led through the desert.

God then selected Joshua to succeed Moses; "At his command he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will come in" (Numbers 27:21). After Moses died, God gave final instructions to Joshua before leading the people into the land of Canaan.

Joshua 1:9

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

Joshua would be required to fight many battles and lead a great multitude of people, so God repeated His encouragement several times... "Be strong and courageous!"

This is an awesome exhortation for us today. God has given us His instructions, empowered us with His Spirit, and has told us to boldly proceed down His path knowing He is by our side wherever we go. But there's an additional lesson God desires all His children to learn.

Prior to his first battle in Canaan, Joshua "saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand" (Joshua 5:13). This caused Joshua some obvious concern, so he approached the man and asked; "Are you for us or for our enemies?"

Joshua 5:14

"Neither," he replied, 'but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.' Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, 'What message does my Lord have for His servant?'"

We are called to be bold, but our boldness will always become self serving unless we totally submit to God's leadership - unless we say with complete humility: "Lord, You are the Commander and this is Your army. I will fight with courage and strength, but these are Your battles. What would You have me do, and where would You have me go?" As we boldly go forward into God's Land of Promise, our marching orders are clear: we are to always be strong, courageous, and humble.

Have A Great Day!

## God Makes It Grow

6-12-07

Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthian church to correct several problems. The Corinthian's needed instruction in marriage, Christian freedom, worship, and various issues which tended to cause division. He rebuked the church for quarreling about whom they followed: "You are still worldly... For when one says, 'I follow Paul,' and another, 'I follow Apollos,' are you not mere men?" (1 Corinthians 3:3,4).

Apollos was a good teacher, but Paul reminds us that all ministers of the Gospel - all preachers, teachers, parents, and anyone else who desires to share Biblical truths - are simply servants through whom God accomplishes His work. We become worldly and fail to live according to the Spirit of God any time we become followers of a specific minister or feel responsible for someone's growth and maturity.

1 Corinthians 3:5-6

"What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe - as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow."

We must always remain exclusive followers of Jesus Christ! Though He may use many others to assist in the process, God must receive ALL the credit and glory for our growth. In the same manner, God uses each of us to ASSIST in the growth of others. We can teach truth with our words and demonstrate truth with our lives, but we can never cause someone to accept the truth or even grow to a deeper understanding.

We are instructed to plant the seed of His Word and water with discipleship, prayer, and encouragement at every opportunity; "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

As we plant and water, it's normal to want to see some growth. We may desire to see blossoms overnight, but God is growing a mighty shade tree with deep roots and wide branches that will not break in the wind - and this kind of growth takes time. We may NEVER see the eternal results of our effort, but we must patiently continue to plant and water, and trust God to accomplish His work; "{My Word} will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I have sent it" (Isaiah 55:11).

Each of us knows someone who needs to know our Heavenly Father in a more personal way. There are great ministry opportunities placed in our path every day. Let's obediently follow by being well nourished and casting forth the seed and water of His Word without becoming discouraged. Let's remember we are the servants through whom He works, but let's ALWAYS remember that God makes it grow!

Have A Great Day!

## Careful Thought To Our Ways

6-13-07

The motivational speakers of our day want us to set great goals for our life: "Where do you want to be in two, five, or ten years? What type of lifestyle do you want when you retire?" We are encouraged to set goals slightly beyond our reach, and then instructed how to create a plan to accomplish these goals. The implication is that a more focused effort will yield superior results and lead to greater "success."

But before we can ask where we want to be in the next few years, we must first ask a longer term question: "Where will I be in one hundred years?" No other goal is worth pursuing until we have a solid answer to this most basic (but all-important) question. What difference does it make which college we attend, which job we take, or what our home looks like if we have failed to address the issue of where we will spend eternity!?

Proverbs 14:8

"The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception."

We must be wise with the days we are given and no longer be deceived by the values of the world's system. There's nothing inherently wrong with goals and plans; but far too often, they lead to a self-determined lifestyle and away from the true Director of ALL plans; "In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps" (Proverbs 16:9). Our planning must be as a direct response to God's leading; and once in place, our plans must remain in complete submission to His will; "I know, O Lord, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). When our goal is to be in the center of His will, the specifics of where we will be and what we will be doing are really none of our business.

Every moment of our life is a precious gift from God. Even though the average life span continues to increase, our time is extremely short. An average life lasts about 45,000,000 minutes (much less in many countries). This may seem like a lot, but by this time tomorrow 1440 minutes will be forever gone; "You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (James 4:14).

We must not waste our limited time by chasing after things which vanish; "Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity" (Ephesians 5:15-16). We must evaluate ALL our decisions and goals based on the overriding desire to glorify God in all we do, to rejoice in His many blessings, and to long for the time when we can worship before His throne for all eternity. Any other set of values must fade to nothing in comparison.

Every day we are handed a block of time and given the freedom of how it will be spent. This is a wonderful opportunity, but the clock continues to tick! Let's honor our Heavenly Father with our goals and plans and give careful thought to our ways.

Have A Great Day!

## Great Expectations

6-14-07

In the message "Careful Thought To Our Ways" we saw how God is the Director of our steps and how we must carefully (and prayerfully) develop goals and plans which glorify His name. And though our true goal should always be to fully release our life to God and worship Him for all eternity, each day we walk this earth can be filled with a wonderful excitement as we live for Him.

Paul was confined in Rome when he wrote his letter to the Philippians. He didn't know whether he would be set free or executed, but he knew Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. Paul had seen God's hand at work and fully understood His love and power. He had completely turned his life over to God and now lived with an excitement at how God would use him to accomplish His plan.

Philippians 1:20

"I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body whether by life or by death."

There were times when Paul's situation appeared dismal and without hope, but he had already seen how God was using ALL things to His glory; "It has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ" (Philippians 1:13). Paul's hardship had made it possible for the whole palace guard to hear the gospel message and had encouraged others to "speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly" (Philippians 1:14). Paul had learned the true joy of being a vessel through whom God could work.

As we follow Jesus we must develop a view which is not constrained by what we see; "For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). He is ALWAYS at work, and always inviting us to join by His side. As we develop an eternal view of this world, we will see every situation as working toward His good. Trials will become a wonderful time of growth, and interruptions in our plans will become exciting God-directed opportunities for ministry.

We spend so much time trying to create our future happiness that we miss the true joy God has for us today. He is calling us to know Him better and love Him more; to experience His love and share His love with others. He has a wonderful and exciting plan for us TODAY! "He is our God and we are the people of His pasture" (Psalm 95:7).

Let's begin each day with a wondrous anticipation: "I can't wait to see what God has for me today!" God has an amazing plan for our life! Let's develop a view which looks and longs for opportunities to draw near, love Him, and serve. Let's live each day filled with joy and great expectations.

Have A Great Day!

## Build All For His Glory

6-18-07

The last two messages have considered how we ought to use a different set of priorities in forming our goals and plans. Our goal should be to fully submit to our Heavenly Father, and our plans must always remain under His control. We also saw that a life submitted to God is full of opportunity and excitement. But such a submitted life requires discipline and perseverance. Though the world may scream for us to return, we must be determined to continue to live by the truth of God's Word.

In 586 BC, the armies of Babylon destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem. About 50 years later, the Jewish people started to rebuild; but after a few years, their priorities began to shift. Their comfort and the condition of their own homes became more important than being obedient to God's call: "Is it time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house {of the Lord} remains a ruin?" (Haggai 1:4). God sent the prophet Haggai to challenge the people to reconsider their values and return to the work they had begun.

Haggai 1:5-6

"Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."

The people had turned from rebuilding the Temple to building their own homes - from rebuilding their Spiritual lives to building the comfort of their physical lives - and found that no matter how hard they worked, they never had enough. Isn't it amazing how the foundational truths never change?

We have more pulls on our priorities today than at any other time in history. There are more distractions, more temptations, and many more "construction projects" that cry for our time and energy. But if our focus remains on building for our own physical comfort and security, we will also be ones who find we are NEVER satisfied. It may take many years to realize this truth, but without an eternal focus on the glory and honor of God, all our effort drains away.

Our lives have become a Temple of God - a Temple being built to worship Him for all eternity, and one which must not fall into ruin! We must build the foundation of this Temple through intimate prayer and the study of His Word. We must cover all we build with an overriding desire to love God "with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30).

Each and every day we are given the task of building His Spiritual Temple. Let's not be turned from this task by projects which so easily fade away. Let's refocus our priorities and diligently build ALL for His glory.

Have A Great Day!

## Forgive As He Forgave

6-19-07

It seems like sooner or later everyone gets mistreated and hurt. Many times the actions against us are unintentional, but other times they can be extremely malicious. Suddenly, this hurt begins to invade every other area of our life. We carry a heavy burden which we know we don't deserve - and which we certainly don't desire to keep - but it's a burden we can't seem to let go.

There is only one true way to relieve the burden of our hurt, and it always begins with forgiveness. True forgiveness can be difficult and require great humility. We want the other person to first ask (maybe even beg) for our forgiveness. We would like them to admit the hurt they caused; and, if we are honest, we probably would prefer them to suffer...just a little. But this is not in God's plan.

Colossians 3:13

"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

If we have come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ, we have first come face to face with our sinful nature. Without an understanding that we are full of sin, we will never reach out for a savior. And if we have experienced the true meaning of God's love, "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8), we will be compelled to forgive others. When we truly understand His forgiveness, we WILL forgive others!

Jesus told a parable of a man who failed to forgive a small debt when his master had just forgiven him a much greater debt: "'Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed" (Matthew 18:33-34). Do we really understand how much we have been forgiven? Or our inability to repay? Yet our debt has been completely forgiven by grace through faith in Jesus, and we are now commanded to forgive others.

God established the standard for forgiveness. We are not called to forgive because someone deserves or has earned our forgiveness, we are called to forgive simply because God first forgave us. When we forgive, we must strive to make the forgiveness complete; "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" (Hebrews 8:12). Though we may carry a healthy level of new caution as the relationship continues, we must never place conditions on maintaining our forgiveness.

There WILL be times when we are burdened with hurt. But let's not seek revenge or try to withdraw and hide our pain. Let's follow the commands of God's Word and be set free! Let's grow closer to our Heavenly Father and see through His eyes. Let's share His love and forgive as He forgave.

Have A Great Day!

## What It Means To Forgive

6-20-07

In the message "Forgive As He Forgave" we saw that our forgiveness of others should be based on recognizing the magnitude of forgiveness we've been given through faith in Jesus. A true understanding of God's mercy toward us compels us to be merciful to others. But still, forgiveness remains difficult and somewhat ambiguous. Some hurts last sooooo long!

There are those today trying to forgive child abusers, murderers, habitually unfaithful spouses, and a whole list of emotional and physical pain. How do we truly forgive when it hurts so much? And how do we know when we've properly forgiven?

Ephesians 4:31-32

"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

All forgiveness begins with a belief that God desires us to forgive in any situation; "If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:15). If we are unable, or unwilling, to forgive, we need to spend more time reflecting on the forgiveness of Christ. Do we really understand? Do we really believe? Our ability to forgive identifies our focus: Is our priority on Christ or on our own needs and desires, hurts and pain?

But forgiveness is not simply saying the words "I forgive you." Rather, forgiveness is canceling the emotional debt. It means we love and earnestly pray for blessings in their life; "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). We should be able to think about the other person without bitterness, rage, or anger. We should be able to pray for an increase in their ministry or business, more peace in their family, and a closer relationship with Jesus. It's amazing how much healing takes place in our own heart when we pray for those who have caused us pain.

However, forgiveness does not necessarily mean a relationship must continue as if the hurt never occurred. Our heart may be free of all anger and bitterness - we may earnestly pray for the one who caused us pain - and yet, we no longer trust or enjoy their company. My forgiveness of a child abuser does not require me to leave my children in their care. I can love with a Christ-like love and pray without anger and yet guard my physical body and emotional and Spiritual heart.

It's unfortunate, but most of us are carrying some bitterness toward another person today. These burdensome emotions should not continue in the heart of a Child of God, and the only road to release them is through the gate of forgiveness. Let's ask God to purify our heart. Let's refocus on the cross and release our burdens to Him. Let's honor our Father by showing the world what it means to forgive.

Have A Great Day!

## Step of Faith

6-21-07

Today was a busy day! Early this morning we heard that King Herod killed John the Baptist. Jesus seemed to take this news pretty hard; "When Jesus heard what had happened, He withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place" (Matthew 14:13). I knew He wanted to be alone, but the crowds kept following Him. Soon there were "about five thousand men, besides women and children" (Matthew 14:21). When it started to get late we tried to send the people home, but Jesus had everyone sit down and He fed them with "five loaves of bread and two fish" (Matthew 14:17). What a day!!

Finally, Jesus sent us across the Sea of Galilee; "After leaving them, He went up on a mountain to pray" (Mark 6:46). I'm glad Jesus is getting some time alone, but I wish He was here right now. It's dark and the waves are so high. Wait, there's something out there; something, or someone, walking on the water; "It's a ghost, they said, and cried out in fear" (Matthew 6:26). No, I think it's Jesus!

Matthew 14:28-29

"Lord, if it's You,' Peter replied, 'tell me to come to You on the water.' 'Come,' He said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus."

When Peter took that first step onto the water, there was nothing within his physical senses which told him the water would hold. The boat was being tossed by the wind and waves, and Peter certainly had many past experiences telling him that heavy objects sink in water - telling him his step would fail.

But Peter KNEW Jesus. He had spent time with Jesus - he walked with Him, talked with Him, prayed with Him, and witnessed His miracles. Peter knew the face of Jesus and knew His voice. He knew if Jesus said "Come," He would also provide a way for him to follow. Jesus made the water solid, but only when and where Peter stepped - only after he stepped out in faith and in response to the call.

The step of faith is needed for any situation which requires a solution beyond what our physical senses can understand. "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). The situation may be related to relationships, finances, jobs, or ministry opportunities. But it may also be related to raising children, challenges at school, the apparent inability to forgive, or anything else which requires us to operate outside the comfort of the boat.

God calls us to a life of faith. We must spend quality time with our Lord so we can recognize His voice, but when God says "Come," our only response is to step. Our past experiences may scream it's not possible and that we will fail. We may not see solid ground, but we must trust that the One who called will provide the solid foundation. Let's trust Him to provide a way with each and every step of faith!

Have A Great Day!

John 9:13-17 - Lesson #96  
6-22-07

The miraculous hand of God came to earth, made some clay, and healed the eyes of a man born blind. One would think this would be a reason for great rejoicing - healing had occurred, a life made new! But this was not the case for those within the walls of the established religion of the day. The healing had not followed the understood and accepted rules. It seems God had operated outside His man-made box!

John 9:13-17

"They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees. Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.' Therefore some of the Pharisees said, 'This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.' Others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?' And there was a division among them. They said to the blind man again, 'What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?' He said, 'He is a prophet.'"

The Pharisees determined that Jesus had violated the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a day established by God for rest and worship; "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). But over the 1500 years since the Sabbath law had been given, the religious leaders created specific rules as to how the Sabbath was to be kept holy. For example, one of the rules stated that it was a violation of the Sabbath to knead dough to make bread - or to knead anything on the Sabbath. And since Jesus had kneaded the dirt and spit to make mud, He had clearly violated the Sabbath.

Jesus most often healed on the Sabbath. And when He healed, it's as if He said, "Be healed, and go violate the established Sabbath law." For example, "Rise, take up your bed and walk" (John 5:8). In Matthew's gospel Jesus defended the picking of grain to eat on the Sabbath and then went into the synagogue and healed a man with a withered hand. These were done to give correct interpretation; "it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:12), and "the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:8). The established interpretation had been wrong - God was not confined to man's box!

Though Jesus revealed the character of God, died for the forgiveness of sin, sent the Holy Spirit to guide us in all truth, and ensured His Word would be recorded and preserved, much of what we understand and how we worship is based on man's tradition and interpretation. Not all tradition and interpretation is bad, and much is necessary, but we need to understand the potential for placing restrictions on God. Jesus operated outside the box and He was either dismissed or rationalized away.

God will never violate His revealed Word, but He may challenge our interpretation, challenge our box. Let's worship the God "who is and who was and who is to come" (Revelation 1:4). Let's lift high and honor Jesus Christ, trust His guidance and never worship our self-created religious box.

Have A Great Day!

## Focused On Jesus

6-25-07

I've always been impulsive. I was one of the first to follow Jesus. I didn't even know who He was, but when He said "Come, follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19), though I didn't know what He meant, I dropped my fishing nets and followed. After three years, I foolishly told Jesus I was "ready to go with You to prison and to death" (Luke 22:33), but that same night I denied I even knew Him - three times! And in the garden, when the soldiers came to take Him away, I drew my sword "and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear" (John 18:10).

But the most impulsive thing I ever did was that night in the boat. The waves were rough and we had "rowed three or three and a half miles" (John 6:19), when I saw Jesus walking on the water. I told Him I would come if He called, and the next thing I knew I was jumping out of the boat! And I didn't sink!! I kept my eyes on Jesus. I knew in my heart He was "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16), but the wind was blowing so hard and the waves kept crashing against my legs.

Matthew 14:30

"But when he {Peter} saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!'"

Jesus said Peter began to sink because he doubted and had little faith (Matthew 14:31). But let's not be too hard on Peter - remember, no one else even left the boat! Peter stepped out of the boat and took several steps on top of the water!! But then he lost his focus.

Peter was in the middle of an awesome display of God's power, and yet he "saw the wind," or at least the effects of the wind. Peter began to look at the turbulence of the world and not at the One who created the world; "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

There are times when we clearly see God's hand at work. Our eyes become focused on Jesus, His peace fills our life, and the foundation under our feet feels solid and secure. However, it's usually not long before the wind begins to blow, the waves rise up, and we feel that sinking feeling. When this happens (and it will) we must not despair, for this is also part of God's wonderful plan. As we are sinking, He always reaches out His hand as an invitation to draw near and know Him better - to know He will always be there when we cry out "Lord, save me!"

The walk of faith cannot be accomplished in our own strength. With each step we must "put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature" (Colossians 3:5), and "clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:14). Every day we must take our eyes off our own ability and the pulls of the world - take our eyes off the wind - and commit to trusting and keeping our eyes focused on Jesus.

Have A Great Day!

## Hear The Call

6-26-07

In the last two messages, we've considered Peter as he responded to Jesus' call: "Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus" (Matthew 14:29). We saw that Peter needed great faith to step out of the boat, even though his faith quickly faded "when he saw the wind" (Matthew 14:30). But we also saw that before Peter could even get out of the boat, he first needed to hear and recognize the clear call of God; "Lord, if it is You, tell me to come to You on the water" (Matthew 14:28).

It wasn't faith alone which allowed Peter to walk on the water, he had to apply his faith to Jesus' call. It was Jesus who provided a firm foundation under Peter's feet as he stepped. Peter wasn't specially gifted at water walking - he simply heard the call and obeyed in faith.

If Peter would have sailed to the exact same spot the following day and stepped out of the boat without being called, he would have sunk like a heavy stone - guaranteed! Peter could not have commanded the water to hold nor "claimed" a solid foundation for His feet. His faith would not have kept him on top of the water for even a fraction of a second. His "success" on the water was not due as much to the magnitude of his faith as it was to properly hearing and then applying his faith to the call of Jesus.

John 10:27

"My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me."

We seem to spend much of our life wandering without direction, but it's God's desire that we follow closely after His Son; "He goes on ahead of them, and His sheep follow Him because they know His voice" (John 10:4). Do we really know His voice? How often do we set aside time to listen? If we only occasionally listen to the voice of our Lord, how will we even recognize His call? We live in a world so filled with distractions that we must not wait until the crisis of a storm. If we haven't learned to filter out the competing noises of the world, God's call will be lost in the crashing waves.

We must spend time away from the "noise" where we can be alone with God and learn to recognize His voice. We must establish times of quiet to read His Word and talk with Him in prayer; "Sanctify them by the truth; Your Word is truth" (John 17:17). As we meditate on the truth of His Word and pray for understanding, our Spiritual filter will become tuned. Then, when we enter a storm, the noise may still surround us, but our filter will only allow a single voice to enter.

Let's develop the discipline of listening along with the Spiritual ability to filter and recognize the voice of God. Our faith will be enough to respond - strong enough to step - but we must first be able to hear the call.

Have A Great Day!

## Meet Them Where They Are

6-27-07

Peter heard the call of Jesus in the middle of a storm and "got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus" (Matthew 14:29). Peter knew the voice of his Lord and knew that if He called, He would also provide a way to follow. But Peter soon "saw the wind...and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!'" (Matthew 14:30).

Matthew 14:31-33

"Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' He said, 'why did you doubt?' And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, 'Truly You are the Son of God.'"

Jesus' words to Peter might seem a little harsh. After all, Peter had stepped onto the water while the other disciples remained in the boat. But Peter needed to be encouraged in what true faith could accomplish. He needed to clearly see that "with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26), but only if he kept his eyes focused on Jesus. God had great plans for Peter - plans which would require great faith - so Jesus ministered to Peter's doubts and fears by meeting him on the water.

Jesus then climbed in the boat with the other disciples. Rather than chastising them for their lack of faith and telling them how they should have climbed out of the boat, Jesus simply allowed them to worship. These disciples had failed to understand who He was, and now they needed to just spend time loving and worshipping their Lord. Jesus ministered to the needs of these disciples by meeting them in the boat.

The Apostle Paul had a clear understanding of ministry opportunities: "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). Paul never sinned in order to save the sinner, but he understood where a person was in their Spiritual journey and met them on their road to begin his ministry.

Every day God places people in our life who need encouragement and desperately need to be directed onto a path which will lead them closer to God. None of us know all the answers, and we certainly don't need to force everything we know into a single conversation, but we each are given an opportunity to minister - an opportunity which may only last a moment and may never truly return.

Let's look for the specific needs of those who cross our path and be prepared to encourage with the truth of God's Word. But as we speak the truth, whether on the water, in the boat or even back on the shore, let's minister as we meet them where they are.

Have A Great Day!

## Step Toward Jesus

6-28-07

In the last several messages, we consider the faith of Peter as he stepped out of the boat and walked on the water. We saw the importance of properly hearing the call and of keeping our eyes focused on our Lord as the waves are crashing at our feet. This story contains many lessons for our walk with Christ. But a lesson which is often overlooked is the motivation of our heart.

We know that the heart contains our true character and true relationship with our Heavenly Father. When God was showing Samuel who to anoint as king of Israel He reminded him: "The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Our outward actions are a "reflection" of the condition of our heart; but they are not a true image and they can most certainly deceive!

God saw this deception in the worship of His Children long ago. We are all susceptible to the trap of going through the motions of worship without really having a heart devoted to God: "These people come near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. Their worship of Me is made up only of rules taught by men" (Isaiah 29:13).

Yes, without considering the heart we lose the real message of Peter getting out of the boat. These words become just another self-gratifying motivational speech for those who want to climb up another rung of the ladder: "If you want to go further and accomplish more, you must leave the security of the boat!" Taking a "step of faith" will often lead to "successful" advancement in worldly as well as ministry endeavors, but neither are pleasing to God without the proper heart.

We sometimes forget that there was another time when Peter got out of the boat, but this time Jesus was a little distance away standing on the shore.

John 21:7

"As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, 'It is the Lord,' he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water."

Peter wasn't motivated by the thrill of walking on the water, not by the praise he might receive from the other disciples or even by the thought of doing something wonderful for God. Peter got out of the boat simply because that's where Jesus was; and walk, sink or swim, he desired to be with the one he loved.

Let's pray for an increased faith which allows us to follow more closely after Jesus. Let's pray for the courage to leave the confines of our worldly security and follow where Jesus is calling. But let's diligently examine our heart and make sure that with EVERY step, we abandon all and step toward Jesus.

Have A Great Day!