

Devotionals
from
God's Daily Word Ministries

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Put It Into Practice

10-2-06

Paul's letter to the Philippians is one hundred and four verses filled with encouragement and joy. Paul didn't write this letter to explain deep theology or to deal with any particular sin. Rather, his purpose was to express love for his friends and to encourage them (and us) to live a joy-filled Christian life.

In chapter one, Paul encourages us that God's work in us WILL continue; "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion" (1:6). In chapter two, we are encouraged to "do everything without complaining or arguing" (2:14).

In chapter three, Paul inspires us to be forward-looking in our walk with Christ; "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal" (3:13-14). Finally, in chapter four, Paul writes some of my personal favorites; "Rejoice in the Lord always!" (4:4); "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation" (4:12); and, "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength" (4:13).

But buried within these wonderful words of encouragement is probably the most valuable and applicable message for our daily journey with Christ.

Philippians 4:9

"Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me - put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."

Paul had the gospel message living in him and shining through him every moment of every day. But he never would have learned "the secret" of rejoicing and being content in all situations if he had just learned "about" the gospel. Although it's wise, and very useful, to study and even memorize God's Word, His peace and contentment - His joy - will never be real until we actually apply His Word to our life on a daily basis: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22).

We must NEVER be just hearers of the Word who become puffed up with Bible knowledge. We must never preach Biblical truths yet fail to apply these truths in our own life and draw ever closer to our Heavenly Father. Jesus accused many of the Jews around Him of making this same mistake: "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life" (John 5:39-40).

Let's never stop with just loving His Word or His "activities." Let's love HIM with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; and express our love through faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to the leading of His Spirit, as we take what we daily receive and put it into practice.

Have A Great Day!

Stand Firm in The Gap

10-3-06

In the final years of the southern kingdom of Israel, God warned that He was going to use the king of Babylon to discipline the people unless they returned to Him with a heart of worship. But the people failed to repent and the invasion of Jerusalem began.

Ezekiel was a prophet to those taken captive during the Babylonian attacks. Through Ezekiel, God explained why He was allowing Jerusalem to be destroyed. He said the people had rebelled and drifted far; but His anger seemed mostly directed at the leaders who failed to point the way: "{The priests} do not distinguish between the holy and the common; they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean" (Ezekiel 22:26). In addition, God said the prophets were covering up the sins of the priests; "They whitewash their deeds for them by false visions and lying divinations" (Ezekiel 22:28).

God searched, but found no one who was willing to lead the people into a life of pure and holy worship - a life which recognized God as Lord of ALL and prayed without ceasing for His guidance and protection.

Ezekiel 22:30-31

"I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none. So I will pour out my wrath on them and consume them with my fiery anger."

As in the days of Ezekiel, Spiritual walls are crumbling all around us. We have whitewashed sin in the name of tolerance, and we have lost our passion for holiness and worship in the busyness of materialism and worldly advancement. And tragically, many of our churches are filled with compromise and fail to point the way to truth. The result is many lives filled with Spiritual gaps - areas vulnerable to grave attack by the enemy.

We must repair our own walls through repentance, forgiveness, and daily drawing nearer to the presence of God. But we must also look for "gaps" in the walls of those around us and commit to standing firm with prayer, encouragement, and time, until strength returns and walls are repaired. We must be ones who live without compromise and faithfully point the way to true worship and a life which glorifies God in all we do.

We must continue to stand in the gap for as long as it takes the relationship of a friend to be restored, the strength of a pastor to be renewed, the heart of a loved one to be transformed, or the life of a prodigal child to return home. God's words through Ezekiel are harsh; but God didn't give up on the people until the people gave up on each other. It's not too late if we continue to point the way; there is still hope if we will stand firm in the gap.

Have A Great Day!

Never Lose Hope

10-4-06

In the message "Stand Firm in The Gap" we were encouraged to continue in prayer and minister to the needs of others; to stand in the gap for those who need protection against enemy attacks. We saw our responsibility to stand for as long as necessary. This requires perseverance and complete trust in God. It can be difficult when we continue to "stand" but God appears slow to respond. We can also become extremely discouraged when we think we understand HOW He should respond.

Lazarus had become sick to the point of death, and his sisters were standing in the gap by ministering to his needs. They even sent word to Jesus in hopes that He would help.

John 11:4-6

"When He heard this, Jesus said, 'This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.' Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed where He was two more days."

Jesus did not immediately respond - and during this delay, Lazarus died. Yet this tragedy was for God's glory. When Jesus finally arrived, He raised Lazarus from the dead and taught an important message: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies" (John 11:25).

Lazarus and his sisters would have preferred a healing during the early stage of the sickness - but that was not God's plan. His plan included much more than the temporary suffering of one family. His plan was to teach many people, through many generations, to this very day and beyond, that He was the sure way to eternal life. His plan was perfect, with perfect timing.

We are all given opportunities to serve by meeting the needs of others. But as we serve, we must NEVER take our eyes off our Heavenly Father. Our "job" is to stand in the gap before Him and minister in the manner which His Spirit directs - it is never our responsibility to "fix" the people or circumstances we have been called to serve. If we will faithfully serve as He directs - working outward while looking upward - we will find that God actually uses our ministry effort to work on many issues in our own life. Most are issues we never even knew we had, issues like trust; "Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge" (Psalm 62:8).

When our area of service seems out of control - when the need seems to outpace our ability to serve and God seems slow to respond - we must continue to trust Him with all our heart. These times of testing will draw us closer to God as we abandon ALL into His sovereign care. He alone knows His plan, and His plan remains perfect. Let's continue to trust Him and serve as He directs. Let's continue with our eyes fixed on God, and never lose hope!

Have A Great Day!

These Are God's Battles 10-5-06

During the time of King Jehoshaphat (approximately 860 BC), several armies began to invade the land of Judah. Being greatly outnumbered, Jehoshaphat called for a nation-wide time of fasting and prayer to seek guidance from God: "O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon You" (2 Chronicles 20:12).

The king needed to formulate a plan. He was the appointed leader and responsible for the safety of his people. King Jehoshaphat's "plan" was to place the fate of the entire nation into the hands of God. Many see such action as weakness, but it took great strength to recognize he was powerless - even greater strength to know where to turn and Who to trust!

God answered King Jehoshaphat's cry for help through a Levite named Jahaziel.

2 Chronicles 20:14-15

"Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel... 'Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: "Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's.'"

This is great comfort when we face trials which appear much bigger than anything we can handle: we can rest in the fact that our battles belong to God. But there is more to the story! God didn't tell Jehoshaphat to just sit in his tent while the battle was won, He gave specific instructions to confidently stand before the enemy.

2 Chronicles 20:16-17

"Tomorrow march down against them... {But} you will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you."

It's inevitable that our life will contain such battles - many are facing overwhelming battles right now. As with everything we encounter on our Christian walk, battles have a purpose. Many times the purpose of our battle is to understand a fundamental truth: "Apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Reaching the end of our own strength is our real battle - turning to God and trusting Him for every step of our walk is the real victory!

As we trust Him with all our heart and seek counsel in His presence, He will tell us where to march and where to stand. Let's boldly follow our Lord each and every day and refuse to become discouraged. He is in absolute control...for these are God's battles!

Have A Great Day!

John 6:41-47 - Lesson #68
10-6-06

When the people asked for a sign so they could believe, Jesus said He was the bread of life. The miracle of His life was much greater than that of Moses supplying manna in the desert because Jesus could fully satisfy; "He who comes to Me shall never hunger" (John 6:35). But not everyone could accept these words.

John 6:41-47

"The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, 'I am the bread which came down from heaven.' And they said, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, "I have come down from heaven"?' Jesus therefore answered and said to them, 'Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God." Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me. Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.'"

"The Jews" is a phrase usually reserved for those who opposed Jesus and could suggest the setting moved from the outside to the smaller confines of the synagogue (v.59). The Jews didn't quote the exact words of Jesus, but it's clear they understood His meaning. Jesus claimed to be from Heaven just as John said; "He who comes from above is above all" (John 3:31). But how could this be true since they knew His family?

With their focus on the natural, the supernatural was not possible. They were talking with the One sent to give life; but rather than hear His words, they were looking for reasons NOT to believe. Jesus mentioned this type of reaction in the parable of the great feast; "'Come, for all things are now ready.' But they all with one accord began to make excuses" (Luke 14:17-18).

The Jews believed they could enter God's kingdom by their own effort, that they could be good enough - righteous enough - to merit God's favor. But Jesus said no one is good enough. Entrance to the kingdom must be by the grace of God, they must be drawn and made righteous. But HOW are they drawn?

Jesus quoted from Isaiah 54:13 to identify Himself as the King sent to restore the kingdom and to show they were in a time when all would be taught by God. Notice how Jesus then connects the drawing of God to hearing and learning. The act of drawing is carried out through hearing and learning from the Father. But only the Son has seen the Father, so all teaching which draws is done by God through the Son; "He has declared Him" (John 1:18). Jesus has the words of God which are used to draw us to Himself, the Words of God now recorded in the Bible. Jesus then concluded by again tying everlasting life directly to belief in Him. God is the initiator, supplier, and sustainer of true life; and He has entrusted ALL to His one and only Son. Let's hear and learn from God through His Word. Let's be drawn to the Son and believe.

Have A Great Day!

Serve With Humility

10-9-06

John the Baptist was born with a single purpose: "to make ready a people prepared to receive the Lord" (Luke 1:17). He was chosen for service before he was conceived and was "filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth" (Luke 1:15). John was so obedient to his calling that Jesus said, "Among those born of women, there is no one greater than John" (Luke 7:28). But John also knew his position within God's Kingdom - he had come to serve.

John 1:26-27

"I baptize with water,' John replied, 'but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'"

John had been given his assignment and was empowered by the Holy Spirit to accomplish his tasks: he was a servant preparing the way for the King. John was the greatest man ever born of a woman; and yet, in his humility, he felt unworthy to even untie the sandals of Christ.

True humility is not simply defined by a low self-image, it is the natural condition of our spirit when we begin to understand who we really are...and Who God really is! John felt unworthy because he had been given a glimpse of the unfathomable greatness and holiness of his Lord. As he stood in the presence of Perfection, there was only one response; "He must become greater, I must become less" (John 3:30).

When we know that Jesus is on the throne, "at God's right hand" (1 Peter 3:22), and that He will reign for all eternity, we begin to see our life in the proper perspective. He is infinitely perfect and worthy of infinite love, worship, and service. We live and breathe purely by His grace; we are but "a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (James 4:14).

Yes, we are a "mist," but we are a mist with a purpose. We have been empowered by the Holy Spirit with the necessary tools to victoriously serve. Though our offering will always be imperfect, and far less than He deserves, it will be pleasing and acceptable if we give Him our ALL, give Him our best, and give from the innermost part of our heart.

Our God is truly above ALL, and He loves us so much that He gave His one and only Son so we could be with Him for all eternity. He calls us to believe in His gift and then serve Him for all the rest of our days. Let's continue to love Him with all our heart, give Him our absolute very best, and daily walk down the path He lays before us. Let's serve obediently, boldly, and victoriously...but let's also lift the Name of Jesus higher and higher and serve with humility.

Have A Great Day!

Intended For Good

10-10-06

Joseph's life was filled with one difficult situation after another. By the time he was a teenager, his brothers had developed an intense hatred toward him. Their hatred led to an attempt to take his life - but rather than kill him, they sold young Joseph into slavery (Genesis 37). And then, as a slave, Joseph was falsely accused of rape and thrown into jail (Genesis 39).

It's never really explained how Joseph learned to trust God - but he did! He could have become very discouraged when he became a slave, but somehow Joseph adjusted to his circumstances and thrived; "The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered" (Genesis 39:2). When tempted with sexual sin by Potiphar's wife, he kept himself pure because he did not want to "sin against God" (Genesis 39:9). But false accusations still sent him into prison.

Even after spending several years in jail, Joseph continued to place his complete trust in God. When asked to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph risked his freedom and rightly gave all the glory and praise to God rather than take credit for himself; "I cannot do it, but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires" (Genesis 41:16).

Joseph was rewarded with much more than his freedom; he was placed in charge of the entire land of Egypt during a great famine. He was also reunited with his family and able to keep them from certain starvation. Several years later, after their father died, Joseph's brothers came and fearfully asked for his forgiveness. Joseph could have taken great revenge, but he continued to demonstrate his understanding of how God cares for His children.

Genesis 50:19-20

"Joseph said to them, 'Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.'"

When Joseph was sold into slavery, he had no idea of God's awesome plan. He would spend many years in jail before receiving even a hint of God's purpose. But God is ALWAYS at work in the lives of those who love Him. Joseph's life must encourage us to draw near to God during times of hardship - to continue trusting and honoring Him in all we do...no matter what our circumstances!

We all go through "dungeon" seasons when life seems to take unplanned and seemingly "unfair" turns. We all, at times, feel abandoned and alone: "Has God forgotten me? Does He no longer care?" We may not understand why things happen the way they do, but if we will continue to love Him with all our heart and consistently trust Him in and through all our trials, we can be certain (and we will one day see) that God is in control and our situation is truly intended for good.

Have A Great Day!

Never Forget 10-11-06

It had been forty years since Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. During their years of wandering in the desert, God demonstrated His faithfulness as well as His holiness. Now, as the people were finally ready to cross the Jordan river into the promised land of Canaan, Moses gave one last encouragement.

Deuteronomy 6:10-12

"When the Lord your God brings you into the land He swore to your fathers - a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant - then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

We have all lived in the land of slavery - a land where we were controlled by sin. We were born as slaves, but Jesus came to set us free: "Though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free" (Romans 6:17-18).

While we were still lost in our sinful condition, Jesus gave His life as a sacrifice (payment) for our sin - but He also broke the chains which kept us slaves to sin. Though we still struggle, we need not be mastered if we have placed our faith in Jesus and daily submit to the leading of His Spirit. His sacrifice provides a way to be "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17). This IS a victorious life!

Yes we have been set free! But we did nothing to earn this freedom. We did not dig a well of righteousness or plant a field of forgiveness. Our "promised land" of freedom is a gift, given by a loving Father to those who believe.

As we continue on our Christian walk, with its many peaks and valleys, twists and turns, we often forget. We become discouraged over trivial matters which are quickly fading away and forget the gift of eternal life we have been given. We wander in the dry desert of ungrateful hearts and ask, "Where is God?" We forget the joy we once had of abiding in His presence and forget His promise to always be near; "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

Through God's precious gift, we have an eternity to worship our Heavenly Father. This alone should give us reason to praise His Name with every breath and live a life holy and pleasing to Him. Whether we are currently in a time of crushing trials or unparalleled peace, we must continually remember from where we were rescued. His gift is a blessing we can hardly comprehend! And as we draw near and give Him all of our heart, His grace continues to bless us even more. Let's worship with a thankful heart, glorify His Name in ALL we do, and be careful to never forget.

Have A Great Day!

Precious In His Sight

10-12-06

In the message "Never Forget" we saw that God's gift of Salvation through faith in Jesus is our greatest blessing - a blessing we must never forget as we tend to become discouraged. In the beginning, "God created man in His own image" (Genesis 1:27). Then, when sin entered the world and man became separated from God, "He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

This is the greatest love story in all history; "While we were still {lost} sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). He died for you and me, and also for all those other lost sinners scattered around us. Jesus Christ, "who being in very nature God" (Philippians 2:6), was born in a dirty stable; "He made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant" (Philippians 2:7). He lived His life with the single purpose of dying so that ALL who believe could be eternally restored to the Father; "the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men" (Romans 5:18).

God loves us VERY much! And He doesn't just love those who love Him in return or faithfully serve Him - He loves ALL. Yes, He hates sin and will one day judge with an eternal damnation all who fail to believe; but His love - His offer of Salvation - extends to all...even to our noisy neighbor and difficult co-worker, to our obnoxious family members and the disrespectful kids who wear "strange" clothes.

God's love is so much a part of who He is, and of who we ought to be, that Jesus commands us by His example: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34). We are to love as Jesus loved; and as if this was too difficult a concept for our finite minds, we are commanded to love in terms we can all understand.

Galatians 5:14

"The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

God wants us to love others primarily because He loves them and desires His love to be expressed through us! He encouraged this love by creating us with a natural capacity for love. When we are hungry we feed ourselves; when we are hurt we care for ourselves; and when we are down, we pray to be lifted up. These are natural expressions of love - the same love God desires us to show to ALL.

Let's evaluate our thoughts, words, and actions in terms of their effect on others. Are we encouraging or adding burdens? Are we building up or tearing down? Are we bringing others closer to Jesus or pushing them further away? Are we as loving to others as we are to ourselves? Let's be His hands, feet, and voice of love in the world around us. Let's begin to see others as through His eyes; and remember, we are ALL precious in His sight.

Have A Great Day!

John 6:48-52 - Lesson #69
10-13-06

There can be no greater discussion than one which involves eternal life. When Jesus was discussing eternal life with the Jews, He approached the topic from multiple directions so they would not only know of the need to believe, but also the importance of belief and why they must believe in Him.

John 6:48-52

"I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.' The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, 'How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?'"

Jesus already said He was the bread of life; "He who comes to Me shall never hunger" (v 35). But the Jews were looking for a prophet like Moses who would lead them out from under Gentile rule. With this view, they would always think of bread from heaven in terms of the manna given to the Israelites in the desert, the manna which the Psalmist referred to as "Angels' food" (Psalm 78:25). So Jesus continued the discussion by reminding the Jews that all the Israelites who ate the manna eventually died. But He was the bread from Heaven who would give true life - eternal life - to anyone who would eat.

By using the analogy of eating Jesus spoke of a very personal action. We can take food to someone day after day, but if they do not eat they will not be nourished. And we understand that when we eat, food is digested and distributed to cells in every portion of our body. Taking bread in our hands does not nourish; neither does reading or talking about bread, singing songs or bowing down to bread; we can study bread, smell bread, recite bread and hold bread "high and lifted up," but until we eat the bread and move it into every part of our innermost being, we remain hungry...and dead.

Notice how Jesus begins to shift the focus of the discussion: He IS the living bread, but He begins to talk about the bread He "shall give." This is future tense and begins to point toward the cross where He "shall give" His flesh for the "life of the world." John began his gospel with "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14), and here Jesus spoke about this same flesh being given for the life of the world, for those who would eat. This is also a beautiful reference to the way Jesus was first announced: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Jesus was the sacrificial Lamb who would give His life to take away the sin of all who would personally receive Him, consume Him, believe in Him.

But there were those, as there are today, who say How can this be? They will quarrel, debate, deny, and run...and all the while remain hungry. There is no discussion more important, or meal more necessary, than the bread offered at the cross. Let's sit at His table today. Let's receive Him in by faith, and eat!

Have A Great Day!

According To Your Will 10-16-06

On the night before He was crucified, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. The thought of what would take place in the next 24 hours caused Jesus to be deeply troubled; "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Mark 14:34).

Being fully God, Jesus knew exactly what was about to take place and exactly why it had to occur. But being fully Man, the foreknowledge of the rejection, physical pain, and spiritual separation from the Father was nearly unbearable.

Mark 14:36

"Abba, Father,' He said, 'everything is possible for You. Take this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what You will.'"

Jesus cried out and asked for the plan to be changed; and yet, His greater desire was for the Father's will to be done. Earlier in His ministry, Jesus taught us this same principle; "This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven'" (Matthew 6:9-10). Even with an absolute understanding of what He must endure, Jesus' sole desire was to glorify the Father by walking the path placed before Him; "I have brought You glory on earth by completing the work You gave Me to do" (John 17:4).

This is the example we ought to follow all through our life; we should present ourself to the Father, fully prepared to serve, and be completely emptied of our own desires. When we have allowed Him to be the only possessor of our heart, He will fill us with His Spirit and accomplish His perfect will through our life. When our life is ordered and directed only by His will, we will receive blessings from above which bring far greater joy than the fulfillment of ANY flesh-directed desire.

This is one of the mysterious "secrets" of the Christian walk. We were created to be in fellowship with God - to glorify Him and enjoy His presence for all eternity. We may spend a lifetime chasing what we believe will bring us a sense of fulfillment, but we will never be truly content until we rest in His arms and submit to His ways.

What cup have we been given to drink; what seemingly unbearable burden have we been given to carry? Have we been asking, even demanding, that the burdens be taken from us, or are we yielding to the Father's will and being determined to glorify Him in all we do? Let's come to His table ready and willing to serve; but let's also come with complete submission to His perfect plan. Only in this can we fulfill the purpose for which we were created. Heavenly Father, we give our life fully into Your hands - let it unfold, not by our plans, goals or desires, but according to Your will.

Have A Great Day!

Finish The Race

10-17-06

Paul was returning to Jerusalem at the end of his third and final missionary journey. By this time in his ministry, Paul had been a Christian for nearly twenty years. Twenty years since Jesus called Paul, "My chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15). Twenty years of faithful service, and now... "In every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me" (Acts 20:23).

Paul was returning home, but his life was not going to be easy. He knew there were many trials ahead, but his life had a purpose far beyond his immediate surroundings.

Acts 20:24

"I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me - the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."

It was several more years before Paul wrote; "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation" (Philippians 4:12); yet here, when facing certain hardship, Paul showed he had already learned the secret. The particular circumstances in Paul's life had become of minor importance. He knew his contentment was not based on current events, but on bringing glory and honor to God. His life had a wonderful purpose even in the face of great adversity and harsh conditions.

We were all created for the same purpose as Paul - we were created to bring glory and honor to God! Our specific tasks may differ and change from time to time, but we each have the same unchanging purpose - everything we do, say, and think should bring glory and honor to our Heavenly Father!

God's race is run in the deepest part of our heart - not in the flurry of activity. Running well is not defined by doing more; rather, we run a "successful" race as we do every little task we are given with the complete and absolute devotion of our heart.

His race is long and often difficult. There are many distractions which seek to slow us down and even pull us from the track, and at times we may even wonder why we're running. But being a participant in God's eternal race is infinitely more rewarding than standing on the sidelines and simply watching! He has called us to run - and to run well!!

We must run the path God places before us with all the strength He provides - and within the sure and calming protection of His grace. Let's run with the motivation of bringing Him glory and honor by loving Him with ALL our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Let's continue to run well, and with a burning desire to finish the race.

Have A Great Day!

Who Taught Us To Walk 10-18-06

In the message "Finish The Race" we were encouraged to "run" toward the finish line; but we were also reminded that God's race takes place within our heart as we learn to trust and love Him more and more. His race is not in what we do, but in who we are and who we are becoming as we do ALL to bring Him glory and honor. One of the biggest stumbling blocks which keeps us from running a "successful" race is the complacency caused by forgetting what God has already done in our life.

Not everyone's circumstances are what they might prefer, but each of us are on a wonderful journey which began when God sent His Spirit to open our eyes to the truth and called us to be with Him for all eternity through faith in His Son. Our beginning ought to be a clear indication of God's miraculous grace and Guiding Hand. And as we look back on our journey we can recognize some of the miracles which brought us to where we are today, but many we fail to acknowledge or understand - and most we have simply forgotten.

God's children have always had a hard time with recognizing and remembering. The northern kingdom of Israel had been in rebellion for almost two hundred years when God called Hosea to be a prophet. The people had created their own form of worship and had long forgotten how much God loved them and how much He had already done to guide and protect.

Hosea 11:3-4

"It was I {God} who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them."

In this passage, Ephraim refers to the nation of Israel. God was reminding the people how He provided for all their needs as He led them out of Egyptian slavery, into the promised land of Canaan. But this passage is very applicable to each of us today. Whether we see His Hand or not, God has been at work guiding us in many different ways.

None of us are at our final destination, but each of us are where we are because God loves us dearly and wants to draw us ever closer to Himself. Let's not create our own form of worship where we give Him the leftovers of our heart. He created us, saved us, and brought us to where we are today - He deserves our ALL.

We must turn our eyes back to God and praise Him for His continuous provision and His loving promise to finish the work He has begun in our life; "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion" (Philippians 1:6). Let's praise Him for His Guiding Hand, and, as we run, let's always remember it was God who taught us to walk.

Have A Great Day!

A Darkened Heart

10-19-06

When God called Jeremiah to be a prophet, the people of Jerusalem had been living in sin for a very long time. It had been 300 years since the kingdom of Israel divided; and despite God's patient warnings, the people continued to rebel and worship other gods.

God finally told Jeremiah He would no longer endure this continued rejection; "I have withdrawn My blessing, My love and My pity from this people" (Jeremiah 16:5). God also said that because of the many years of rebellion, destruction was now certain; "I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness" (Jeremiah 16:9). He then told Jeremiah how to respond to the inevitable cries and complaints.

Jeremiah 16:10-12

"When you tell these people all this and they ask you, 'Why has the Lord decreed such a great disaster against us? What wrong have we done? What sin have we committed against the Lord our God?' then say to them, 'It is because your fathers forsook Me,' declares the Lord, 'and followed other gods and served and worshiped them. They forsook Me and did not keep My law. But you have behaved more wickedly than your fathers.'"

This is a difficult message. God is characterized by extreme grace and patient love...but He has His limits. He will not tolerate continual disobedience. If we claim to be a child of God we must deal with the very real issue of sin. God hates sin because it causes separation with those He loves.

Continual and unrepented sin causes us to lose the ability to recognize our sin. It becomes a cancer which causes our heart to turn cold and dark, unable to even hear the conviction of the Holy Spirit; "For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:21). Sin clouds our vision and causes us to drift further and further from God's path.

The people of Jerusalem could no longer recognize their sin - they stood before God in their wickedness and boldly asked: "What wrong have we done?" Today, we are at risk of becoming equally darkened anytime we fail to address the sin which continues to push into our lives. What activities have we begun to tolerate? What behaviors have we begun to accept? What "teachings" from the modern media have we begun to receive? What sin has begun to fill our heart?

If our eyes were truly opened, would we be surprised to see how far we've compromised and strayed? Let's recommit our lives to holiness, purity, worship, and absolute love for God. Let's allow His light to indwell EVERY area of our life. Let's repent of our sin and refuse to live with a darkened heart.

Have A Great Day!

John 6:53-59 - Lesson #70
10-20-06

Jesus had identified Himself as the bread of life and said; "If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" (6:51). The Jews began to argue about what Jesus could mean by this bold statement. Other religions of the day talked about eating of the gods when they ate a portion of the sacrifice, but "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" (v. 52). Rather than ease their concerns, Jesus pressed His analogy to its full conclusion.

John 6:53-59

"Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven - not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.' These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum."

Talking about drinking blood did nothing to calm the tension. The Jews were strictly forbidden from eating anything with blood; "I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people" (Leviticus 17:10). But when God warned about the blood, He also explained why: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood... it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul" (Leviticus 17:11). God had established a sacrificial system which pointed to Jesus as the final sacrifice and the source of true life.

Jesus didn't say He was the way to a better life, but that without Him there was NO life. We may be able to walk and breath, raise a family and go to work, but if we do not eat His flesh and drink His blood we have no life. Earlier Jesus said; "he who believes in Me has everlasting life" (v. 47). By relating eating and drinking to eternal life, Jesus was explaining "believes in Me." Belief is more than an intellectual understanding; it is a consumption, a filling, a sustaining, a belief that Jesus is ALL - the ONLY source of life.

Jesus further defined true life as abiding in Him. Jesus would speak similar words to His disciples on the night before He was crucified; "He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). The reason we can do nothing apart from abiding in Christ is that we are dead! We may think we are living and accomplishing something great - but without Christ we are dead.

This synagogue discussion has been increasingly forceful and left no room for misunderstanding. They may not yet have understood about His sacrifice on the cross, but His claim of being sent by God as the Greater Moses who would restore true life to the nation was clear. Jesus claimed to be the only source of life - eternal life for all who believe. This life can never be achieved by looking or working for worldly manna, it can only be received as a gift through abiding in Christ. He is our life! Let's eat and drink, enter in, and live.

Have A Great Day!

An Unknown God 10-23-06

When Paul was on his second missionary journey, he came to the city of Athens which was inhabited by people who loved to worship, and talk about their worship. They worshipped every conceivable god of their day and made sure no god was left out.

Acts 17:22-23

"Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: 'Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.'"

The people in Athens worshipped gods like Zeus, Hermes, and Diana. And to ensure they did not overlook any god, they also gave their worship to a god they did not know.

Today, many of us go through our life worshipping such gods as Pleasure, Leisure, Entertainment, Security, Power, and Wealth. Then, usually with much less intensity and commitment, we "worship" the Creator of the Universe. But our worship often becomes something we schedule and not something we live. We take part in religious activity, but have no idea how to make the Almighty God an integral part of our everyday life. We attend church services, but never give a thought to actually loving God or asking Him for guidance and direction. We go through the motions of worship, but our hearts are cold and far from the One True God.

We ALL must examine what we believe, and then live a life consistent with that belief. Many people profess belief in God - even the God of the Bible - but have no idea what this belief means or Who they really believe. They believe and then attempt to worship a God they do not know. If Christ died for the forgiveness of our sins, was resurrected, and now sits at the right hand of the Father making intercession on our behalf - if He will one day return and take us to be with Him for all eternity - then He certainly deserves more than our casual worship and the leftovers of our time.

Our Heavenly Father has been calling us back to an intimate fellowship ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the garden; and His message has remained the same: "Enjoy My creation, but give Me ALL your heart." He must be given sole possession, without any competition. The true Creator of the Universe will never accept just being one of our many "gods."

Let's proclaim the absolute and unchanging truth and encourage one another to "wholeheartedly obey the form of teaching to which you were entrusted" (Romans 6:17). Let's resolve to live a consistent life - a life of sincere love and faithful service - a life which no longer worships an unknown God.

Have A Great Day!

Covenant of Worship

10-24-06

In the message "An Unknown God" we were encouraged to live a life of sincere love and faithful service while we worship a God we truly know and adore. But this type of consistent life, where our daily activities match what we profess to believe, does not come easy or initially feel natural; it requires a firm commitment and a determined perseverance.

King Asa was the great-grandson of Solomon and led the southern kingdom of Judah about 900 years before Christ. He began his reign with ten years of peace because he "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord his God" (2 Chronicles 14:2). Asa took definite action to remove the idols and places of false worship from the country and commanded his people to "seek the Lord and to obey His commands" (2 Chronicles 14:4).

When Judah was invaded by a foreign army, Asa realized he was greatly outnumbered with little hope of victory. As he went into battle, his faith was strengthened while calling on God: "Help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on You, and in Your name we have come against this vast army. O Lord, You are our God; do not let man prevail against You" (2 Chronicles 14:11).

After God granted them victory on the battlefield, the people gathered in Jerusalem to solidify their commitment by making a covenant to follow God.

2 Chronicles 15:12,15

"They entered into a covenant to seek the Lord with all their heart and soul. All Judah rejoiced about the oath because they had sworn it wholeheartedly. They sought God eagerly, and He was found by them."

Every child of God has a deep desire for a more committed life. When we have answered God's call and begun our journey with Him, we will not be at peace until His praise fills every area of our life. But this requires we establish priorities which allow us to actually spend time getting to know Him - His ways and His love.

Our Heavenly Father longs for us to abide in His presence; He rejoices when He is found by those who seek Him in a committed life of worship. He even promises to help those who begin down a committed path; "For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him" (2 Chronicles 16:9).

Our time on this earth is very, very short. Let's not waste another day by aimlessly wandering through life, allowing the concerns of this world to choke off our relationship with God. Let's live with purpose and eagerly commit to seek Him with all our heart and soul - to seek Him "wholeheartedly." Let's make the decision today to enter into an eternal covenant of worship.

Have A Great Day!

A Broken Covenant

10-25-06

In the message "A Covenant of Worship" we were encouraged to make a covenant to love the Lord and worship Him with all our heart. This covenant must be viewed as a pledge or binding agreement which directs all our actions. God gives many examples of covenants in His Word, and no where does He allow for a covenant with half-hearted commitment.

When God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, He made a covenant with them at Mount Sinai. He promised special blessings if they would set themselves apart and worship Him with all their heart. But the people failed to honor their commitment - they worshiped other gods and disregarded His Commands.

After several hundred years of willful disobedience, God sent the prophet Hosea to remind them of the pledge they once made and to reveal their unfaithfulness.

Hosea 6:6-7

"I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings. Like Adam, they have broken the covenant - they were unfaithful to Me."

Hosea was able to deliver this message with great passion because he understood the pain of unfaithfulness. God had called him to marry a woman who, though she made a covenant of marriage, left him to live as an adulteress with another man. He could literally cry to his Israelite Brothers of the hurt they were causing God with their Spiritual adultery; he fully knew how it felt when the one you love turns away to love another.

The covenant we make with our Heavenly Father must not be taken lightly. He loves us dearly and gave His Son as a sacrifice for our sin. And to those who believe He has given His Spirit, "with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30). God is committed to this covenant; and though He forgives us when we fall short, He expects and deserves commitment in return.

When we turn from sin and believe Jesus to be our Lord and Savior, He promises forgiveness - we promise to trust and follow where He leads. He promises a clean heart, we promise our heart will always be His. He promises eternity in His presence, we promise to worship Him with every breath!

Have we truly entered into a covenant relationship with the Living God? And if so, are we being faithful to this covenant? Are we seeking His direction, or are we following our own path and our own desires? We must commit to love, honor, cherish...and follow, until the end of this life brings us fully into His presence. Let's remain faithful and true to our promises. Let's renew our commitment to obedience and worship, and refuse to come to the end of this journey with a broken covenant.

Have A Great Day!

Continue To Seek

10-26-06

As Jesus was speaking to a Pharisee named Nicodemus, He said, "no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3). He then explained being "born again" as a Spiritual birth which occurs when we believe; "whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). EVERYONE who will spend eternity in the Presence of God must be born of the Spirit - it is impossible to be a Child of God without being "born again."

This Spiritual birth is part of the New Covenant through faith in Jesus and was revealed over 500 years before Christ through the prophet Ezekiel; "I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees" (Ezekiel 36:26-27). Paul refers to the Spiritual birth as becoming "a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17), but it is most often referred to simply as being saved; "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5).

The process of Spiritual birth is relatively easy to explain - God reaches down and transforms our heart by the power of His Spirit. However, the exact events which lead to the Spiritual birth (and when the birth actually occurs) remain somewhat a mystery. On one hand, God's Word is very simple and clear; "Whoever believes will be saved." But understanding what it means to really believe can be difficult. We can talk about submission, obedience, sacrifice, love, or the basic faith of a child, but these will always fall short of an adequate definition of belief.

Only God can save; only He is fit to judge; and He alone can look into the innermost part of our heart and determine true belief. All we can do is seek Him with all our heart - and trust He will be found.

Matthew 7:7-8

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."

Our Salvation was initiated by God when Jesus came to earth and died as a perfect sacrifice for our sin. He chose us for an intimate and eternal relationship when His Holy Spirit began to call us near. And, if we will but answer the call and begin to seek His face, He will be found. In an instant, which He alone determines according to His perfect timing, He will transform our heart and adopt us as His Child.

We may not be able to explain or even fully understand true belief, but if there is any call of God on our heart we CAN ask, seek, and knock. God never hides nor runs away; "He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27). He is waiting for us to reach out and call on His Name. Today, let's trust He will be found as we give Him all our heart and continue to seek.

Have A Great Day!

John 6:60-66 - Lesson #71
10-27-06

Jesus continued to press the point that He was the only source of life; "whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life" (John 6:54). Many had followed Jesus and listened to His teaching. After He fed the 5000, many believed He was the promised King sent to deliver Israel from Roman oppression. They listened to His claim to be greater than Moses and were patient with His numerous references to being bread from Heaven; but this talk about needing to eat His flesh and drink His blood had gone too far!

John 6:60-66

"Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, 'This is a hard saying; who can understand it?' When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, 'Does this offend you? What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. And He said, 'Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.' From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more."

The word disciple is used for those who made an initial commitment to follow Jesus and listen to His teaching, but it does not imply a saving faith. Jesus later defined a true disciple; "If you abide in My word, you are My disciple indeed" (John 8:31). A true disciple is one who continues to follow the words of Jesus - even when His words are hard. Jesus spoke of a deep love and desire for Him and His word much the same as the prophet Jeremiah; "Your words were found, and I ate them" (Jeremiah 15:16). The words which were hard to accept were those that told them to let go and trust something outside of their own effort.

Jesus proclaimed a message of eternal life given to those who truly believe. This was in direct opposition to the Jewish system which had turned the Law into a self-righteous method of working their way to God. Jesus said this method - done in the flesh - counts for nothing. We cannot work our way one step closer to eternal life. We can't do it on our own! It is the Spirit given by God who draws us near and gives life.

All we can ever accomplish in our flesh is an existence of flesh which will perish; but when we place our trust in Jesus, the Spirit gives birth to eternal life (John 3:6). And notice how Jesus immediately says His words are spirit and life. His word teaches us all truth leading to life. What an awesome gift!

But there will always be those who think His word is too hard and will "walk with Him no more." If God had not provided a way through faith in Jesus, we NEVER would have worked our way to His side. But God has granted that we should have the words of Christ which are used by the Spirit to draw us near and give us true life. Let's consume His word and determine to walk with Him ALL of our days.

Have A Great Day!

Guard The Good Deposit

10-30-06

In the messages "Covenant of Worship" and "A Broken Covenant" we were encouraged to make a covenant - which we resolve not to break - to worship God with all our heart for the rest of our days. I pray we accept this challenge and make a decision to commit our lives to Him without any reservation.

When God brings us to this point of greater commitment and surrender, we have a wonderful reason to rejoice; but we also have an obligation to protect and nurture what He has planted in our heart. He has called us to draw closer and spend more time in His presence - to join Him in a more intimate and loving relationship - but the enemy is hard at work trying to destroy the change which has begun.

2 Timothy 1:13-14

"What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you - guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us."

Every so often on our Christian walk, there comes a time of special closeness with God. This closeness may come as the result of a new understanding of His Word where we see His character like never before. It may come during a solitary time of prayer or while worshipping with many other believers, through a powerful speaker or inspirational writing. Each time this occurs, God is depositing a little truth into our life which says: I am the way, draw nearer and follow Me more.

We know when God calls us in this manner. We know His truth; we know He is lighting the only true way, and we honestly desire to follow. But then we're back at work with deadlines to meet, people to see, or kids to feed. Soon, the busyness of our everyday "normal" life has consumed our thoughts, and God's deposit has begun to fade - this should not be!

We must establish disciplines which enable us to hear God's message and then help us keep His message at the forefront of our thoughts all through the day. These disciplines will vary for different people. Some may need to wake up earlier to have a time which is quiet; others may need to change their work habits or the condition of their work environment. But we all, regardless of our hectic pace, need to simply talk with God more and worship more at His feet. This must become our highest priority.

We cannot allow His gifts to be destroyed or forgotten. We should never allow the frustrations of the past, the pulls of the present or the desires of the future, to steal the gifts entrusted to us today. Let's make the necessary changes and boldly draw near without hesitation. Let's praise Him for His gifts, and, "with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us," guard the good deposit.

Have A Great Day!

How To Guard His Deposit 10-31-06

In the message "Guard The Good Deposit" we saw the importance of protecting what God places on our heart. He often gives us moments of Divine intimacy as a taste of the life He desires for us - a life of continual passion for God; a life where all our thoughts, words, and deeds become an act of worship.

As these moments fade, we either take definite steps to follow God's call, or we allow our heart to slowly drift away. The nature of this world is to pull us from what God desires and cause us to forget He has even called. So how do we really "guard" what God has given and truly accept His invitation to draw near?

Deuteronomy 11:17-20

"Fix these words of Mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gate."

When God called the children of Israel, He knew they would face the same difficulties we face today: "Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them" (Deuteronomy 11:16). He said the values of the world must never distract from our primary duty to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5).

God told His chosen people that the best way to remain near to Him was to remain near to His Word through disciplined reading, teaching, discussing, and applying. When our lives are completely immersed in His Word, the "enticements" of the world lose their power and no longer pull us from God's path.

But His desire was never for us to stop with outward disciplines. While they are somewhat useful in themselves, the desired end is always for His Word to be written on our heart and for our thoughts to remain with Him all through our day! Only as He is allowed to truly live through us will our lives become a complete sacrifice of worship.

If this is the life we desire, then we must begin with a disciplined approach to God's Word. I suggest we set aside a specific time and place each day which we can completely devote to prayer and the quiet study of ALL His Word. He will soon reward us with a more intimate relationship as His Word becomes written on our heart. As we continue to grow, our thoughts will turn more and more to Christ. What began as great effort will soon become as natural as breathing. The world will still try to pull us away, but it will no longer succeed; for we will be walking in His Presence and will have learned how to guard His deposit.

Have A Great Day!