

Week 1

Investing

“ Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. ”

— *Matthew 6:20*

The Power of Believing

Written by:

Troy Asher

1 TIMOTHY 6:11-16

Week 1

Day

1

It has always puzzled me that there is not more written in the Bible about being a good father or mother to our children. There are very good examples of how NOT to be a good parent. We see examples of neglect, favoritism, lack of discipline and lack of care.

The best example of good parenting in the Bible models how to invest in a relationship. The relationship I'm referring to is the relationship between Paul and Timothy. Although Paul and Timothy are not related through blood, Paul refers to Timothy as his "son in the faith." This is a relationship that is one of love, trust and investment.

I've always enjoyed the books of 1st and 2nd Timothy and I fell even more in love with these two powerful books when I realized the intimacy of the relationship between Paul and Timothy. Paul wrote 13 letters. Nine of them were to groups of believers and four of them were personal. The most personal and heartfelt were his letters to Timothy and his letter to Titus. Paul invested in these two young men, and he encouraged them to lead their respective churches well.

In today's reading, Paul encourages his young protege to fight the good fight and to pursue godliness, righteousness, faith, love and steadfastness. I can only imagine the amount of encouragement these words must have brought young Timothy.

However, when I read Paul's words to Timothy something else sticks out to me. Paul points out and emphasizes Timothy's *identity*. Notice in verse 11 Paul refers to Timothy as a "Man of God!" He lets Timothy know *who* he is in Christ, and he also gives him a challenge.

What do you see when you look in the mirror? What words do you use to describe yourself? If you are like most people I know, you don't see yourself as a man or woman of God. Many of us didn't have a Paul in our lives to tell us who we are and what God says and thinks about us. Let me say it to you loud and clear. You are a prince or a princess! You are royalty! Not because I say so, but because the King of Kings says so!

Do you have people in your life that speak truth like this into your spirit and soul? Do you speak these words to others? Are you invested in and are you investing in others? I refer to this as "one anothering." And, the Bible is very clear that we are to be investing in one another.

In the book of Philippians, Paul knows that the people of Philippi need encouragement, as they are being badly persecuted for their faith in Jesus. Who does Paul tell the Philippians that he is going to send to encourage them? His "son in the faith," Timothy. Paul tells them that he has no one like Timothy. Believing in people is powerful!

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Who are you investing in? Who is investing in you?
2. If you have someone in your life that you are investing in, take time this week and let them know some of the great qualities that you see in them.
3. How do you see yourself? If it is less than what I described above, ask God to shape your thinking. Meet with an elder or a spiritual leader and have them help you to see yourself the way that God sees you. (See Colossians 1:21-23)

Just Believe

Written by:

Lina Asher

ACTS 9:26-27

Week 1

Day

2

Barnabas has always been an intriguing figure to me. To be nicknamed “Son of Encouragement” is quite the compliment! I can just picture him going around teaching and preaching, and smiling and complimenting everyone he came in contact with. This reminds me of Pastor Troy, who is a joyful and wonderful encourager!

In the scripture above, we see a brave act of faith on Barnabas’ part. Saul wanted to join with the other “believers” so that he too could preach and teach with them about Christ. But who could trust him? His past preceded him. He arrested and persecuted the believers in Christ. And, some of these same believers didn’t believe in his supposed “conversion.”

But, Barnabas stood up and boldly told the apostles that he witnessed this change and that he believed in Saul.

This one vote of confidence caused others to consider the possibility that change had taken place. Barnabas believed in Saul, so Saul was accepted. And with that acceptance, Saul, whose name was later changed to Paul, went on to impact thousands of lives for Christ!

Believing in someone is such a powerful thing! I still remember those who believed in me, who walked beside me, encouraging and loving me. I couldn’t be where I’m at today without them. Their investment in me showed me that I am valued and that I am capable of greater things.

One person that stands out when I think about this is my 11th grade English teacher, Mrs. Owens. I didn’t even think she liked

me, let alone believe in me, since she would glare at me often. You see, I would joke around a lot and not put in much effort and I was failing the class. I realize today it was my insecurities and lack of belief in myself that caused those behaviors. But guess who saw right through me? Yes, Mrs. Owens did.

One day she pulled me aside, and I thought I was going to really hear some harsh words. Instead she boldly and lovingly said, “Lina, you’re not putting in the effort that I know you are capable of. I believe in you, now believe in yourself!”

Just those few words of support and encouragement helped me turn things around. By the end of the year I had an A in Mrs. Owens English class! I did find out later, after I had become a Christian, that Mrs. Owens too was a Christian. In my eyes she was my Barnabas!

This is just one example of what triggered a desire and passion in me to mentor, encourage and invest in others. It’s one of the most powerful gifts you can give to someone. Letting them know that they are capable and that you believe in them!

Going back to our story...Paul also went on to mentor a young man named Timothy and many others. He believed in them and encouraged them to stay strong in the faith. Lives continued to be impacted because of these investments.

The way we believe in others can help spur them on to do bigger and greater things in life and for the Lord.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. How can you be a Barnabas or Mrs. Owens today? Think of someone you can encourage today and give them a call or send them a text.
2. What keeps you from investing in others? Busyness? Laziness? Insecurities?
3. Pray daily that God would open your eyes to see those that need encouragement.

Where's Your Treasure?

Written by:

Janet Caldon

MATTHEW 6:20-21

“It’s about time I got a perk around here.”

Week 1

Day

3

My colleague’s response startled me. Earlier that morning, the Lord had impressed upon me to speak words of life to a specific grade level team at my school. I approached them individually, wanting to share with each of them privately and personally.

I don’t remember what I said to her, but I haven’t forgotten her response. Afterward, I wondered: How many people feel like she does? Under appreciated? Overworked? Unnoticed?

The verses today are typically applied to finances, but the application extends beyond that subject.

Matthew’s words provide a reminder and challenge. They remind us that we are blessed to invest. They challenge us to treasure the eternal.

People are our most valuable treasures. Eternal treasures. Like my teacher, we can take people for granted. We can get so caught up in who we are and what we do that we forget to recognize them for who they are and what they do.

Who are your treasures? Your spouse? Children? Grandchildren? Do your treasures include your colleagues? Your neighbor across the street? The barista that serves you? The cashier at your grocery store? The homeless woman you

see on the street corner each day on your drive to and from your home?

Everyone deserves life spoken into them. Everyone needs someone to invest in them. Will you do it? Intentionally invest?

I want my heart to be so shaped by God that I see people through His lens. That I do for them what they need, whether it's giving of my time, talent, treasures, and yes, my words.

Receiving God's direction that morning cost me the one thing I both value and sometimes waste: time. It is far too easy for me to rush rather than rest. Lean on my own power rather than listen. Ignore rather than invest. What would have happened had I not listened to the Lord and obeyed His voice? What happens when you do?

Speaking to my colleague cost me nothing, yet it meant everything to her in that moment. And, it taught me a lesson I needed to learn. Words of kindness and affirmation meet needs we may not know the listener has, but God does.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What have you stored up recently, as far as eternal investments are concerned?
2. Have you taken a moment to speak life to someone who is experiencing death? Hope to a family member who seems hopeless? Truth to someone walking in lies?
3. Take a moment to pray. Ask God to reveal to you someone who needs to be invested in and be intentional about doing it.

Investing...

It's Not About You!

Written by:
Vashti Makupson

ROMANS 15:5-7

Week 1

Day

4

Yup! You read that right. The title...investing, is not about you! There was a season in my life where I selfishly thought about how I would benefit from investing. I would imagine things like:

- How good I would feel.
- The way I would be encouraged.
- What great things would be said about me.

You notice how all of those things are more about me. I mean, yeah, I enjoyed time encouraging people, but my motives and thought life reflected so much self-centeredness, it makes me sick just thinking about it.

The reality is, investing in others has very little to do with me or what I will receive in return and everything to do with glorifying God by being united. It is about being a servant to those in our spheres of influence with the goal of both individuals becoming more like Christ. That takes endurance. Becoming more like Christ is a step by step, moment by moment process that embraces the unique design of the person you are investing in.

One thing I have settled on when it comes to investing is that God is the only one who can change a heart. The best investment that can be made is accepting how God has crafted His children and trusting that He speaks to them. This is what

we are called to do. We are not called to infuse people with what we think needs to be changed. Rather, we are to come alongside and “consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” Hebrews 10:24

As we consider how we can spur one another on, here are three practical ways to invest: Celebrate them. Encourage them. Pray with and for them

Celebrate the way God created them by believing in them. Point out their strengths, their talents, and their gifts. Encourage their dreams and hopes. Spur them on with words that breathe life. Pray with them. Life gets messy. There is nothing more powerful than knowing that you are not alone. Sometimes, the most powerful thing you have to offer is prayer.

However, the most powerful investment is the investment of giving and receiving relationship. Let’s seek to empower others to flourish in a way that brings God glory!

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Take a moment to ponder those people you are to invest in. Ask the Lord to reveal how you can spur them on toward love and good deeds.
2. What are some things you can do to practically invest in someone using these three points: Celebrate? Encourage? Pray?
3. How can you intentionally glorify God in your relationships? Is there an attitude that needs to change, a mindset that needs to shift? If so, share it with someone who can hold you accountable.

Giving People A Chance

Written by:

Chris McKinney

PROVERBS 27:17

Week 1
Day
5

There's a gift much more powerful than money or esteem. Your time. When we give our time to others to equip and encourage them, we invest in their lives and walk with God.

In my life, I've had people "take a chance" and reach out to invest in me. At times it was a listening ear over coffee, at times accountability when I needed it most. Now, I realize that I have to make these connections to also grow in my faith. Sometimes, I'm the one investing. Sometimes, I speak into another person's life.

I'd like to turn our attention to the story of two men who needed something from Jesus. In Matthew 20:28-34, we find Jesus ministering to people and then going on to another town where he could teach others. Along the way, there were two blind men that sat along the road. They heard people talk of Jesus' coming and the excitement of seeing and hearing him. Imagine hearing that "the Healer" is walking by and your biggest desire in life is for sight.

These men who would not be able to stand in front of or beside Jesus, called out to Him. When told to be quiet, they yelled louder. Then, Jesus did something the people didn't expect. Matthew 20:32 says, "Jesus stopped."

Despite being on his way from Jericho to another place, Jesus paid attention to those in need around him. Jesus did not

let the busyness of the day stop Him. He allowed a temporary interruption of His schedule to make an eternal investment.

When someone new comes through the door of the church, do we shy away? Are we too busy to greet someone new? Or, do we walk right up to them and greet them with open arms? When we see someone struggling, do we offer to sit and listen? Even if there's nothing you can do or say?

We need these connections to grow in faith and in our relationships. You don't have to know everything and you don't have to be the best at everything. God calls us to walk with each other in love. This investment of time is a sign of a growing believer that loves God by loving others.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What does investing in others mean to you?
2. How do you feel when someone gives you a chance?
3. Who will you invest in this week?

“ No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it’s painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way. ”

— *Hebrews 12:11*

Week 2

Change and Growth

Pruning

Written by:

Troy Asher

HEBREWS 12:5-11

Week 2

Day

6

There are times when I am in the checkout line or out in public and I see children disrespecting their parents, throwing tantrums and flat out misbehaving. They are unruly and they just won't listen to a thing that their parents are trying to tell them.

They are often upset because they are told no or they are not getting their way. They want something that they are not allowed to have or told that they have to go a certain way and they don't like it one bit.

Now, I am not that parent who says, "My children NEVER acted that way!" I will tell you, however, that I am the parent who will say, "My children never acted that way without DISCIPLINE and CONSEQUENCES!"

As parents, it is our responsibility to discipline our children and help them to understand that the way they are behaving is unacceptable, so they can grow into being responsible productive members of society.

In today's reading, the author of Hebrews uses some words that are not always associated with discipline, he uses the word, "encouraging" and the phrase, "good for us." We don't often see discipline this way, do we?

We see it as harsh, hurtful, and uncomfortable. Often times, instead of learning what God is trying to teach us in these moments, we complain, we resist, we blame or we run. We don't accept that God's discipline is good and it's encouraging. It's how we grow and how we become the children of God that he knows we can be. It is spiritual pruning! Yes, discipline is painful, but God disciplines us because He loves us!

The author finishes with this: "But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way." WOW! What a wonderful promise! A "peaceful harvest!" How great of a promise is that? When is the last time you were able to look in the mirror and know that you are living a life that is peaceful and righteous? It's a wonderful feeling knowing that you are living the way God desires you to and that you are growing and changing into the person that He has designed you to be.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Think about a way that God has disciplined you in the past. What did you learn from it? How did you grow?
2. How do you respond to God's discipline? How well do you recognize it?
3. If you're going through something today, ask God what it is that He wants you to learn.
4. Thank God for His discipline in your life.

Meditation on Psalm 46

Written by:

Christina Sullivan

PSALM 46:4

Week 2

Day

7

In Psalm 46 I get an incredible picture in my mind's eye. I picture a city, a large fortress set on the edge of a cliff. It's formidable stone walls have withstood the wars and weather of hundreds of years. All around this fortress, there is calamity, war, earthquakes and raging storms. I imagine the people inside this fortress shaking in fear, worrying for their safety. They are surrounded on all sides by either raging waters, or earthquakes or violent enemies with spears ready to fight and kill. It would be easy to despair, wouldn't it? God promises he will fight for us, he will end the wars and calm the seas and we can trust him to do so. As cool as this was, I was drawn again to the stream that made its way through the city. (see verse 4)

It is almost strange because it's such a shift of imagery. Streams and rivers don't seem to fit with the rest of the psalm. War and earthquakes are violent. Streams are gentle and unassuming. Why would this stream make the city of God glad?

I believe at times, seeing the stream is the key to change. The world will always change and rage. People will always cause us trouble, even the earth itself can cause destruction with natural disaster. It's so easy to focus on what's going on outside the walls, isn't it? I believe it is God's reminder that no matter what is going on in our lives, we can choose to focus on the mess around us or the Lord, the quiet stream.

God will fight our battles, He will rescue us. We needn't peer anxiously over the castle walls to see if God will show up. He will. We need to quiet our hearts, and see the stream of God, the quiet river that always flows through every situation, every trouble, and every challenge.

How does this help us change? Because it shifts our focus from the external to the internal, from worry to humility, and from trying to control to surrendering to God. It is in those places that God can and will speak to our listening hearts. He may tell you to be more gentle, to trust Him with a tumultuous marriage, to extend greater patience, or to speak less and listen more. It's a beautiful place to be, to hear from the One who loves you.

In those gentle moments, God fills my heart with His wisdom. I expectantly believe this for every single person reading this, too. So, if you are at all like me, and often get caught up in the anxieties of the unknown; let's together rest and trust in the place we are, knowing full well God will fight for us, and give us the knowledge and wisdom to change as we seek His quiet stream.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Read Psalm 46. What promise of God sticks out to you most?
2. How do you react to the storms and wars in your life?
3. If you were to set aside quiet time to rest in God's peace during those storms and wars, what do you think would happen?

What are You Producing?

Written by:

Lina Asher

LUKE 6:43-45

Week 2

Day

8

I wasted so many years, not feeling good enough or smart enough. So much so, that I had finally had enough!

I knew I was not listening to the right voices in my life. I struggled receiving the good things spoken about me and accepted every negative thing spewed my direction.

The day I decided I'd had enough was the day I told the Lord I was willing to do whatever it takes to hear His voice over all others. That's when I decided I would dedicate one day a week to go on a "date" with Him. Because, any relationship we want to grow in requires investment, right? So, just as I date my spouse, I began dating God.

And that's when true change began! That's when God began to speak in such loving and creative ways. Mostly, through nature.

One particular date, He and I were at the river and He directed me to a curious-looking vine. It wasn't a fruit-bearing vine, but a bramble.

God spoke to my heart about the bramble: the bramble can show lush growth, but there is no fruit. It attaches itself with its thorns around the base of a tree. God had previously spoken to me about trees and how they symbolically represent His

people, just as the scripture above demonstrates. The bramble provides no service or provision for the tree. Instead, it is more likely to irritate, injure or damage the tree. It was a reminder of who I had been allowing to speak into my life. Were they fruit-bearing, or were they fruitless? Meaning, do they encourage, love and support me? Or, do they injure and damage my growth process?

God also took this opportunity to gently and lovingly encourage me to also be that fruit-bearer and not the bramble in the lives of those I invest in. Just like a good father does.

I want to produce good fruit and encourage others to do the same.

Of course, there will be pruning in this process, but we all need it, and it's for our benefit, for godly growth and change.

Don't be a bramble!!!

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Reflect over this last week. Have you been bearing fruit? Or have you been a bramble?
2. How can you be fruit-bearing today? Ask God for opportunities to bear fruit.
3. Pray and ask God to prune away the areas that aren't producing good fruit and look forward to positive change!

Grow Up

Written by:

Danny Makupson

2 PETER 1:3-5

Week 2

Day

9

Have you ever been told “Grow up?” I know I have. This statement typically came to me when I displayed behaviors that did not reflect my perceived external development, meaning “Act your age, not your shoe size!” That’s how I received it.

Beloved, intrinsically I knew I needed to grow up, but did not know what that meant or how to do it. I invite you to absorb the truth of God from this text which Peter penned under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Here are some steps in creating your own treatment plan to begin the growing up journey.....

Step One: Understand and know you have everything you need.

Verse 3 proclaims “God has given us everything we need for living a godly life.” Now, it is up to you and me to receive it. For example, when Amazon delivers a package to my door and tracking shows it was delivered I still have not received it until I have the product in my hand. Likewise, God has made Jesus available to us, delivered Him to us, but we have to receive Him. (John 3:12) You see beloved, we need to receive His promises.

Step Two: Examine how you ignored some of God’s promises. Confess and begin believing.

Beloved, knowing God's promises will keep us from stinking thinking. Every time my wife and I would fight, I would respond very immaturely and forget this promise of God, "Your wife will be like a fruitful grapevine." (Psalms 128:3a) Forgetting His promises resulted in years of unnecessary challenges.

Step Three: Repeat steps one and two, and that is planning your work and working your plan.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What pattern of immaturity do you recognize in your life?
2. What will you do about it today, right now?
3. What does it look like to be mature? How do you see yourself when you respond in a godly way versus a way that revealed your shoe size?
4. Tell your spouse, friend, or family member which promise of God you are believing for.

Change Like a Seed

Written by:

Vashti Makupson

ISAIAH 61:11

Week 2

Day

10

One thing is certain in life, nothing will stay the same. Change will find us, whether we ask for it or not. It can be voluntary change or it can invade our regularly scheduled lives. It can be the desire to start a new habit or an unexpected challenge like being laid off. How we respond to those moments when change invades our life determines whether we sprout through the soil or remain stuck.

Here's the thing about seeds, first they must die in the ground then push through the opposition of the dirt in order to be transformed into the plant God intended. If we want to flourish through our seasons of change, we will have to die to self and push through the dirt of old habits in order to grow.

This will require that we step out of our comfort zones to do something new and it can be painful. No one ever said dying to self will be easy, but it is in surrender that we yield ourselves to the process. We must choose to do the hard work of surrender in order to cultivate the fruit that God is wanting to produce.

Whatever season of change you find yourself in there are ways to surrender to the process. First, receive the nourishment that comes from His living water. Start with prayer. Intentionally seek His Presence through worship.

Know that whatever the circumstance is, you are not alone. He is leading you through it.

Second, destroy the weeds by taking thoughts captive. The enemy does not want to see you flourish. He will do anything he can to ensure you do not break through the dirt by flooding your mind with lies. Destroy these lies by taking your thoughts captive and replacing them with the truth.

This takes us to our third point, allow the truth of His light to shine through by being in the Word. Get into the Bible. Identify the lies and find Scripture to actively combat them.

Write it. Speak it. Pray it. Share it.

Change is not easy. It will require intentionality, diligence, and a heart of surrender that yields to the process but know that the end result will be worth the momentary discomfort.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What are some things you need to remain aware of as you experience change? Ask Jesus to reveal them to you and listen to His voice.
2. What are some lies that you are believing? Write them down and find truth to combat them.
3. Find someone to support you on the journey. Share the areas you want to grow in and take one step at a time.

“ Listen to my voice in the morning, Lord.

Each morning I bring my requests to you and wait expectantly.

— *Psalm 5:3*

”

Week 3

Prayer

The Problem with Prayer

Written by:

Troy Asher

MATTHEW 6:5-7

Week 3

Day

11

When I was younger I heard a preacher talk about prayer and he said how dishonoring and disrespectful it was for us to fall asleep while praying to God. He said, “We don’t have a correct understanding of who God is if we fall asleep during prayer.” That really convicted me. Pretty much all of my life I have fallen asleep while praying to God.

Several years later, I was thinking about God as a Father and I got emotional. I thought about how great it is to have a Father in my life that I can lean on and rely on. A Father who loves me unconditionally, then for some reason it hit me.

How sweet it is, for me as a father, when my children fall asleep on my chest! It is so awesome to know they feel so peaceful in my arms that they can fall asleep so easily. I thought to myself, if God is my Father and He loves me like I love my children why would He feel dishonored if I fell asleep each night talking to him, feeling His peace surrounding me.

Needless to say, I have gone back to going to sleep each night praying to God. If we are not careful we can believe things about God that just aren’t true, including how to pray.

The Bible has much to say about prayer. As I have studied God’s Word in more detail over the years, I realize that God takes prayer pretty serious. I also see in His word that He gives us much grace and mercy in every area of our lives, even in our prayers.

I believe there is a balance when it comes to prayer. On one hand, Jesus tells us to come to him as children, as a child who

speaks to his or her father. Then, there are passages like the one we read today where Jesus chastises the religious leaders of His day for their haughty, self-gratifying prayers.

In 2 Chronicles chapter 7, the Bible talks about God hearing from heaven and answering our prayers. Then, in Isaiah chapter 1, it talks about God not hearing our prayers and being disgusted by our worship. So, which is it? How do we know that God hears our prayers and is pleased by what we are saying?

The answer lies in not what we say but the heart, the attitude, and conviction in which we say it.

For example, if you are angry and hold unforgiveness toward your neighbor the Bible tells us to go and make it right with that individual before we come to God. The Bible tells us that if we are mistreating our spouses and not showing them honor then our prayers will be hindered. The Bible tells us if we have some secret sin in our lives that we need to repent and turn from that sin before we pray. Then, in today's reading Jesus tells us if we babble on or make grand speeches with our prayers, our prayers are only going to be impressive to the people who hear them, but not to God.

So, what kind of prayers does God hear and respond to? Prayers of humility. Prayers for others. Prayers of repentance. Prayers of worship; adoration of and for Him. And most of all, prayers that line up with His agenda, not ours. These are the kind of prayers that are pleasing to God.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What does your prayer life look like?
2. How have you seen God answer prayers in your past?
3. What do you think when you read passages of scripture like Isaiah 1?
4. Read Psalm 141:2. Make that your prayer today. That your prayers would be like incense to our God!

Your Will Be Done

Written by:

Lina Asher

MATTHEW 26:39,42,44

Week 3

Day

12

When we talk about prayer and the “how to’s” of prayer, most people will direct you to Matthew 6:9-13 (The Lord’s Prayer). Though Matthew 6 is a great reference from Jesus himself on how to pray, I want us to also consider the above scripture.

Jesus knew his death was drawing near and He was grieved to the point of sweating blood! Can you imagine? Not once, not twice, but three times He asked God to take this from Him. But, He always ended His prayer with, “Your will be done.”

I don’t foresee any of us having to go to the cross like Christ did, but we will go through times of testing, pain, loss, devastation, etc. Through those times, do you believe your faith is strong enough to withstand it and you can pray, “Your will be done?” Will you even be able to pray when times become overwhelming and hopeless in your eyes?

This is a question I’ve asked myself. What if I lost my job, my home, my possessions? Would I still seek Him for provision? What if a loved one was unexpectedly taken from me? Would I seek His arms for comfort? What if my memory was slipping away slowly, would I seek Him for wisdom and clarity? These are hard questions! And until we truly face these things, we cannot say how we will respond. I pray that I will respond by seeking His face.

Jesus didn't want to go to the cross. He didn't want to suffer and be separated from God as He took all the sin of the world upon Himself. But, He sacrificed because of LOVE. Obedience to His Father, and love for us!

Let us never forget that Jesus knew pain and struggle. He understands what we go through. But, He knew where to go in weakness and pain. Let us be like Jesus and go before the Father, on our knees, face to the ground, praying, yet always remembering, no matter what we are going through, "Your will be done!"

POINTS TO PONDER

1. How do you typically respond when you have struggles with fear, sadness, loss, etc?
2. When you pray this week, remember to trust God with everything and pray, "Your will be done."
3. Thank Jesus for the cross and His example of sacrifice for us.

While You Were Sleeping

Written by:

Janet Caldon

PSALM 5:3

Week 3

Day

13

There's just something about the morning. It arrives before we're ready. I mean every day, like clockwork! The sun rises. Roosters crow. Alarms sound. The promise of a new day dawns and with it something else, if you're willing. Moments to talk

with God.

Imagine this: God looks down from heaven's throne and sees the sun as it is just about to peek over the horizon. The beat of his heart increases as He sees you stirring under the covers. "It's almost time," He tells the angels to His left and right. "My child is about to wake up! I can hardly wait to talk with them!"

Your alarm sounds; you hit the snooze button. God leans earthward, anxious for you to arise. The alarm sounds again; you groan, silence the alarm and sluggishly rise from your slumber. You shuffle toward the bathroom and then toward the kitchen. "Coffee!" you think to yourself, "I just need some coffee!"

Mug in hand, you settle into your chair, catching a glance of your phone, wondering what happened while you were sleeping. Facebook grabs your attention. You close that app, only to click on Instagram. Pictures of your friend and family's latest happenings entertain you.

God looks down again, saddened, wishing that He could have the first things of your morning. First attention. First words. First worship. First, well, you know what I mean.

Have you ever noticed just how many times Scripture speaks of meeting with God in the morning? The psalms are filled with them: Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love – satisfy us in the morning with your loyal love – in the morning, hear my voice – in the morning I lay my needs in front of you – I rise before dawn and cry for help – I will awaken with the dawn; I will praise you, Lord.

Abraham went early and stood before the Lord. Isaiah asked God to be his strength in the morning. Jesus rose early to meet with His Father. After looking at this list, I am left without sufficient reason to not do the same.

The promise of this verse is the blessing that comes from two things: our relationship with God and our obedience to God. Did you catch it? In the morning, You hear my voice. And because He hears our voice, we have the privilege of laying our requests at His feet with the confidence that He hears and will answer.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What is your morning routine? Does God get your first? Your best?
2. What do you need to do differently to make Him a priority?
3. Take time now to lay your needs before the Lord – He hears your voice!

Praying in God's Will

Written by:

Ray Fraley

LUKE 22:42

Week 3

Day

14

We have several examples of Jesus praying to His Father in the New Testament. The Luke verse above is one of many examples. John chapter 17 gives us another example of Jesus praying to his Father. Please, take 5 minutes to carefully read through this chapter. When we are praying where could we find a better example of communication with God?

Notice that in the prayer in John 17, Jesus is praying in God's will, that is, all that Jesus says to His Father in this prayer are things that He knows that God already knows or would agree with.

On the other hand, in the prayer found in Luke, Jesus asks for something that God does not agree with. Jesus is asking God to relieve Him of a pending, painful sacrifice. Jesus would like a result that He is not sure that God would agree with.

So, what does He say? "If you are willing," and "not my will, but yours be done."

In both of these prayer examples, Jesus wants God's will.

This from God on earth as man! This from a member of the trinity! This from the Jesus who does miracles! Yet, He humbly wants not His will, but the Fathers.

Jesus was not shy about making His own desire known to His Father, nor should we be.

Do we want God's will in all our prayers? When we pray for a certain job or promotion, is that God's will? Do we know for sure? Let's try mirroring the greatest example of all, Jesus, and pray not our will, but God's will.

During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln said, "Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right."

If we trust that God wants the best for you and me, and for those we love, then we can trust that our prayers, "in His will," are pleasing to Him.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Thinking back, have you considered God's will in your prayers?
2. Can you remember how different answers came from God through praying His will and not your own?
3. Do you feel that today's word is valid for you, and if so, how will it affect your prayer life?
4. Be aware of your trust *in His will*. Be aware of how willing you are to give up *your* quest for *His*.

God, Can You Hear Me Now?

Written by:
Chris McKinney

PSALM 40:1

Week 3

Day

15

There are times when I am frustrated with technology. For example, when an App fails to work the way it should. You might know the feeling. I tap, click and muddle my way through the App only to delete it for another. I often think to myself, “monkeys could program this app better!” There’s anxiety and the longing for a simpler time. As a child, technology was so exciting and thrilling to use. Now I spend roughly 10+ hours a day using technology. It’s not as exciting as it once was. I have to admit that I envy those who can turn off their smart phones and walk away. You know who you are.

This anxiety causes us to reach out for quick fixes and companies that cater to our every need. Have you ever tried to order something online and found out that you’d have to wait longer to get the item. Two day shipping should be TWO DAYS!

Now stop for a minute and think about your prayer life.

Do you talk to God like you’re ordering dinner on your phone? You pick from the options available, press send and move on? It’s one thing to pray for little things, but it’s another thing when life gets you by the tail.

We’ve all been there. You find yourself making the same paycheck week after week and the bills keep piling up. You’ve had another fight with your spouse and that’s fight number 3.....today. Your kids are on your very last nerve and that so-called friend you’ve been reaching out to won’t call you back.

In these moments, it feels like God isn't listening. Sometimes, I want to pick up that precious smart phone and throw it across the room.

David was in the same boat. He wanted an answer to his prayers, for persecution to end. He prayed, "My eyes are swollen with weeping, waiting for my God to help me." (Psalm 69:3) And it goes on. David sounds like he was having a bad day, or a bad week, or a bad year.

Newsflash - God doesn't answer our prayers when we think He should! Sometimes it's a matter of patience. Sometimes it's a matter of obedience. Take a look at Proverbs 1:28-31 for a list of reasons God may not answer your prayers. It pays to be obedient.

Does God hear you when you pray? Yes, He does! He knows and hears everything and wants you to reach out to him. Why? Because he loves you, His precious son or daughter. Our verse for today is David's song of thanks to God. He prayed and waited for God's answer.

So, what are you waiting for? Take a moment today to ask God for help. Talk to him about your day, your frustrations and your hurts. Ask for His help. He's always there waiting for you to share your life with Him.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Why do you think God waited to answer David?
2. When have you felt the way David describes in Psalm 69:1-13?
3. How can we be willing to continue to wait, trusting God to answer us—even when we feel like David did?

“ Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray. ”

— *Mark 1:35*

Week 4

Rest and Solitude

Time Management

Meditation...

It's Not What You Think

Written by:
Troy Asher

PSALM 119:25-28

Week 4

Day

16

When we think of the word meditation, it often takes us to Eastern religions. We picture a person sitting on a rug with their legs crossed, eyes closed, mumbling a phrase over and over again. We don't often associate meditation with Christianity, but the Bible actually has a lot to say about it. There are two Hebrew words used to convey the idea of meditation and together they are used 58 times.

In Eastern religions, meditation is the attempt to empty the mind. Christian meditation is an attempt to fill the mind with the teachings of Christ and the prophets of God. The majority of the time the word meditation is used in the Bible, it refers to meditating on God's Word, mainly it's decrees and it's laws. The proof of successful meditation is found in the fruit of our lives.

In other words, the idea is to fill our minds with God's Word so that we will not be so prone to sin. Psalm 119:11 says, "I have hidden your Word in my heart, so that I will not sin against you."

There are times in my life when I will just stop and read a passage of scripture over and over again. Sometimes weeks will go by where I stay camped on the same passage of scripture.

I meditate on the same passage of Scripture for a few reasons. It may be because it is something that is convicting

me and God, through the Holy Spirit, is shaping me and molding me to be more like Him. It may be a word of encouragement that I need at that moment in time. Or, it could be something that I don't really understand and I want more clarity and revelation on the passage that I am meditating on. Whatever the reason, I love to meditate on God's Word and allow it to restore me and refresh me.

In the passage that we read today, the psalmist says that he will meditate on God's "good deeds." If I am honest, this is an area that I do not spend much time meditating on. As I write this, I wonder how much more joy and peace I would have in my life if I spent my time meditating on the good deeds of God? Not just the obvious blessings of finances, family, possessions and friends, but the good deeds of God that are eternal. The eternal salvation that He promises me, the promise of glory that He promises me and the promise of paradise that He promises me.

We serve such a great God! He is worthy of our praise, our honor and our meditation.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word meditation?
2. What do you think about now that you have read this daily reading?
3. What is something that is going on in your life that you can meditate on today? Do you need encouragement? Instruction? Revelation? Take some time out today to sit quietly and meditate on God's Word.

Find Your Wilderness

Written by:

Janet Caldon

LUKE 5:16

Week 4
Day
17

Why did Jesus have to pray? After all, He was God in human flesh, the Incarnate One. He made everything. He knows everything. There is nowhere that He is not. It kind of makes me wonder.

Moments spent wondering with God reveal the ways of God.

Jesus wanted to know His Father's ways and will as He experienced the wear-and-tear of daily ministry. Because of this (and I imagine several other reasons) He often withdrew to pray. He needed time with His Father to hear His Father. He needed undivided attention to experience unparalleled intimacy.

So do we.

Experiencing intimacy with God requires intentionality and time. And much like Jesus, it won't happen unless we choose to withdraw from our rigorous routine. This verse provides step-by-step insight into developing intimacy with God through prayer.

Jesus' standard to withdraw was "often." I love this!!! It doesn't say at 5:30 each morning when I rise, or 9:00 most nights when I get ready for bed. "Often" liberates me to release my schedule, my self-imposed checklist and frees me to do my best. Some days my best includes moments in the morning

in my recliner with my cup of coffee. Other bests include my commute to work or drives to the mountain to sit near a river. He knows me. He knows my heart wants to meet with Him often, challenges me graciously and loves me unconditionally.

Jesus' location was the wilderness. A wilderness is a place of isolation. I believe there is a message in this meaning. Many of us are not inclined to isolation, or the quiet that accompanies it. But when we take time with Him, detaching ourselves from our demands, we are then free to hear Him more clearly.

A wilderness is also a place of barrenness. When we strip ourselves of everything but God, we see ourselves as God sees us. We are then able to take those barren places before Him, surrender them and ask Him to shape us into His image so He can be glorified in us. This is what Jesus did. This is what we are to do.

And finally, Jesus' purpose was talking to His Papa and so should we. Prayer. Aligning our spirit with His. Speaking our words to His heart. Listening to His words for our soul. This is the most beautiful exchange. One He wants with you. Right now. Will you take the time?

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Where's your wilderness? Do you withdraw from the pressures of everyday life to meet with Him? Take some time now to meet with Him.
2. How do you carve out time in your schedule to hear His voice? What is something you can begin doing to carve out some time?
3. When you look at your calendar for the week, does it include Him? Take some time to schedule your God moments and then do it.

Slow Down

Written by:

Lina Asher

MARK 1:35

Week 4
Day
18

I often get up early in the morning to go to my solitary place to pray. Most often it's my living room while the rest of my family is asleep. I also love to leave my house and go to a solitary place with the Lord. I love going on dates with Him!

While on my dates, I don't always pray. There are many times where I'm silent. These are times for me to grow in intimacy with my Father. And, sometimes I need to be still, to hear His still, small voice.

If you are anything like me, life demands a lot out of you! There's the constant need to "hurry here" or "hurry there." To get this done asap!

In reading about the gospel writer Mark, I find that I relate to him greatly! He tells the gospel faster than any other gospel writer. His common expression is "immediately" or "at once." He uses them over 30 times! I thought I was impatient!!

Mark is excited to share about Christ, so much so that he skips over the birth entirely and just jumps into his life, death and resurrection. Yet, Mark slows down enough to give us glimpses into Jesus' time of solitude with the Father.

I love Mark! Always in a rush, but slows down enough when it's necessary. He explains how and where Jesus finds solitude with the Father. He tells us that Jesus finds solitude and rest in

going: beside the lake, on the lake, mountainsides and gardens.

This helps me to truly understand my own desire to get away in nature when I date God. The river is one of my very favorite places of solitude and rest.

I believe to be more like Christ is to follow His example. Though it's hard to follow perfection, we can take steps towards being more like Him by doing what He did.

To me, it starts by getting away with Him, slowing down, resting and listening, so that I can allow Him to fill me up with the right things. Because, when we don't allow Him to fill us up, other things will fill up those areas.

Don't allow that! Slow down and fill up with Jesus!

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Are you running on empty? Get away this week to a solitary place and allow God to fill your tank!
2. Take some time this week to slow down and be still. It's okay to not be busy.
3. Pray for a heart to be more like Jesus, knowing when to get away to a solitary place with Him.

Return and Rest

Written by:

Vashti Makupson

ISAIAH 30:15

Week 4

Day

19

We can easily get sucked into this fast paced world that is constantly moving. The demands of kids sports, work, ministry, and friends can pull us in different directions. The rush of countless demands can not only leave us feeling like we are drowning, but it makes us rebellious.

The world is a needy place. Constantly pulling at our pant legs begging for more. Friends, we were not designed to say “yes” to everyone and everything. By fulfilling our desire to please people, we etch God out.

Learning to listen to His voice and obeying His direction is a lesson I had to learn before busyness consumed me. That required me to “return” and “rest” by saying “no” to the plans of others and “yes” to the plans of God.

Let me tell you, learning this was a miracle in itself because this girl here is all about coffee and friends! But, in all honesty, what was happening internally was more than I bargained for.

I lived tense, anxious, and frustrated the majority of the time, running from one thing to the next, with very little room to breathe. Maybe you know the feeling. Wanting to cry, but not having enough time to think or process. Living in this space is less than our best.

Then in a moment of surrender and obedience, I began to

seek God's face and set boundaries for myself. One step after another, I followed His lead. I practiced listening to His voice above others.

Isaiah 30:15 became a refuge for me, teaching me how to find balance. Instead of forging ahead with my own plans, I chose to return and rest. Now, I'm not talking about a passive rest, but rather an active one that was intentional about seeking His face and renewing my mind with His truth.

In quietness and trust I was strengthened to accomplish the tasks He had for me. I created a habit of setting aside unhurried time to rest and be refreshed rather than striving to perform. By keeping company with Jesus it curbed my addiction to busyness and set me free from finding my identity in what I do.

I'm not sure if you find yourself in this space. If you do, I challenge you to one of the most spiritual things you can do, REST! We are not designed to say yes to everything. We can't be everywhere and see everyone.

AND friend, hear me when I say, THAT. IS. OK! Rest in the arms of your loving Father by making space in your schedule for this spiritual act.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What exhausts you or keeps you working past your limits? Identify some things you need to say no to or find balance in.
2. What kind of rest would refresh your body: exercise, a nap, going to bed early? What kind of rest would refresh your soul: retreat, sleep, music, reading?
3. Choose two times this week when you will intentionally enter into rest for body and soul.

Resting in Exodus

Written by:

Chris McKinney

EXODUS 33:14

Week 4

Day

20

Imagine a single mother of four who works a full-time job. She has no husband, no support system, she's going it alone. Many give up and let their children suffer, but not this mom. She's going to press on till every amount of energy left in her is gone. Rest? Are you kidding? She has exactly 3 hours to sleep before she has to get her kids on the bus and go back to work. So the cycle can start all over again.

Moses had a huge task that kept him up at night. This task likely took every ounce of energy he had. He and a few others were tasked by God to lead roughly 2 million Israelites out of Egypt in the largest exodus recorded.

Those leaving captivity should have been ecstatic seeing miracles. Along the way, God fed them, kept the sun off their heads, and led them with a pillar of fire at night. With everything God did, they still complained. I can't imagine what that must have been like for Moses.

You might be in the middle of your own exodus. You're working hard to move to the next thing and you don't know if you have enough strength, willpower or fortitude to move forward. In fact, all you want to do is rest. Take a look at what God said to Moses, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

Moses was on a mission given by God. We have missions given to us by God. Missions to be a godly man, woman, husband, wife, father, mother and the list goes on. Those missions are from God and we can choose to trust Him or go it alone.

Read the account of Moses and you'll find there were times when Moses trusted God and times when he didn't. God is right there ready to give you the rest you need. You must trust God instead of your own ability to make your situation better.

Worry is a huge opponent to rest. You can't rest when you're worried about tomorrow. Do your part and then trust God with the everything else. He came through for Moses even though Moses made a bunch of mistakes. He will come through for you.

Moses surrounded himself with people to walk with him and hold him accountable. We have to trust God and surround ourselves with people to hold us up when times get tough.

If you are spinning your wheels today, think of Moses. Think about the kind of trust he needed to move those 2 million people to a new home. Surround yourself with godly people to help you.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What is my mission from God?
2. Who can I surround myself with to walk with me and hold me accountable?
3. How can I trust God with my life?

“ There is no greater love
than to lay down one’s life
for one’s friends. ”
— *Matthew 15:13*

Week 5

Love

Tough Love

Written by:

Troy Asher

MATTHEW 5:43-48

Week 5

Day

21

I've always found it pretty easy to love people. I am very social and have always had great friends. There is nothing I wouldn't do for my family or friends. If they need a ride I will pick them up. If they need someone to talk to I am there. If they need help financially I will give to them. If I have something they need there is never hesitation. I give because I love.

One of the many things I have always admired about my mom is her ability to love the unlovely. My mom could always find something good to say about a person no matter how mean, rude or obnoxious they were. She would often tell me, "Anyone can find the negative in people, I choose to find the positive."

Over the years, I have realized my mom is very unique in this mindset. Most people I know not only see only the negative in people, but many often look to find it.

When I was in my mid twenties, I was going through the roughest time of my life. I was a very bitter, negative, and jaded person. My wife had left me and I was a single parent. I was in a place where mercy, forgiveness and grace were not part of my mindset. Rather, I had a justice and vengeance mentality. I was angry with my ex-wife. I was especially angry with my father. I hated being around him and I hated his negative attitude.

If I'm being honest I think I really hated him. I remember asking my mom some tough questions. I asked her why she put up with him! Why did she stay in a marriage with a man that showed her so much dishonor and disrespect.

One day, in all of my 26 years of maturity and wisdom, I decided to confront my mom about this. I asked my mom why she didn't just leave dad and why she didn't want a better life for herself.

Her answer was much more detailed than this but in a nutshell she told me, "That isn't what love is. Love pushes through even when life is hard."

I didn't like her answer then, but I love it now. She was merely following Jesus and doing what His Word tells us to do. In our reading today, Jesus gives us the hardest assignment there is. He tells us that we have to "love our enemies" and "pray blessings upon those who persecute us." This does not come easily to us, in fact it is counterintuitive to everything in us.

But, it is what God commands us to do!

When I started to emulate my mom, and started to put this into practice, God showed me that my dad did the best he could with what he had. He wasn't as fortunate as I was to have a mother that showed him the love of Jesus.

When I started to love and pray for my dad it brought us closer. Now, today I can say that I love my dad very much. Loving the unlovely is the hardest thing you will ever do, but as Jesus says, anyone can love those who loves us. Jesus is calling us to a better love, a "Tough Love!"

POINTS TO PONDER

1. As you read this today, who comes to your mind as a "tough love"?
2. How can you take a step today toward loving them?
3. Take that first step today, whatever it may be. I recognize that some of you reading this have been badly abused or hurt by someone in your life. I encourage you today to start with a simple prayer for them.

Not a Request

Written by:

Lina Asher

JOHN 15:17

Week 5
Day
22

In John 15:1-16, Jesus describes how our relationship with Him should be like the vine and the branches, abiding in Him and allowing Him to prune us in our process of growing in Him. It culminates into verse 17 about loving each other.

Reading the above scripture, you may say, “Is that it?” Actually, it’s a lot! This may be a short verse, but it sure packs a mighty punch, because it’s much easier said than done!

Jesus isn’t simply telling us what He would “like” for us to do. He is “commanding” us to love each other.

Just think, if your boss were to command you to perform a certain task or complete a project that is in your ability and responsibility to do, would you refuse? Of course not! So why would we say no to Jesus’ command to love each other? Especially when it is in our ability and responsibility to do so as a child of God?

I will be the first to say that it’s difficult to love some people. Sometimes people can be very unlovable! There was a time in my life when I really struggled with loving a certain individual. I kept hearing the scripture in my head, reminding me to love and pray for my enemies. (Matthew 5:44) And it would irritate me! I finally realized that it irritated me because my pride wouldn’t step aside and allow a humble heart to take

over, so that I could pray for them and pray for a softening of my own heart in the process.

When I finally surrendered my pride in this area and embraced a heart of prayer, that's when I noticed true change. Not a change in the other person, but a change in me! Because, guess who is the only person I can change? That's right! I can only change myself. You can only change yourself.

My heart began to soften and grow more full of love. And, I can honestly say that I love this person today. Not to say that I've gotten this down 100%, but I'm getting much better at it.

I know when Jesus speaks and "commands," I should listen and respond out of obedience. Jesus commanded it because it's His heart. He loves us all, regardless of how ugly and hateful we can be. We need to do the same.

Let us love like Jesus!

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Is there someone in your life that you struggle to love? Begin praying for a change of heart toward them and pray for blessings over them.
2. How is your heart? Is it surrendered to loving the unlovable? Or, are you allowing pride to hinder this process?
3. Pray that God will reveal areas of your heart that need softening, so you can honor His command.

Love Like You Mean It

Written by:

Chris McKinney

JOHN 15:13

Week 5

Day

23

Love is one of those things that's hard to describe, hard to measure, and hard to manage. For some, the words "I love you" can mean many different things. Because of this, we describe love by saying it has many different forms. To me, this further confuses the matter.

After years of telling my wife "I love you," the meaning was confused with the tradition of saying it. On the phone, before bed, before parting ways, we always said it, but I felt that it wasn't enough.

I was saying, "I love you" without demonstrating that love. Saying, "I love you" doesn't cost you anything. Like saying, "I'm sorry." It doesn't mean much when the person continues their behavior. Love is nothing more than a phrase unless you put action to it.

To me, love is simple. The people that love you are the people that care for you. The people that spend their lives investing in you. The people that call you at random to see how things are going. The people that have no expectations other than to be your friend and walk through life with you.

When I say, "I love you," I mean that I care for you. It means that you are important to me and that I will be there for you. It's not enough to say, "I love you," you have to show it. In my marriage, it's cleaning up after myself. I do this to honor

my wife's time by keeping our spaces neat and orderly. Preparing meals while she's out shopping. Generally, being an active part of the family and not expecting my wife to serve me is one of many ways that I love her.

As our example, Jesus gave us the most incredible gift during the most amazing act of love this world has ever seen. While we were sinners, He died for us. He took our punishment when he didn't have to. He put himself in danger so that we wouldn't have to endure death as a punishment for our wrongdoing. He paved the way for us to be saved from our sins so that we can have direct fellowship with God for all eternity.

It's not enough to say, "I love you" and move on. We have to show it. Jesus did. Jesus left us a command in John 13:35, "Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." My encouragement to you today is to look for ways to show that you love God and others.

Don't just say, "I love you", show it.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What does, "I love you" mean to you?
2. How does the death and resurrection of Jesus change your view of love?
3. How can you show others love?

But I Don't Want To

Written by:

Janet Caldon

JOHN 13:34

Week 5
Day
24

I don't know about you, but sometimes Jesus' words shoot straight to the heart. And His actions? Well, they astonish me. Let me set the scene...

It's the night before Jesus is crucified. He is surrounded by the twelve men He invested in for the past three years. The disciples around the table included the one who would betray him moments later, the one who would deny him three times the following day, nine who would scatter at His crucifixion and only one who would remain faithful at His death. Sounds a bit like modern day humanity to me.

Jesus set Himself apart from humanity by modeling humility. He had demonstrated this moments earlier by wrapping a towel around His waist, grabbing a basin of water, kneeling before the disciples, and washing their feet. Dirty, nasty, smelly, calloused feet. And then He commanded them to love each other as He had just loved them.

Command. The word causes our flesh to bristle a bit, doesn't it? Humanity prefers to state their options with arms folded and feet stomping like a two-year-old temper tantrum, "You're not the boss of me." If not publicly demonstrated, this rebellion is often subconsciously sequestered. "Yeah, you can't tell me what to do." "I have options." "That's not how I interpret it."

I don't see any contextual wiggle room in this verse or the ones preceding it. Jesus had lowered Himself with His face in the disciples' feet, doing what was considered slave work at that time. I imagine reactions around the room: raised eyebrows, sideways glances, even the disciples mouthing to each other, "What's He doing?"

He was physically demonstrating life and world-changing power: humility through love. The one to your left, right, and across the table. The one I've called to change the world. It's interesting to me, that *in this moment* He said "each other" rather than "those in the world." I believe it was intentional for them and remains intentional for us.

We are called just as the disciples were called. We must love just as He loved, with humble servant-like actions and attitudes. This, my friends, is not easy!

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Who are your "each others?"
2. Quantify specific ways you believe Jesus is challenging you to love as He loves.
3. What is holding you back?

Supernatural Love

Written by:

Christina Sullivan

PHILIPPIANS 2:13

Week 5

Day

25

I've heard people say that when they accepted Christ, they felt an immediate weight lifted, or an instant peace in their deepest being. I felt an instant, unexplainable feeling that I had just awoken a war.

In a spiritual sense, this is very much true. Once we become Christ's, we are no longer the enemy's puppets, and that makes him angry! He wants us to do anything but be soldiers for Christ.

In my newly found desire to walk with Jesus, I often found myself in a place of torment between my fleshly desires and the holy. When I say fleshly, I simply mean the human tendencies to be selfish and prideful. My struggle was that part of me didn't want to let go of those human fleshly desires. I was deeply, stubbornly still holding on to my pride and selfish desires. It was part of the war I had awoken by accepting Jesus. It was the battle between the self and the holy.

This battle bothered me for more than one reason. Firstly, because I felt that in order to be a good Christian, I must at the very least want to change. I must want to obey God, and yet I found I didn't, at least not always.

And secondly, even if I did want to change, I knew I wasn't strong enough. I was eager to rid myself of shame and some sin, but some things were just too risky. Forgiving those who would hurt me again? Too risky. Exposing my deepest secrets

to a godly mentor? Too risky! Even though I knew these things would facilitate my healing and empower my walk with God, I hesitated.

Until, that is, one day I read Philippians 2:13. It says, it is not my strength, but God's that gives me the energy, the longing and the ability to obey and follow God!

From that day on, I have tried to remember this: It is not my doing that I desire to obey and follow God. It's the Holy Spirit's doing. I can rely on and depend on, in fact, desperately cling to, His power. I don't have enough gumption or grit to even want to do the right thing all the time.

My flesh wins out. But, I do have the ability to do this: cry out to God for his Holy Spirit to give me the desire and the will and the ability to obey Him.

Why do I call this supernatural love? Because, not only did Christ love us so much he died for us, not only does he call to us, not only does he forgive us, he also recognizes our human nature. And so, He left us the Holy Spirit to intercede on behalf of our weakness so we can have the power, the desire and the will to do what pleases Him.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What do you do when you don't feel like obeying God?
2. What things in your life have you tried doing under your own power?
3. How does it make you feel to know that God himself can give you the power and the desire to do what pleases Him?

“ The Lord gives his people
strength.

The Lord blesses them
with peace.

— *Psalm 29:11* ”

Week 6

Peace

The Unwrapped Gift

Written by:

Troy Asher

JOHN 14:27-29

Week 6
Day
26

I want you to stop right now and think about this question. How many people do you know who have complete peace and contentment in their life? Take a couple of minutes right now and really think about that question.

Can you think of 5? Can you think of 3? Can you think of 1? It's an interesting question isn't it. I know for me, I can only name a few, and I know a lot of people.

For so long, I always prayed for peace. I prayed that God would bring me peace. I prayed that I would have peace in my heart. I prayed that God would take away the worry and discontentment that I constantly struggled with.

I would talk to people and they would ask me to pray that God would grant them peace in their lives. I would oblige them and pray for God to bring peace to their weary souls. It seemed there was nothing more elusive than this "peace" I was praying for.

Looking around our nation, and even our world, I would say then, and to some extent, I can still say it now, that peace is something that everyone wants but few people have.

About 7 or 8 years ago, I came across the passage of scripture that we read today and it stopped me in my tracks. I read it over and over again for a few weeks straight. I tried to figure out what I was missing, but the more I read, studied, and meditated on this passage of Scripture the more it was clear to me that I should no longer pray and ask for peace. Why? Because Jesus has already given it to us!

In the passage we read today, Jesus says that He is going to leave us a gift through the Holy Spirit. What is that gift? You guessed it! PEACE! Jesus says very clearly that He is leaving us a gift and the gift is peace. So we don't have to ask for peace, it is already given to us as a gift from Jesus.

The question is, if peace is a gift from the Lord then how do we unwrap it? Well, Jesus gives us a hint in today's reading as well.

First of all, we have to allow the Holy Spirit (God in us) to guide our hearts and minds. Secondly, we have to have a Kingdom mentality. Peace comes from knowing that no matter what is going on in our lives, we are promised the gift of eternal life and we can always walk in victory.

When we recognize that earth is not our final resting place, and there will be a time when we no longer struggle with sin, will no longer have hurt, pain, sadness or death; then, and only then, will we experience God's peace. A peace that passes all understanding.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being no peace (constant worry and anxiety), and 10 being great peace (no worry no anxiety), how do you rate?
2. If you are below 5, how often do you think about the promises of heaven? If the answer is rarely or never, start thinking about Jesus' promise of eternal life and His victory over death, hell and the grave.
3. If you are above 5 what do you need to change in your life to raise it up a point?

Peace Like a River

Written by:

Lina Asher

ISAIAH 48:17-18

Week 6
Day
27

Oh no! Here I go again! Talking about “commands” from the Lord. I guess the Lord needs me to really get this command thing down!

In today’s passage, the prophet Isaiah has been told by the Lord to speak to the disobedient Israelites. They were worshipping idols and not God. It was pulling them away from His ways towards their own ways and desires, and robbing them of His peace and presence in their lives.

I love how descriptive and detailed God is when speaking about His peace in this passage. “Peace flowing like a river.” If any of you know me well, you know the river is my spot to be with the Lord. During those times, I can confirm that I feel that peace! But, it also makes me think about the times I’m away from the river and back to life. What are the idols in my own life that steal my peace? I have come to the conclusion that my biggest idol is: SELF! My eyes are off of Christ when I focus on myself, my wants, my rights and desires.

Some other idols we can struggle with may be: work, success, image, materialism, money, sex, people, social media, etc. All of these can become idols and take our eyes off of Christ and STEAL the peace that God has so freely given us.

We aren't so different from those wandering Israelites, are we? No wonder so many of us lack peace. Idols are consuming our lives!

We need to remember John 14 and the promise of not only the precious gift of the Holy Spirit that Jesus is speaking about being sent to us after He departs to go back to the Father, but in verse 27 He says, "I am leaving you with a gift - peace of mind and heart. And, the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid."

The world wants us to fix our eyes on the mirror. That's idolatry and it's detestable in the eyes of the Lord. Let us choose the peace that Christ has so graciously left with us. Let us fix our eyes on Him and embrace His peace.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. If we are honest, we all have idols, things that take God's place. What is the biggest idol in your life?
2. What is one tangible thing you can do today to put God back in the place He deserves?
3. Pray that God will quickly reveal those idols in your life and give you the strength to have victory over them.

Praise Him in the Storm

Written by:

Janet Caldon

PSALM 29:11

Week 6

Day

28

There are days when I wonder just how much I can take. Have you ever felt this way? On the edge? On the line between wanting to curl up in a fetal position or sob until there are no tears left?

Feeling as though a storm cloud has enveloped you with no way of escape?

David wrote Psalm 29 for our benefit. It is poetically beautiful, describing both the strength of a storm and power of God's voice. It repeats the phrase "the voice of the Lord" seven times, which means completion in biblical context. The Psalm is pure praise.

I remember a storm in Oklahoma a few years back. Winds whipped. Thunder roared. Lightning struck. My granddaughter and I watched from her bedroom window as storm drains filled. Before we knew it, the streets below looked like a river of water, over a foot deep and rising. I recall praising God in this storm, declaring His power and might (and asking for a little protection, being a Washington girl!)

Sometimes I praise God in the storm, but more than I'd like to admit, that is not my first reaction, or thoughts or words. My flesh fails. My heart falters. If only I would cling to these promises: Strength and peace come from Him.

I need His strength, as I work in a challenging elementary school where storms prevail over the peace I desire. Rarely, a day passes when I am not stretched to my limit. However, when I recognize my breaking point, stop to surrender my emotions and praise Him, His strength floods my soul. And you know what follows thereafter? His peace. The kind that surpasses my understanding.

I don't know your circumstances, but God does. Your storm might be your marriage. Or your children. Or your work. Or your lack of finances. Or your addiction. Or your, well, you can fill in that blank.

Can I ask you do something? Right now? Set this devotional down and pick up your Bible. Read Psalm 91 in its entirety. Discover the strength of the One who knows your limits and the power of His voice. Underline or highlight His name.

And then, will you do one more thing? Surrender your storm. Stay in that place of talking to your Jesus until you receive what He promises.

Peace.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What storms are you facing? Name them. If you aren't presently facing any storms, praise Him.
2. Do you feel weak in your faith? If so, what is causing it?
3. In what ways has God blessed you with peace?

Peace Despite Chaos

Written by:

Chris McKinney

JOHN 16:33

Week 6

Day

29

Have you ever dealt with a tantrum from someone between 0 and 48 inches tall? You know those “little people” we call children? When a child’s world is falling apart, everyone suffers. Doesn’t matter if you’re a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle or someone else. The formula is simple: they had expectations, someone didn’t meet those expectations. In an epic last ditch effort, you will be the unwilling participant of a full-on tantrum. They’ve lost it. Any shred of self-preservation or dignity is gone.

After this experience, I’ve come to the conclusion that we as adults are no different than children. We use bigger words. We manipulate, control or order those around us to give us what we want. We may pull out our credit cards to buy our way to the thing we want, but when we can’t have it, the whole world falls apart.

Life is full of unmet expectations of safety, privacy, provision and more. These experiences will challenge our ability to have peace in the storm. Nehemiah was a government official. He asked his master, the king of Persia, if he could go and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The king granted his request and Nehemiah went on a journey to rebuild the walls.

As the project was going and the wall was going up, neighboring groups decided to interfere. They mocked

Nehemiah and plotted to prevent Nehemiah's men from completing the work.

Nehemiah and his men worked while waiting for an impending attack. Men were instructed to carry a brick in one hand and a sword in another. During this time, the outside groups asked Nehemiah to meet them so that the wall would be delayed. By most standards, Nehemiah would have had anything but peace. We see that Nehemiah responded to the requests, but never stopped to talk to them. He kept the project going to restore the defenses of his home-town.

Are you going through a time when everything seems to be going wrong? When we talk about peace, do you think, “yeah, right?” Peace is knowing that everything is going to be alright even when nothing looks like it will be. God says He will take care of us. He says He will protect us. We can move forward knowing no matter what trial may come, God is always in control. He will be with us through every step we take.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. How do I find peace when things around me are not peaceful?
2. Who can I go to when I'm feeling like the whole world is ending?
3. What does the Bible say about peace and dealing with worry?

Let Peace Rule

Written by:

Vashti Makupson

COLOSSIANS 3:15

Week 6

Day

30

I'm not sure about you, but there are moments when I feel bombarded by life. You know those moments where one thing after another happens. The fridge breaks, the teen yells, the finances are less than favorable, and a deadline looms. With so many issues looming, vying for my attention, it becomes rather easy to be sucked into a cycle of negativity. In these moments I wish I could push the pause button to catch my breath.

Well friends, according to today's verse, we can push pause on the things life has flooded us with. That pause looks like choosing to "let the peace that comes from Christ rule in our hearts."

There are four words that catch my attention immediately. LET. PEACE. RULE. HEARTS. You see, those four words are our pause buttons. We can choose to live in a way where peace is the norm despite our circumstances.

Peace is a condition of freedom from disturbance. Read that again, slowly. What that is NOT saying is that peace means you never encounter disruption, but rather that you find freedom from not allowing the disruptions of fear, anxiety and worry to enslave you. This is a supernatural undertaking.

You see, this peace is rooted in an intimate relationship with Jesus. The more we fill our minds with His truth and fix our gaze on His Presence, the more we practice letting peace

direct our lives. This is where the word **RULE** comes into the picture.

That four letter word is a powerful one. Track with me. The word literally means “to arbitrate, decide; to act as an umpire.” Did you catch that? “Act as an umpire.” What does an umpire do? They watch a game closely to enforce the rules, make judgment calls, and handle disciplinary actions. You guys, this is how peace rules in our hearts!

The peace of Jesus acts as an official who watches the game of our life closely, dominating our hearts, governing our thoughts, and enabling us to take negative thoughts captive. But here’s the thing, we have to **LET IT!**

Simply put, we do this by surrender. The moment negativity comes knocking on the door of your heart, allow the Umpire of peace to empower you to take those thoughts captive and declare your trust in God. Fill your mind with His truth and fix your eyes on Him with a heart of gratitude.

Thank Him for His peace that surpasses all understanding!

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What areas of your life are lacking peace? Think about the areas of your life in which worry and anxiety have consumed your thoughts. Write them down.
2. Find Scripture that will combat the lies you have been holding on to and turn them into prayers.
3. What are some things you can start doing now to practice living a life of peace and equip you for the roller coaster moments of life?

“ Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or stand around with sinners,
or join in with mockers.

But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night.

They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season.

Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do.

— *Psalm 1:1-3*

”

Week 7

Joy

What Are You Thinking About?

Written by:
Troy Asher

PSALM 1:1-3

Week 7
Day
31

This week I was more disappointed and frustrated with the leaders of our government than I have been in many years. A bill was passed that, in my opinion, was physically and morally wrong for our nation.

That day I was painting and had been without human interaction for about 9 hours. As I worked the paint roller back and forth, applying the paint, I thought and stewed. I got more and more irritated as the day went on.

I thought to myself, “How could they?” “What is wrong with these people!!!”

Not once, by the way, did I pray. Not once did I rely on God’s peace that He offers to us so freely.

I was so relieved to have Lina home after her long day at work! I finally had someone to vent to, someone to share the negative thoughts and opinions that had been formulating in my mind all day.

As we were driving to meet with a new couple at church, I let Lina have it! It was great to spill all of my negativity and frustration! I felt like I had been holding my breath all day! Now, I could exhale!

About 10 minutes into our 15 minute drive I noticed Lina’s countenance. She was sitting in silence, a blank look on her face, staring straight ahead, probably thinking, “After a day and week of work (it was Friday) the last thing I want to do is talk politics.”

I stopped, thought about the words that were coming out of my mouth, my tone, my facial expressions and realized that my negativity had not only brought me down, it was doing the same to my wife. I had allowed something that I had very little control over to steal the joy from our life.

Immediately I stopped, looked over at her and said, “Honey, I’m sorry, this is the last thing you want to hear right now. Jesus is still on the throne, He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. I’m going to choose joy.”

She immediately lit up and said, “YES!”

We proceeded to have a wonderful evening with great friends as we spoke about all of the wonderful things God has done in our lives and in C3.

In today’s reading, the psalmist speaks of how much joy we have when we meditate on God, His goodness, and aren’t surrounded by negative people.

What do we possibly have to worry about when we have the promise of eternal life and glory with God? We can live in His presence while we are here on earth.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. How often do you find your negative thoughts bringing you down?
2. What do your conversations look like on a daily basis? Are they filled with more positive or negative? If they are more negative, stop yourself and think about God’s promises to you and change your “stinkin thinkin.”
3. Who do you surround yourself with? Are you being influenced negatively? If so, make it a point to pray for those people and influence them with your positive words.

Don't Weep

Written by:

Lina Asher

NEHEMIAH 8:10

Week 7
Day
32

In my study about joy, God directed me to a well known scripture. As I read it and took it to prayer, I asked God for a better grasp on the meaning of “The joy of the Lord is your strength.”

I’ve been known to quote this scripture quite often. Usually, it’s when someone is down and I want to remind them of “Whose” they are and where their strength comes from. Other times it’s quoted while one of my friends has me laughing so hard that I feel like I’ve had an intense ab workout! But, in reading why Nehemiah spoke this, it really opened my eyes to seeing it in a new, fresh and exciting way.

In Chapter 8 of Nehemiah, we read how the Israelites had just come out of 70 years of exile in Babylon. They had settled in their towns and it says they were unified. I love it when God’s people are unified! It also says, they were preparing to hear the Word of God read to them. Verse 3 says, “All the people listened closely to the Book of the Law.”

Nehemiah, Ezra, and some Levites not only read the Word but explained it until the Israelites understood. Remember, it had been 70 years! Some of them had never heard the Word of God.

How did they respond?

They chanted loudly, “Amen,” and they lifted their hands and bowed down with their faces to the ground worshipping God. So many familiarities to how our C3 family worships! But, like us when we are convicted by our sin and shame.....they began to weep.

This is when Nehemiah steps forward and speaks boldly. He didn’t want to see the Israelites weeping and mourning! This was not the time for that. The words that Nehemiah spoke were: “Don’t weep, This is a sacred day,” “Go and celebrate,” “Share gifts.” Then, finally, “Don’t be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength!”

Like the Israelites, we need to remember that every day is sacred. We don’t need to mourn and weep and stay in that place of sin and shame, because we have GREAT JOY as children of God! We are blessed to be able to hear His Word, read His Word and live out His Word!

Let us choose joy over mourning!

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Make a decision to choose joy over mourning today, even if it’s hard.
2. Choose to share your joy today with someone who may be struggling.
3. Pray that God will strengthen you with “the joy of the Lord”.

Truth-Tellers

Written by:

Janet Caldon

JOB 5:17

Week 7

Day

33

When I looked up verses on joy in the Bible, I hadn't anticipated running across this one. It caught my attention and I could not escape it. Joy and correction are not two words I would ordinarily put in the same sentence, but God did, so He deserves our attention.

For those who may not be familiar with Job's story, it reads like something out of a novel or from the movie screen. His bio is like none other in human history.

Job was a wealthy married man from Uz with ten children, numerous servants and extensive flocks. God gave Satan permission to test, but not kill him. In a 24-hour period, Job received four messages, each with devastating news. His ten children, all his servants and livestock were killed. He was then tested with horrible skin sores. And finally, his wife tells him to "curse God and die!"

Throughout the next several chapters of Job, a conversation ensues with his three friends. They attempt to console him, yet do not waver from their opinions that Job's suffering is God's discipline in his life. I don't know about you, but if I had lost everyone I had loved, everything I had owned and physically suffered the torment of a skin disease, these words from my friends would be difficult to receive.

I say that from experience. God has used my best friend to bring discipline into my life. She has challenged me in areas that I preferred to ignore. Personal areas. Relational areas. Areas that I didn't see, but God did. Areas that I had hoped to remain hidden, but God revealed.

Her words made my palms sweat, my heart race, and my spirit yield. Rather than ignore her wisdom and despise God's discipline, I've learned to surrender my pride. When I did this, I received the joy that comes from correction!

As I type these words I realize some readers may have turned the page or closed the devotional. I understand. I've been there. I might have done that a few years ago. But if you've continued to read, I believe the Lord will speak to you, showing you that when (not if) He corrects you, it is to produce the eventual fruit of joy in your life!

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Do you have "truth-tellers" in your life? If not, why?
2. Are you willing to receive correction, regardless of the cost? If not, take a moment to consider why.
3. Ultimately discipline comes from God. In what ways might He be disciplining you now? Are you willing to share this with someone you trust and receive the healing/joy He promises?

Joy, Not Happiness

Written by:

Vashti Makupson

PSALM 16:11

Week 7

Day

34

This week was a rough week. Everything I had hoped to accomplish did not happen. I had my plans and well, let's just say, that my plans did not line up with God's plans. I was inconvenienced and instead of choosing joy, I got stuck - focused on my unhappy moments. Maybe you have been there?!

You envision what your week will look like and get excited for Monday morning, and then Monday has plans of its own. That doctor appointment takes 45 minutes longer than expected. That errand was a little more complicated than you hoped for. You drive from one thing to the next and by the time you get home you are hangry!!

I love how God allows me to go through difficult experiences to teach me a valuable lesson. Today's Scripture opens up with "you make known to me the path of life." The reality is, I can plan until I am blue in the face, but it is God who directs the path of my life.

In each of those inconvenient moments, I could have easily chosen to trust that His plan for my day was far greater than my own. His joy was available for me in those chaotic moments.

It is in these moments that we have a choice to make. If this is you right now, please stop. Take a moment to breathe,

refocus, and pray. Surrender the angst you are experiencing. You can experience His joy in this moment by focusing on His Presence.

God faithfully reminded me that joy is found in the Presence of God. What my soul desperately needed was quiet time with my Father! Instead of pausing, I chose to plow forward, allowing my fleshly desires to win.

However, when we choose to pause by setting our gaze on Jesus, despite the chaos that is looming in us, we will discover a joy that will strengthen us for the journey ahead.

Joy is not mere happiness, it is far greater. Joy is knowing that despite everything God is right there with you. It is rooted in a loving relationship with a Father who is for you and calls you His own. Joy will not change your circumstances, but it will definitely change you in the midst of them.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Think of a time when you have felt inconvenienced. How did you respond?
2. What are some things that fight for your attention, trying to take your focus off discovering joy in His presence?
3. Will you make the choice to discover the joy of spending time with Him? When and Where? Commit to cultivating joy by surrendering the temporary happiness of being comfortable.

A Reason for Joy

Written by:

Chris McKinney

ROMANS 8:28

Week 7

Day

35

In middle school, I played basketball. I wasn't the best at shooting but I was the tallest kid on the team. That helped when we were on defense. I was in the position known as center. This position was the last person to defend the hoop from the player wishing to make a basket. I don't remember how many basketballs I knocked away from other players, but there were many.

One year, we had two coaches that really loved the sport and wanted us to grow in our own playing ability. We would practice twice a week as a team and then on our own. One of my takeaways from that time of my life is that we worked hard to develop our skills before game time. When it was game time, our goal was to have fun. We had done the work, then it was time to do the fun part, play the game! This was a huge encouragement to the team.

We all made mistakes from time to time. When we made mistakes individually or as a team, we were disappointed in ourselves. Every player wanted to impress the coaches who poured so much of their time and energy into us. What was great is that they encouraged us to be better. Those mistakes became good things as we identified what went wrong and were able to focus our practice time on the most needed issues.

I remember the coaches promised a trip to 7-11 after each practice as a reward for working hard. We'd run to the back of the store, grab the biggest cup we could find and fill it with every flavor of Slurpee they had available. We'd take a huge drink and after about 3 seconds, we were shaking our heads with a monster brain freeze. I'm sure it was a sight to see.

God is like the greatest basketball coach you've ever had. He wants us to grow in our faith, our love for people and ultimately, our love for God.

The Bible tells us, "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." Romans 8:28

This is a reason for joy. It means that we don't have to worry about how things are going to turn out. God can turn our mistakes into good. We can safely put our outcome in God's hands. You don't have to feel bad about your past. God will use those mistakes to mold you into the person He created you to be.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. How have you seen God turn your mistakes into good?
2. If you know that God can use your mistakes for good, how does that change your outlook on the future?
3. What step of faith will you take with the confidence that God is working for His good in your life?

“ But those who trust in
the Lord will find new
strength.

They will soar high on
wings like eagles.

They will run and not
grow weary.

They will walk and not
faint.

— *Isaiah 40:31*

”

Week 8

Hope

Talk About it, Then Be About It

Written by:
Troy Asher

1 PETER 3:13-17

Week 8
Day
36

I'm going to put something out there. If you have said this, know that I love you and have no ill feelings toward you, but one thing that bothers me is when people say, "I can't memorize scripture."

I think back to a time when I heard them recite every line from their favorite movie or sing every lyric to their favorite song and think, "Interesting, your memory is working fine."

I don't have the thought in a judgmental way, but in a sad way. I know how much the Word of God enriches and enhances my life. When I think on it and meditate on it, it sinks into my mind and soul.

I don't have to focus on memorizing it, it just becomes part of my life. It's like memorizing a song. You don't sit down and think, I am going to sit here and memorize the words to this song. No, you learn the words because you listen to it over and over again.

That is how it is for me when I memorize or learn God's Word. There are so many incredible life-shaping truths in the Word of God, passages that inspire me, challenge me, encourage me, convict me and help me to be the man of God He has created me to be.

At times I am forced to deal with difficult decisions. There are ways I "feel" like responding and choices I "feel" are best, but when I pray and remember God's Word, I am often moved to respond differently.

Psalm 119:11 says, “ I have hidden your Word in my heart so that I will not sin against You.” The psalmist knows if he does not know God’s Word and is not in tune with what God wants, he will fall short and sin against God.

In our reading today Peter gives us a real challenge. He says if anyone asks us about the hope we have in knowing Jesus, we need to have an answer for them! We need to be able to explain to people the reason we have such a love for God and people!

He goes on to say we can’t just talk about it, we have to be about it! He says people should feel ashamed for talking badly about us based on the life we live! However, it is difficult to live a godly life if we don’t know God! It is like being asked to hit a bullseye without being given a target!

At the end of today’s passage, Peter reminds us of a truth that puts him in the “Captain Obvious” category. He says it is better to suffer for doing good than to suffer for doing bad. Christ followers should all say, “Duh!”

But, if we do not know what God expects from us, we can find ourselves compromising our morals and standards based on what we “feel like” doing, that’s a very dangerous place to be in.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. When is that last time you memorized a passage or a verse in the Bible?
2. If it has been a while, what has kept you from spending time and memorizing God’s Word?
3. This week, find one verse that speaks to you and repeat it 9 times, 3 in the morning, 3 in the afternoon and 3 before bed. Don’t read it with the desire to memorize it, simply read it with the desire to live it out in your life.

Comforting the Hopeless

Written by:

Janet Caldon

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4

Week 8

Day

37

She catches my attention every day. Rickie, the homeless woman camped on the corner of 96th Street and Pacific Avenue.

I can't help but notice her and the streetwise "home" she's made for herself. Cushioned. Layered. Tarpred. Even a lawn chair to get off the cold, wet ground. This is her world, the one she created for reasons beyond my understanding. I drive by and make eye contact. She nods my direction. I question hers. Did she relinquish hope? Did she ever possess it?

Do you or are you currently facing circumstances that make you feel hopeless? A child in trouble. An addiction. A loveless marriage. An illness. Perhaps you're experiencing hardship at work or in your community. Whatever it is, God's promises are true. Hope is as near as your next breath.

The dictionary defines hope as a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen. I prefer it's biblical meaning. The Hebrew term literally means a cord, as an attachment. We all attach to something when we need hope, the question is what will we attach ourselves to? Do you choose God?

Hope involves the exchange of two parties: God gives; we receive. Perhaps you've been on the receiving end, as I have. There is nothing more comforting than God speaking to my

pain of hopelessness and replacing it with the comfort of His presence and the power of His Word.

He also uses others to bring comfort. I needed hope after my daughter died. I needed comfort when experiencing deep marriage troubles. In both circumstances, God provided and guided His people to speak into my life. He is faithful!

Equally true to receiving hope is the power of speaking hope. Perhaps you're in position to provide hope by offering words of comfort. Reflect on your journey with Jesus. When have you felt hopeless? Helpless? As though you couldn't move forward unless He directed your steps? How did He comfort you?

Someone needs your words of hope and comfort. Your person might not be a homeless woman in your community, like mine. It may be the child in your home or the colleague in your office. Your person may sit a few chairs down from you at church or stand behind you in the line at Walmart.

Whoever it is, speak hope! Bring light to their darkness.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. When have you felt hopeless? How did God provide comfort?
2. Do you see yourself as someone who can bring comfort to the troubled?
3. Look for someone who needs your words of hope and comfort. Determine to bring a measure of light into their darkness.

Strength in Weakness

Written by:

Lina Asher

ISAIAH 40:31

Week 8

Day

38

Hope defined is: to trust in, wait for, look for, or desire something. To expect something beneficial in the future.

As I was thinking about all the things we put our hope and trust in, I felt God speak to my heart regarding something that didn't quite make sense in the moment.

I was at the river when I heard Him speak to my heart, "About those spiritual gifts tests..." Then there was silence.

My mind began to think about how recently I had seen person after person posting their spiritual gifts test results on Facebook. So I decided to take the test too.

Some of the questions I could rate high because it was so me. Wisdom, teaching, encouragement, yep, that's me! And others were rated very low because it definitely wasn't me! Evangelism and missions? So not me!

Then I realized something, the ones I rated high were the ones I wanted to be me. Sure, there are some that are definitely my strong areas, but I recognized the ones I rated low were the ones I had no hope or desire for! Sure, I wasn't strong in those areas, but do I want or try to be???

That's when the Lord continued to speak to my heart. "Daughter, you have said you don't have the gift of evangelism

or missions, and yet, you know my Great Commission. It's not your strengths but your WEAKNESS that I want. Because MY power works best in your weakness!"

I began to sob! The revelation was too much for me in that moment. My hopes and desires were in what I was comfortable with. MY strengths. I asked God to forgive me for not seeing this before.

When we do things in our own strength where does that put God? Now, I'm not saying that all of us push God aside in our areas of strength, but I want to encourage you to meditate on that God statement above. And, possibly, He May want you to focus on the spiritual gifts that YOU ranked lowest.

Then maybe, just maybe that will be the weakness that becomes your hearts hope and desire, so that God will be your full strength and you will shine in areas you never thought possible.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Take some time to take a spiritual gifts test and see where you rank lowest and write down your lowest three. Not your top three, and take them to prayer.
2. Do you feel like your hopes are self-centered or God-centered?
3. Pray and ask God to reveal what you are doing in your own strength and ask Him to strengthen your weaknesses.

Hope Despite Failure

Written by:

Vashti Makupson

LUKE 22:31-32

Week 8

Day

39

I blew it AGAIN! For the umpteenth time, I lashed out in anger because I was so frustrated and overwhelmed. Instead of demonstrating self-control, I demonstrated my fleshly desires. And then the voice of shame began to shout at me relentlessly, telling me things like: “You are such a failure!” “You will never overcome this anger!” “Just who do you think you are!”

That is until I looked at the beauty that is found in God’s Word. I found it kind of interesting how Jesus began this interaction with Peter by letting him know that Satan “asked to sift each of you like wheat.”

Did you catch that?! The enemy had to ask permission to sift! There is comfort in knowing that God is still in control of those sifting moments. He has a greater purpose in mind. Where the enemy seeks to devour me with shame and guilt; God is seeking to free me of my sin.

The word sift means, “by inward agitation to try one’s faith to the verge of overthrow.” The enemy had to ask permission to allow difficult circumstances because he wants me to fail in my faith. God wants to use my failure as a beacon of hope and grace to demonstrate His power and glory!

I'm not sure where you find yourself today, but know that your failures aren't too great for God to redeem. Jesus says to Peter, "I have pleaded in prayer...that your faith should not fail...so when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen your brothers."

Friend, do you see the hope in Jesus' words? Not only is he pleading on your behalf that your faith would not fail, but He is confident that you will return. God is not surprised by our failures. He's not looking down on us with seething anger. Rather, He is waiting...for us to turn to Him again.

There is hope in our failures because the very person of hope, Jesus, is waiting for us, telling us the same thing He told Peter, "repent, turn to me and strengthen your brothers!" Simply put, repentance is changing the way we think about our sin and turning away from it by doing something different.

Precious friends, our stories of failures can be used to breathe life into someone else if we choose to repent. Will you join me in cultivating a lifestyle of repentance to be a vessel of hope to those around us?!

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What areas of life do you hear the lies of failure screaming at you? Write them down.
2. Do you feel like you are being sifted? Ask God to reveal to you what He is wanting to sift out of you versus being focused on the feeling of failure.
3. Now listen to the voice of your Father inviting you to surrender these by repenting. Write out your prayer of repentance, asking God to forgive you for believing the lies of the enemy over the voice of truth.

My Hope Comes from Jesus

Written by:
Chris McKinney

1 PETER 1:3

Week 8

Day

40

When I was a child we had a nightly ritual, following the evening meal we would stop what we were doing and watch the evening news. When the news was over, we went to bed. We'd wake up the next morning, turn the TV on to watch the news again while we prepared for the day.

Our days began and ended with coverage of just about everything around us. It felt good to know what was going on in the world. You got the good and the bad when watching the news back then. There were talks of war, greed, tragedy and everything else.

Today, I try to avoid the news as much as possible. When I find myself watching, I am amazed at the number of stories depicting the terrible things people do. When you check your social media, you see a wide range of news mixed with opinions and comments that are generally one-sided.

Sometimes I take a step back and wonder, what is this world coming to?

However, every believer has something that the world doesn't understand. We have hope. Hope that one day, this world will fade away and we'll see Jesus face to face. We have hope that God will walk with us in every hard time we endure.

While the world searches for meaning and understanding of why things are the way they are, we have a hope that we must share.

As I look at what's happening around me, I am reminded of what the Bible says in 2 Timothy 3:2, "For people will love only themselves." It makes sense to me that the world is the way it is. Then my thoughts go to the promise we have as believers and I have great joy when I remember the hope I have in Jesus.

1 Peter 1:3 - "All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation"

You see, we have great hope because God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus defeated death and now we wait with great anticipation for Him to come back for everyone who believed. On that day, Jesus will make everything right again.

Our world cries out for God like a spoiled and reckless child looking for the fathers attention. We don't have to worry or buy into the world's idea of righteousness. God has given us the hope of the world, Jesus. Anyone who believes and doesn't doubt, will inherit everlasting life. Amen!

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Where does my hope come from?
2. How does knowing that Jesus will make everything right again change my view of our world?
3. How can I remember that my hope is in Jesus?

“ Trust in the Lord with all
your heart;

do not depend on your
own understanding.

Seek his will in all you
do, and he will show you
which path to take.

— *Proverbs 3:5-6*

”

Week 9

Contentment

My Biggest Struggle

Written by:

Troy Asher

PROVERBS 3:5-6

Week 9

Day

41

When I saw the topic for this week, I was a bit anxious. To be honest, I procrastinated on it a bit because this area of my life has been my struggle for as long as I can remember. Being content is something that I just cannot seem to grasp on to in my life. I have grown in just about every area of my life, but there is something inside of me that will not let my soul be at rest.

So, to avoid being hypocritical, I want to fully disclose that God is still at work in my life in this area. I believe I will have victory in this eventually but as for now, I continue to battle the feelings of not enough in certain areas of my life, especially pastoring and leading God's church.

My whole life I have been "over the top competitive." Meaning that my desire to win would often override my integrity, my morals, and my character. I had a "win at all cost" mentality. When I lost, I did not take it well. I would curse, mope, throw tantrums. You name it, I did it.

As I got older I applied some of this same mentality to business and career. Although I had fine morals, integrity and character, I did not have contentment in any area of my life.

I was never satisfied with where I was and what I had accomplished. I had a serious problem of relying on self and competing my way through things. I very rarely allowed God to be in charge of my life and although I was very successful at

work, I was failing at home. I was failing my wife and my kids. I almost lost them both.

I finally got to a point where I couldn't win on my own. I was losing at the most important things and I had no power to control any of it. There were two verses that my mom constantly spoke into my life, Proverbs 3:5 and 6. These verses were my go to in this time of brokenness. I finally realized that I was a good leader of people but a terrible lord of my life. I realized that although I knew of God and had *learned a lot about* Him, I didn't personally *know* Him and certainly had not given Him *control of my life*.

After I surrendered my life to Him and gave Him control, I changed. I no longer had to win at everything. I no longer had to control everything. I could leave that all to Him.

When I was in a tough situation, I realized that I didn't have to fret and try to figure it all out on my own. I realized that I could just call out to Him and have instant peace, knowing that He was in control, not me.

This is still an area of weakness for me, but I am learning to be more content everyday.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What is your default when you have trials in your life?
2. Do you find yourself worrying more or praying more? If the answer is worrying, what can you do to change your default?
3. Start your day everyday this week reciting Proverbs 3:5-6 see if this gives you more contentment in your life knowing that God is in control.

Shine Like the Son

Written by:

Lina Asher

PHILIPPIANS 4:12

Week 9

Day

42

Like many others, I crave sunshine. I love the sunshine! That Vitamin D brings me serious happiness like nothing else. When I was in Arizona in March, that sunshine had me on a high. When I got back to Washington, the cold and rain, well, my happiness turned to longing for the desert!

Notice I didn't say sunshine brings me contentment? Did you know there's a difference between happiness and contentment? There is. Like the difference between forgiveness and repentance, it takes it to another level. With forgiveness you can ask for it and just move on. Whereas with repentance, you ask for forgiveness then seek to TURN from that behavior.

With happiness, it's a temporary emotion. It's in the moment. Fleeting. Contentment is a way of life. It's peace with who you are, where you are, and where you are going. You are satisfied and stable.

Do you know where your contentment lies? It lies in Christ! Some of you reading this are saying, "Good Christian answer." But, the truth is the truth!

I can look around and see my "wants" and "needs" all around me. And if I get them, they can make me happy in the moment. But, happiness without contentment leaves one feeling empty. Happiness is temporary and if I get everything I want, what happens when I don't? Fits, pity-parties, sadness,

depression? All kinds of negative “feelings!” Those deceiving feelings!!!

As I spoke about sunshine making me “happy”when I’m “shining the Son” is where my true contentment grows. Jesus is the true light and warmth that satisfies me above all else. He is my contentment. Because I know who I am in Christ, I have peace, stability and satisfaction with my life. And, that helps me to tell others about it. My life is truly content.

When you’re feeling down because of unmet needs or wants, or the sun simply isn’t shining, recognize it for what it is and choose to go out and “shine the Son” and live a life of contentment.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Do you struggle with wanting more? What do you believe will bring you true contentment?
2. If you can’t say that you are “content”, ask God to reveal what is holding you back from seeing where true contentment lies.
3. Spend time in prayer asking for a heart that is content, so you can see your blessings over your wants, so “feelings” don’t deceive you.

Where's Your Focus?

Written by:

Janet Caldon

ECCLESIASTES 1:8

Week 9
Day
43

Truth be told, I don't like this verse! It cuts straight to the core of my pride, selfishness and self-centeredness. I'd rather avoid it, but can't.

So, let's just get real, shall we? By nature, we are pleasure-seekers who pursue instant gratification. Rather than be content with what God has given us, we want to have the latest and greatest.

The iPhone 7 isn't enough when the iPhone 8 offers advanced options. Why watch TV on a 48" screen when 72" provides a better view? Why keep the spouse you vowed to love, honor and cherish when the colleague next to your workstation is more appealing?

Do you feel like you're getting poked in the chest? Me, too. God has our attention and has called us to live as the salt of the earth, a light to a dark world. How can we be salt when covetousness saturates us? How can we be light when greed blinds us?

Coveting happens when we see something others have and we want it. I completely relate to this. Colleagues at work look great in Lularoe leggings, so I think I need them. After all, I can't be the non-fashion-statement employee, can I? I need to keep up with the Jones' and everyone else.

Coveting also happens when we compare ourselves to

others and think we need to be just like them. Their appearance. Social status. Figure. Fitness level and everything in-between. Comparing ourselves to others happens when we take our eyes off God.

Coveting morphs into greed, a precursor to addiction. Simply stated, greed is a strong, often-times insatiable desire. It trickles into our minds as a want, becomes a thought-manifested “need,” and eventually a “must-have.”

The author of Ecclesiastes sums up the wear-and-tear of these choices: weariness beyond description. Exhaustion. Fatigue. Bone tired, sapping your emotional and spiritual energy.

Contentment, on the other hand, provides a settled peace, resulting in life and the energy to be who God declares you to be and do what He calls you to do.

Let’s find our satisfaction in God, and God alone. Let’s keep our eyes on Him, satisfied with His provision. Let’s take our eyes off ourselves and others, and fix our gaze on Him, satisfied with His person, presence and provision. I’m in, are you?

POINTS TO PONDER

1. How is God poking you in the chest with this devotional?
2. In what ways do coveting and greed manifest in your life?
3. How will you work to remove them?

Free to Be Satisfied

Written by:

Vashti Makupson

GALATIANS 5:13

Week 9

Day

44

Have you ever found yourself being angry because you can't have something you desperately desire? I know I have.

Living in Washington has gotten hard for this desert girl. I desperately long for the warm, desert sun and often get mad because I am always cold. In one of my moments of complaining and anger, God pegged me down with this, "Why are you despising my creation?"

My initial thought was, "OUCH! I'm sorry." As I prayerfully considered what He said, I realized it was an invitation towards satisfaction. My complaining was enslaving me. Rather than delighting in His creation and being thankful, my heart constantly bemoaned my physical condition.

Such were the Israelites! When God delivered them from Egypt, freeing them from slavery, they complained because they didn't have access to their favorite foods. They would rather live as slaves than live in freedom! Don't just take my word for it, hop on over to Numbers 11:4-35 and read it for yourself.

You may think, "What is wrong with them?" But the truth is, we are not that different. This can be seen in the story I shared with you a few paragraphs back. I was choosing to live in slavery to anger, rather than the freedom of being satisfied.

Here's the thing, we have been called to freedom! We have the freedom to live in a way that relates to salvation which is the means of being saved from ruin. Often times that will require saying "NO" to the things that enslave us. Things like: complaining, negativity, pride, gossip, anger, or anything that you run to for satisfaction.

When you feel the pull towards fleshly desires that enslave, view those as a warning signal and S.T.O.P!

Surrender: Surrender those fleshly desires.

Turn: Intentionally Turn to Him, inviting His Spirit to lead.

Observe: Observe/Notice your thoughts. Take them captive, replace them with truth.

Praise: Thank Him for freedom and Praise Him for being near.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What are some things that are enslaving you?
2. Where do you find your satisfaction? Food? Finances? People?
3. Take some time to S.T.O.P. and find your satisfaction in Him.

Growing in Contentment

Written by:

Chris McKinney

HEBREWS 13:5

Week 9

Day

45

There's a phrase that makes most adults cringe, causes stress, anxiety and fear. "We're moving!"

Some of you are Type A people. You have an emotional need to organize everything. You cringe at the amount of time it will take to organize in order to feel good about the move.

Those of you who are Type B don't have this drive. On the reverse, you cringe because you have to replace several items each time you move. You don't know where anything is!!

There's no better way to learn about someone than to help them pack their things, move, or clean up after the move. You learn about their habits, desires and what they value. There are so many emotional connections to things linked to a host of past experiences.

I've told myself that moving would be easier if we didn't have so many things. In the past two years, my wife and I have downsized and looking back, I can't imagine having all that stuff again. I didn't realize how clutter can affect our mindset. Not dealing with clutter brings lack of peace and contentment in our life.

In Hebrews 13:5, it says "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for He has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Contentment is something that had to grow in me. I grew up in a single parent home. We didn't have things others did and it was a source of frustration. Today, contentment boils down to what I want and what I need. Somethings I want, I don't always need. Our needs are pretty basic and anything beyond our basic needs should be prioritized.

Another way I find peace and contentment is when I give those wants over to God. Would I like a new car? Yes. Does my current set of wheels get me to where I need to go? Yes. So I tuck that desire away for when the time is right and I stop thinking about it.

Proverbs 15:16 says, "Better to have little, with fear for the Lord, than to have great treasure and inner turmoil."

Take a look around. Are there items that no longer serve a purpose? If so, it might be time to donate them. You can give things away or donate them to a charity. It's a small way to make a difference and show the love of Christ by providing a needed item to someone else. It takes practice to grow in the area of contentment. Know that you can do it and that having less doesn't mean you have nothing. Having less means you have the things that you need and that's a great way to move toward contentment.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Where and in what circumstance am I most content?
2. How does my desire for "things" affect my life?
3. What can I do to be more content?

“ Be thankful in all
circumstances, for this
is God’s will for you who
belong to Christ Jesus. ”

— *1 Thessalonians 5:18*

Week 10

**Gratitude and
Thanksgiving**

The “Trifecta”

Written by:

Troy Asher

1 THESSALONIANS 5:18

Week 10
Day
46

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. Oh, is that all? Well that’s easy... Ummm, maybe not!

Paul goes for the trifecta in today’s scripture reading. Paul gives us 3 very tough directions. He says, “Rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances.” Let’s break this down....

In this text, when Paul says, “rejoice,” the word is “simcha” which means “celebration or party.” What Paul is suggesting is that our lives should be a constant celebration or party. Why? Because he is encouraging us to look at life in light of eternity. When we are able to grasp the vision of what God has for us eternally then life will be a constant party!

When Paul says, “to pray continually” he uses the word “daven” which means “to constantly move your lips.” Most scholars believe what Paul is telling us is to constantly be one with God, to be connected to Him as one. The way we do this is by talking to Him through prayer. When I am really scared or in a tough predicament, I pray out loud to God over and over pleading with Him to save me or help me.

When Paul tells us “to give thanks.” The word here is “hodayah” meaning “thanks” in Hebrew and is very specific in what we are to give thanks for, simply giving thanks to God

for what He has done for us. Our salvation! This salvation comes through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul is instructing us to give thanks in ALL circumstances by having a heavenly mindset that rises above our circumstances.

In the last part of the verse, Paul uses the word “ratzon” which means “will or desire.” God’s will and desire for us on earth is love, peace, joy and hope.

However, we know there is a real enemy that wants to kill our souls, steal our joy, and destroy our hope. When we learn to focus on God and His desire for us, we can learn to do the things that Paul is directing us to. More importantly, we can have the life that God desires us to have.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What is your attitude like right now as you read this? Stop for a moment and think about your thoughts, and your attitude about your upcoming day.
2. As a percentage, how much of your attitude would you say is positive and how much is negative? (Example 60% positive 40% negative etc.)
3. How would your day be different if you decided to, “Rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstance?” Say this to yourself repeatedly today, then note at the end of the day as to how you feel.

Time to Break Out!

Written by:

Janet Caldon

PSALM 28:7

Week 10
Day
47

I live in a home where, at any given second, my husband can break out into song! It's beyond me that he has a melody for every moment, songs for any season, and lyrics for a lifetime. Sometimes I shake my head and wonder ... how does he do this?

Don't get me wrong, I appreciate music. My dad was a music teacher for nearly four decades. I listened to everything from opera and classical to country and a little bit of rock 'n roll, when I thought no one was the wiser. But, break out into song? Well, that's not my gig. Unless you're talking about Jesus! Then look out – a joyful noise might be coming your way!!!

David's gratitude drove him to worship. His knowledge of and relationship with God caused him to overflow with songs of thanksgiving. But, I believe it went deeper than that. I believe worship flowed out of him because intimacy with God had welled up within him.

David experienced his fair share of troubles. Goliath bullied him. Saul attempted to kill him. Philistines attacked him. At one point, David cried out to God saying, "Those who hate me without reason outnumber the hairs of my head; many are my enemies without cause, those who seek to destroy me." (Psalm 69:4)

In all his troubles, David learned to worship rather than wallow. Remain, rather than complain. Are we lifting our hands in surrender or running our mouths in protest?

Running? I'm not running anywhere these days, not even close. Jogging? Nope. Walking? Yes, but often with a limp. Even now as I write this devotional, I wonder. When will my knee feel better? When will I be able to do what I want, how I want and when I want it? Doesn't sound much like gratitude, does it?

God is showing me today that even though I can't bend my knee as I'd like, I can bow my heart. I can surrender to His will. I can be grateful for two strong legs, even though I have one weak knee.

Read our verse again. David trusted God with all His heart. God was his strength in weakness. He was his shield against every enemy. This is the God to worship with gratitude and praise! Will you do it?

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What keeps you from gratitude today?
2. In what ways, have you wallowed rather than worshipped?
3. Are you willing to bend your knee to the One who is worthy of worship?

Grateful for Godly Leadership

Written by:
Lina Asher

1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-13

Week 10
Day
48

As I was sitting outside by the river listening to the sounds of the rushing water and the beautiful chirping from the various birds around, the strangest thing occurred!

In the peace of this moment I heard a loud noise approaching. As I looked up in the sky, I saw hundreds of geese in what seemed to be a mad frenzy! Their loud honks seemed frantic and urgent. I noticed that these geese weren't flying in the usual V formation, but they were all out of line, scattered, looking dazed and confused.

I began recording the frenzied flock and after about 5 minutes they flew away, lost in confusion. I immediately took this to Lord and asked Him, "What was that about?" Almost as quickly, He reminded me that I was out there pondering what I should write about when it comes to gratitude and thanksgiving.

Then it hit me! I am grateful for the leadership of C3! The leaders the Lord has blessed me with. They are great leaders who are easy to follow. Men and women of Integrity, who love the Lord and want to serve Him with all their heart.

I was reminded how God has called Pastor Troy to lead the flock of C3. Sometimes it will get frenzied and frantic, but He has called him to lead well. Troy has been easy to follow as he

walks in this calling on his life, faithfully, lovingly, shepherding the flock.

I know some of you have had hurts in your past by unhealthy leadership, myself included. Let me dare to say, C3 leadership is different. In such a good way! I don't just say that because the pastor is my husband. I say that because I'm experiencing the blessings of being led by elders who are godly men and women, who are humble, imperfect (and will admit it), but who love and trust their Jesus to lead them as they lead others.

I believe we at C3 follow a V formation. We know who our leaders are and we follow. There isn't confusion or much "honking." We know if we have questions or concerns, we can ask anyone in leadership and they will spend time helping us in our confusion.

When we follow these leaders, that V formation stands for VICTORY!

As I'm grateful for all the blessings God has given me, godly leadership is one of my most treasured.

Thank you C3!

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Are you grateful for your leaders? How can you honor them today?
2. Be aware of times today where you feel like complaining or grumbling and turn it into gratitude and thanksgiving.
3. Gratitude and thankfulness combat selfishness and pride. Pray for a heart of gratitude.

Reasons for Gratitude

Written by:

Chris McKinney

EPHESIANS 2:8-10

Week 10

Day

49

In 1944, there was a teenage boy living in the mountains of Pavlovo, Czechoslovakia. One night soldiers came and gave everyone in the town one hour to pack their things and bring whatever they could carry. They were packed into cattle cars and transported by train to the Auschwitz concentration

camp during WWII.

They were left in a cattle car all night and the next morning taken into the camp. At one point in time the boy's father told him that he would be better off separating from him. His father's wisdom was the thing that kept Martin Greenfield alive.

Martin had experience inside the camp scrubbing Nazi uniforms with a bristle brush. He scrubbed one shirt so hard that the collar ripped. After the attending Nazi soldier beat him, he formed the shirt into a ball and threw it at Martin's face.

Martin was pulled aside by a nice man that taught him how to sew and perform a simple stitch. It was his first tailoring lesson.

Then the day came when 420,000 brave Americans came to fight and die to free Martin and others. They answered the call, and they knew a thankful nation would stand with them in support.

Ephesians 2:8-10 says, "God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from

God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago."

We were all dead in our sin. We had no hope of being saved. Jesus came to set us free from the prison of sin and death. He came to give us abundant life. Martin didn't have a choice to go to the German concentration camp. But, we have a choice to accept the gift of salvation freely given to us by Jesus. Jesus came of his own free will to fight and die for us so that we would be free. Just as the soldiers came to free those in the camp.

At the time of this writing, we're getting ready to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord. We remember the struggle, death and victory of our Lord over the consequences of our sin. There is nothing greater to be thankful for than for our salvation. This is probably one of the best reasons to show gratitude as a believer.

As a man who at age 15 was captured and taken to a German concentration camp where no one else in his family survived, Martin thanks God for his rescue and came to the United States to run a business as a tailor. Today, Martin is retiring from a business where he dressed high-profile officials and presidents so his children can carry on his legacy.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What does "hope in Jesus" mean to me?
2. How does knowing that Jesus saved me from the penalty of sin and death change my perspective?
3. How can I exhibit gratitude for what God has done for me?

Turn Yourself Inside Out

Written by:

Pat Caldon

1 THESSALONIANS 5:18

Week 10

Day

50

Really? “Give thanks in ALL things,” that seems like a tall order doesn’t it? Why does God command this? Well for starters, it is the rational and right thing to do in view of who God is and what He has done. James 1:17

What are the benefits of being thankful, besides just “doing the right thing?” God will always reward obedience. However, let’s look at this a little differently. Here are some benefits of being thankful:

BE THANKFUL TO BE HAPPY.

Have you noticed that generally the people who think mostly of themselves are the most miserable? Those who don’t recognize what has been given to them are never satisfied and are always looking for more. Thinking constantly of ourselves breeds an attitude of entitlement and discontent.

THANKFULNESS LEADS TO RELATIONSHIP.

Those who are filled with gratitude are fun to be around. They help others see beyond their circumstances. They point to the goodness of God and remind us that He is in control.

When you think outside of yourself you bring help and hope that draws others toward you in friendship. Do you find yourself at times feeling far from God?

In the Old Testament, the Israelites were often commanded to put up monuments to remember something that God had done for them. When we live our lives always looking for God's hand, even in the little things, we can't help but be drawn closer to Him. We will see His care more than our problems and love Him for it.

GRATITUDE ALIGNS US WITH REALITY AND OFFERS LIFE.

We live in a world with bodies that cry out to be heard and worshiped. In Heaven, there is continual praise for the only One worthy of praise. Lucifer deceived first himself and then 1/3 of the angels by denying the reality of who God is. He set himself above God in his mind and death was the result. God is life and everything else is death.

Let's be rational and not like Satan who focused on himself and lost the love and life of God.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What are some benefits of being thankful?
2. How can practicing gratitude change your perspective?
3. What is something you will do to begin practicing gratitude?

“ Because of your unfailing
love, I can enter your
house;

I will worship at your
Temple with deepest awe.

— *Psalm 5:7*

”

Week 11

Choosing Wisdom

Fear of God

Soul Craving

Written by:

Troy Asher

ECCLESIASTES 12:8-14

Week 11

Day

51

So often I find that we turn to God as a last resort. We try to fill our lives with many different things to satisfy the soul craving that we have.

We are all born with a spirit given to us by God's Spirit before we even breathe our first breath. (Psalm 119: 13-16) We all have a need for spiritual connection with God that we often times are not even aware of. We have a longing, a craving to be one with God on a spiritual level. Until we find it, our souls will always be in unrest.

Our solution to this "soul craving" is to fill it or feed it with things that our eyes and our flesh find pleasurable. Things like relationships, money, status, etc. When these things don't fill it we turn to more destructive things like sexual sin, drugs, alcohol, gambling and things of the world that lead us to addiction, hurt, and pain.

We find ourselves even further separated from the one true Healer of our souls and Supplier of our craving, God. He alone is the one true source of never ending satisfaction to our soul craving. In fact, He is known as the "Lover of our souls."

Today we read a very familiar scenario. Solomon, the writer of Ecclesiastes, spends 11 chapters talking about his life on this earth. He is a very old man at this point in his life and he gives a "tell all" biography of all of the things that he attempted to use to satisfy his soul craving. He tried money, women, wine,

power and even idol worship but nothing he tried filled his void, in fact he says over 35 times that everything on this earth is “meaningless!”

After telling us what not to do for 11 and a half chapters, Solomon tells us what TO do at the very end of the book. He says to “fear God and obey His commands.”

When I thought about this and meditated on what this really means, it dawned on me. This is such a peaceful way to live! If we have a healthy fear of God, we follow His commands and listen to His voice.

We don’t have to live with regret and shame from our past mistakes. We don’t have to medicate ourselves to numb the sting of our past. We don’t have to put pressure on ourselves to be anything more than a loved and cherished child of God!

Our souls no longer ache and yearn for the void to be filled because we can live our lives knowing we are loved and accepted by the lover of our souls.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What is the biggest worry or concern in your life?
2. What is keeping you from giving it to God and trusting that He will take care of it?
3. In what area do you need to follow God’s commands? Are you willing to give your life completely to Him today?

Stare at God

Written by:

Janet Caldon

PSALM 5:7

Week 11

Day

52

The Lord stopped me in my tracks this morning. It's been a beautiful journey writing on subjects for this devotional. He has spoken clearly, directing my thoughts and words. But, today is a different story.

Rather than write, He said rest. Rather than type, He said take a moment. This is holy ground.

I've read about it. We sing about it. We say that we stand on it, but do we? Really? Stand on holy ground? What does that even mean?

In this moment, He asked me not to just stand, but stare. "Look at Me. Gaze at me, for when you do, you will see Me as I am. Holy. Set apart. Worthy of your worship."

I am in awe. Not the kind of awe I experience when I look at Mt. Rainier or when I see an eagle soar above me. Rather, it is the type of awe that generates fear yet inspires worship. Deep awe. Reverential fear.

This fear creates questions. Do I check the gate of my heart before I walk through the doors of the church? Does awe reflect my attitude as I approach God in worship or do I rush in because it's routine? Am I casual with my Savior because I've become comfortable with my sin?

The Bible uses the word fear at least 300 times when referring to God. This repetitive theme compels me to pay

close and careful attention. I need to know what it means to fear God if I am to truly know God. If I want to truly know God, I must intentionally set aside time with Him and for Him. When I do this, I learn what it means to fear Him.

Two other words draw my attention in this verse: unfailing love. It is the door through which I can enter His house and worship with deepest awe. It is the door through which we all can experience Him in His fullness. His overwhelming beauty. The door through which we can approach His throne and know Him intimately, as a child knows their father. Unfailing Love!

These words coming off my fingers, onto my keyboard, on the screen in front of me and the page you now read, make me shake my head in wonder. I wonder what would happen if we regularly stopped and stared at God? Would we truly fear Him? Would we become the church He's called us to be? The one shining a light and changing the world?

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What does the "fear of God" mean to you?
2. When was the last time you stopped, and stared at God? What did you see? How did He change you?
3. How can you radiate His unfailing love to those around you?

Choose Wisely

Written by:

Danny Makupson

2 SAMUEL 24:14

Week 11

Day

53

Every day we are faced with choices. Sometimes like David, we find ourselves in desperate situations. I remember recently having compromised my job when a client signed a blank release of information, ROI. Something that should not be done, ever. However, I made a decision that would come back to bite me dearly.

The client denied signing the ROI. The client denied it in the presence of my supervisor and the medical records supervisor. Because I compromised, I had a choice to make. Deny it and try to save face. Tell the truth and lose my job. Or state a half truth and say there was a misunderstanding, blah blah stuff stuff stuff...

Much like David, I had to recognize my current situation. In the beginning of verse 14, David said, "I am in a desperate situation!" As the story goes, David had not made the best decision prior to finding himself in the jam he was in. David unwisely chose to number his army which was forbidden and was a demonstration of pride. In James 4:6 we read, "And, he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

David had a choice. Continue in pride or choose humility. He chose humility. In David's humility and wisdom God saw him. He demonstrated humility by building an altar to the

Lord and the Lord answered his prayer. You can read the outcome by going to 2 Samuel 24:25.

David understood that God is merciful. Even though it was tough, he'd rather let God deal with him than man. While sometimes people may have the best intentions, they sometimes can be influenced by convenience. I told the truth and believe God's grace spared me my job.

Are you facing a tough decision? If so, how do you know whether it is the right thing?

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Have you made a tough decision that resulted in divine correction? What was the outcome?
2. Do you have any unresolved situations that you feel God calling you to face? If so, take some time to seek His face to gain wisdom on how to move forward?
3. How have you been influenced by convenience? How did it impact you?

Worthwhile and Wonderful Wisdom

Written by:
Christina Sullivan

PROVERBS 9:10

Week 11

Day

54

Proverbs 9:10 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Typically, wisdom might be attained through careful study. If we want to know more about, say, the history of bubble gum, we might hit up Google or, for some more foot on pavement type, the library.

We would begin our search for knowledge by seeking it out in the ways we know how. We have an innate drive to seek answers to our questions. Children are the best examples of this natural curiosity. They explore and question everything, much to their parents annoyance at times.

In both cases, the history of gum or the child asking “why,” the desire to know the answers, to have wisdom, is approached from the same angle: How can I figure this out? What can I read or ask?

This is why I find this verse so interesting, it doesn’t say studying and asking are the beginning of wisdom. It doesn’t say knowing the whole bible is the beginning of wisdom. It says, “the fear of the Lord,” begins our wisdom.

There is something to be caught here. To see it, we must shift our perspectives from what we can learn from our own ability to what God can reveal to us through His boundless abilities.

To me that means this; humility before God and the recognition that He is more powerful, more knowledgeable, and more wise than I ever will be. It doesn't mean I should throw all reason to the wind, or not trust the good sense God gave me. And it doesn't mean we won't have wisdom. (See James 1:5)

It means when we humble ourselves in righteous awe of the Lord, we see the world differently. We see our problems differently, ourselves more clearly and God's grace more fully. That puts us in the perfect position to be ready for right, pure, just and good wisdom.

This wisdom might lead us to speak just the words at the right moment that uplift a broken friend. It might remind us to hold our tongue when our temper flares. It might just cause us to fall in love more deeply with the Master Orchestrator of the universe. For who better to be in awe of than the mighty God who blesses us with such wonderful and worthwhile wisdom.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. How can the fear of God lead to wisdom?
2. Is it easier to rely on God's wisdom or your own? Why?
3. Describe a time you sought and received God's wisdom.

Positive Fear

Written by:

Lina Asher

PSALM 147:11

Week 11

Day

55

If I'm honest, I've always struggled with the idea of fearing the Lord. Because, when I think of my Heavenly Father, I don't want to think of Him as someone I fear. I want to see Him as loving and kind.

In our healing ministry we work through a chapter on parental wounds. Most ladies have to address issues with their earthly fathers. Like me, some were abused physically, emotionally and verbally. It's devastating to hear their pain.

Then like me, they ask God to heal these wounds, give forgiveness and move forward in victory! I'm happy to say that my father and I have a wonderful relationship today. But during this process, we see that our relationship with our earthly fathers determines how we view our Heavenly Father. In these situations, they fear God and don't trust Him.

That type of fear is not the fear the Bible talks about when referring to fearing God. The Bible speaks to a reverent fear. Meaning awe, respect, honor and adoration. Basically, a fear that causes us to not want to disappoint Him. It helps us to turn from our sinful nature and to please Him with our actions.

In a recent marriage small group gathering we spoke about this exact topic. The consensus from around the room from the ladies was, "I don't want to think of God as someone I fear." These ladies all had unhealthy relationships with their earthly fathers.

However, there was one lady who was different. She spoke up and shared about her relationship with her father. She spoke of their beautiful, healthy and loving relationship. She didn't have anything negative to say about him. She could only say that she understood a healthy fear of the Lord, since she understood the healthy fear of her earthly father. She knew what it felt like when she disappointed her father, and to see his disapproval was enough for her to not do whatever it was again. She had true reverence, respect, adoration and love for him, which helped her to understand that healthy fear of God in her walk with Him.

She helped us all to see a clearer picture of a healthy fear, since ours had been skewed by unhealthy, earthly fatherly relationships.

God is a god of love. And He loves you unconditionally. He is worthy of our love, reverential fear and honor.

So remember, fearing God is a positive thing! It brings Him delight!

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Do you struggle with the word "fearing" God? Research what that really looks like for clarification.
2. Are you actively fearing the Lord? Think of ways to show Him reverence and honor.
3. Pray for a healthy fear of the Lord if you feel like this is an area that needs to be strengthened.

“Your love for one another
will prove to the world that
you are my disciples.”
—*John 13:35* ”

Week 12

**Worship and
Adoration**

The Lord Rules, Reigns, Gives and Blesses

Written by:
Troy Asher

PSALM 29

Week 12

Day

56

When I read Psalm 29, I try to imagine what David is doing. Where is he? What is he observing? What is going on in his life that is causing his awe and wonder of God?

In my conclusion, I believe all is calm when all of a sudden David observes a violent thunderstorm. His silence is broken by a loud clap of thunder and bright flash of lightning! I picture him sitting up in his bed and rushing to a window where he sits and observes the power of God through a storm.

I don't know about you, but when a really strong, violent storm comes around, I stop everything I'm doing and I observe it. I put down my phone, turn off my device, or walk away from the television and look out the window to observe the wonder and the majesty of God.

I often find myself wondering about God and His creation. How it must have sounded when God spoke things into existence. How booming His voice must have been as he created life out of no life. Planets, stars and solar systems out of nothingness.

Then, I imagine the intricacy of His creation of man. How he formed us out of the dust of the earth and breathed life into us. I imagine that sound to be an intimate whisper as He looked at us with pride and labeled us the crown and the pinnacle

of His creation. I can only imagine how He must have smiled on us. How He must have enjoyed the process of creating life! I can only imagine how He felt the first time He saw us smile with joy! It makes me think of how He must still enjoy the smiles and joy of His most favorite creation!

I absolutely love the way David ends this psalm that we read today. David reminds us that the Lord rules over the floodwaters. He reigns in power forever. David also reminds us that God gives us strength and blesses us with peace. In other words, as powerful, mighty and majestic as God is, He is still in love with His favorite part of creation...us!

God is worthy of our praise! He is worthy of our adoration and He is worthy of our love. Not because of anything that we can do, or have done, but because He first loved us. This is why we say along with the angels in heaven, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God almighty! The earth is filled with His glory!

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What part of creation makes you most in awe of God?
2. Take time today to focus on that thing and spend time in worship and adoration of Him.
3. How does it make you feel to know that God values you above all creation? Take time to thank Him for that today.

Worshiping Whom?

Written by:

Lina Asher

ACTS 17:22-23

Week 12
Day
57

Paul had already traveled city after city teaching about Jesus, when we find him in Athens. He was before the Athenian philosophers and scholars of the day and he began speaking to them by saying something that sounds somewhat complimentary!?!

He acknowledges that they seem very “religious.” When I was researching how Paul is using this word, it is better defined as “superstitious.” So, I’m not altogether sure if these scholars were receiving this as a compliment or a critique!

Paul is driven to speak about the fact that these so-called brilliant men, known throughout their region as men of great wisdom, worship at a shrine that reads, “To An Unknown God.” Paul is determined to help them understand there is a God that they are created to worship. He doesn’t want them to continue on in their ignorant, superstitious worship.

This story really makes me think! How can someone acknowledge a “god’s” existence, but not know or understand the god they are worshiping or sacrificing to? They admit there is a God, yet they don’t know him. These are things that make you go....HMMMM!

Paul takes this opportunity to explain who the one true God really is and He alone is worthy of our worship.

How many times in our own lives have we worshiped unknown gods? Of course, I'm speaking metaphorically here. I'm really talking about idols in our lives. Our modern-day idols.

If we are honest, we all have things that pull us away from God. There are temptations everywhere. We want what we want and we want to please self and others. We give into the flesh and forget what God wants from us.

We forget what His Word instructs. We need to be in His Word to know His Word! And, we need to fill our hearts and minds with His Word, in order to understand how worthy He is to be worshiped.

Paul knows we are created with hearts and minds for worship. Instead of worshiping an unknown god, he is teaching these men to worship the ONE TRUE GOD!

Let us grow in love and admiration for our God. Read His Word, seek His face, and worship the only God who is worthy!

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What are some things that pull you away from worshiping God?
2. Read God's Word. Learn about the God who is worthy of all praise and worship.
3. Take time today to come before God in full surrender and worship.

More Than a Song

Written by:

Chris McKinney

JOHN 13:35

Week 12

Day

58

When I think about worship, my mind goes to times in my life when I've stood in front of a group singing my heart out. Everyone is reaching out to God with so much passion that I feel like jumping up and down and letting out a scream of excitement.

It's those moments that developed a desire for the presence of God. Love of God's presence is so strong that worship is a natural expression of who I am.

Many great moments of clarity have come during worship. When I think about the lyrics and let my mind wander a bit, I sometimes hear God's voice. There's a still small voice that I hear in the midst of singing and thinking about who He is and what He's done for me. This happens for me when we come together in unity.

Something I read long ago said there is a big difference between a worship leader and a lead worshiper. Having been there, this hit home for me. There's a big difference between directing a group of people and worshiping, worshiping with all your heart to the point that others feel the presence of God so much that they want to join you.

This change in perspective gave me a new outlook on the definition of worship. It reminded me why we sing, why we gather together and why music and song are such powerful acts of unity.

Whether you sing in front of others or your audience is a bottle of body soap and another of shampoo, we can all worship God in the way we live.

How can we worship God with our lives? We read in John 13:35 that, “Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.” So, the common factor is love for one another. How can we show love? Love can be random acts of kindness or helping someone who isn’t expecting it. Doing something good for someone else when there’s nothing to gain.

Seeing opportunities takes practice. You have to slow down your pace to see what’s going on around you. We’re all guilty of having our nose so far into our phones that we don’t see the opportunities right in front of us. You never know who might need some extra encouragement today.

Can you imagine being so passionate about God that others can see it? We all have opportunities each day to show God’s love. Our challenge is to take advantage of those moments. To live like we’re disciples of Jesus by loving one another. In my mind, this is the greatest act of worship.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What does worship mean to me?
2. When have I been so passionate about God that it showed?
3. How can I worship God in my actions today?

How's Your DQ?

Written by:

Janet Caldon

2 KINGS 17:39A

Week 12

Day

59

What comes to mind when you think of the word “worship?” Music we sing at church? Knees bowed in reverence? Hands raised in surrender? They certainly are familiar images.

But, what if, in this moment, God wants to clarify worship by opening our eyes to things that vie for His attention? After all, worship means to regard the worth of something or someone with substantial respect, honor, and devotion.

God recently challenged me in devotion, opening my eyes to where I dedicate my free time. He understands my work schedule and the energy it requires. He also knows that my heart is to follow Him. Because of this, He pointed out that my devotion quotient was more than just a bit askew.

Netflix.

There, I said it! I had been spending a disproportionate amount of time watching my favorite shows on Netflix. Oh, I had my rationale. “It’s been a long day. The kids at school wore me out. I need to decompress.” He wanted me to know the shows were not worth the time I set apart for them.

Worth. There’s that word again. When I assign worth to something other than God to meet my needs it becomes idolatry. This may sound a bit harsh, but that doesn’t make

it untrue when compared to the command to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, followed by the promise that He will meet all our needs.

The last thing God wants is for me to become like the “thing” I worship rather than the One who is worthy of praise. He doesn’t want me to relax my standards by compromising what I watch. He doesn’t want me fixed on the natural, when the supernatural is available to me. And, while this challenge proved painful, I know that I am deeply loved.

We were created to worship. We cannot *not* worship, but we can choose what not to worship. We have a choice every moment of every day to choose what or who we will worship. Scripture calls us to worship God, to experience Him in all His fullness, beauty and glory. What a beautiful exchange!

POINTS TO PONDER

1. How’s your devotion quotient? How do you spend your free time?
2. What does God’s worth mean to you? Why is He so worthy of worship?
3. Spend time with Him today, declaring how He is worthy of praise.

Bring Your Offering

Written by:

Vashti Makupson

1 CHRONICLES 16:28-30

Week 12

Day

60

In today's passage, we catch a glimpse of the first thanksgiving song appointed by King David. After David's first attempt to move the ark resulted in the death of Uzzah, he refused to move the ark out of anger and fear. (2 Samuel 6:1-11) Three months later, he successfully moved the ark which culminated in a moment of worship. This is what we see in 1 Chronicles 16.

What I love about this story is that David was intentional about seeking God out despite his anger or fear! He lived a lifestyle of authentic worship. I'm not sure about you, but I know there was a period of my life in which anger and fear consumed me. Worship was the last thing on my mind.

All the years of rejection and abandonment had gripped my heart which resulted in the death of my joy. Much like David, I refused to move towards God's Presence because devastation, hurt, and grief consumed me. But here's the thing about God, He is relentless in His pursuit. He loved me far too much to leave me where I was.

He drew me close, leading me on a journey of healing, inviting me to present myself as an offering to Him. Presenting myself as an offering required a choice and a sacrifice. It required that I chose to say "no" to my fleshly desires and say "yes" to the things of the Spirit, with the sole purpose of honoring God.

Much like David, we must choose daily to worship God with our lives. We must choose to take another step to give God the abundant honor that is due His name. How do we honor Him? By living a life of obedience, intentionally coming before Him to get instructions, and boldly moving forward as we present our lives as a living sacrifice.

This requires surrender and humility, which are both at the heart of worship. Friends, will you make the choice to live a life of worship?

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Take a moment read David's song of thanksgiving found in 1 Chronicles 16:6-34. Now think about what season of life you are in. What verse captured your heart? Write it out.
2. In what area of life can you cultivate a lifestyle of worship, choosing to walk in obedience?
3. Spend some time in prayer, thanking God for who He is. Confess the ways you have been feeding your fleshly desires and ask God to give you a heart of obedience. Make the choice to worship Him daily in prayer.

“ Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

— *Philippians 2:3-5*

Week 13

**Serving and
Compassion**

I am Second

Written by:

Troy Asher

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-5

Week 13

Day

61

A few years ago there was a slogan that was very popular in Christian circles. You could see it printed on t-shirts, rubber wristbands, church billboards, etc. The idea was to boldly and publicly declare that Jesus is number one in my life and I am second. We are to elevate Jesus to His proper place as the Lord and

Leader of our lives.

One day I was golfing with my brother and a good friend of mine. My friend asked my brother about the “I am second” wristband he was wearing. My brother quickly explained that it was declaring what I just stated above, Jesus first, I’m second.

My friend half jokingly said, “Oh, so it’s Jesus, then you, then the rest of us, huh? Wow! You’re a pretty big deal!” My brother and I cracked up laughing at my friend’s take on the wristband and continued our round of golf.

One day as I was reading God’s Word, reflecting on today’s passage, I pondered that conversation and began to think more about that popular slogan. The more I thought, the more theologically flawed I realized the slogan was.

When we read the Bible we constantly read about humility and how important it is in God’s kingdom.

“The first will be last and the last will be first.”

“If you want to be great in God’s Kingdom learn to be a servant of all.”

“God will humble the proud and exalt the lowly.”

These are just a few verses that came to my mind. Wow! What the slogan should say is, “I am last.” Today, Paul tells us that we should live our lives with this in mind, everyone is more important than we are.

Paul says, “Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.”

Then he throws this out there, “We should all have the same attitude that Jesus had.”

I don’t know about you, but this is like the calculous of Christianity. This is right up there with, “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you!” Paul is asking us to do the impossible!

But, what if we actually tried to have this mentality? What would happen if we gave this max effort? What would our world look like if we all served one another? What would it look like if we thought more about others than we thought about ourselves?

I know this is a very tough challenge to end our devotional with, but I think it is something we should definitely strive for. What if we started in our own home? With our spouses? With our kids? What would our world look like in 15 years if we taught our kids this Biblical concept? What would our world look like?

Maybe we need to start a new slogan... I AM LAST!

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Why is it so hard for us to put others ahead of ourselves?
2. What keeps you from wanting to serve others?
3. Start today with your spouse and the people close to you by out-serving them. Make it a point to put their needs, wants and desires above yours. See how it makes you feel.

Saying Yes to God

Written by:

Chris McKinney

GALATIANS 5:13

Week 13

Day

62

Most of us are familiar with evangelist Billy Graham. In his time, it is estimated that he reached over 215 million people in more than 185 countries. He met with every president from Harry Truman to Barack Obama. He even led a crusade in Madison Square Garden for 12 weeks in 1957 which was covered by the national news. It seems that in most churches there is a handful of people who made their decision to follow Christ during a Billy Graham crusade.

We could go on and on about his accomplishments. His mission in life was to invite everyone to a relationship with Jesus Christ. He was used by God to win millions of people to Christ.

Billy Graham received Christ as his Lord and Savior in 1934 after hearing a sermon from Dr. Mordecai Ham, an evangelist in South Carolina.

Dr. Ham recalls, “Two young high school boys attended our meeting. They thought everything I said was directed their way, so they decided to take seats in the choir where I couldn’t point my finger at them. They didn’t pretend to be singers. They just wanted to be behind me. One night a man spoke to them during the invitation and said, ‘Come on, let’s go up front.’ Billy and his friend, Grady, both went to the altar. Billy was saved, and Grady dedicated his life to Christian service.”

Thinking about the events leading up to Billy Graham's conversion, I wonder how many people must have said yes to God. Can you imagine a different outcome if someone didn't obey God's calling to be there? Can you imagine if the minister didn't show up or if the venue was canceled?

Before we can serve others, we must first find our freedom in Christ. As our verse states, "For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But, don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love."

If you haven't made your decision to follow Christ, now is your time. Make that decision to follow the creator of the universe who loves you so passionately. He wants you to love Him and love others by serving.

It takes many different sets of hands and feet to win our friends and neighbors to Christ. Each person has a special set of gifts and talents they can use to serve God.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. When I read Galatians 5:13, how does this verse change my perspective?
2. How can I serve God with my talents?
3. Where can I use my talents in the church?

Serving is Not Automatic

Written by:

Ray Fraley

MATTHEW 25:40-45

Week 13

Day

63

Here is an interesting sequence of discussions.....
Jesus was asked, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?”

Jesus said, “To love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and the 2nd is like it, love your neighbor as yourself.”

Then, He was asked to explain.....”Who is my neighbor?”

Jesus answered by telling the story of The Good Samaritan, where a man in a foreign land stopped to help a distressed stranger after others had passed by, too busy or uninterested to help.

We read of Jesus teaching about the most important messages from God on the topic of service. One is found in Matthew 22. “Love Your Neighbor as Yourself” as shown in the above paragraph. The other is found in our scripture of the day, Matthew 25, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me.”

Our Lord wants us to follow Him in serving. He wants us to be “Good Samaritans” not only to family and friends, but also to people who are unknown to us, those in need. Sometimes, serving is as simple as basic things like a drink of water or a place to rest.

It’s easy to serve those we know and love. Right? But, are we willing to seek out and serve those who are not in the “know and love” group?

Remember this phrase, “they will know we are Christians by our love.” Are we known as Christians by our love? I can honestly say, it is hard for me to go very far out of my comfort zone to find needs out there. It takes time, it takes energy, it takes resources! Seems like I have enough to do without looking around for more...and for people I don’t even know!

But, Jesus is saying that we do it for Him!

Several Christmas seasons ago I gave two of my granddaughters, age 9 and 11, \$100 each on the condition that they give it away! Their eyes widened! “Just give it away,” they asked?

“Yep,” I said, to people you see who might need help and an extra dollar or two. They were off on an adventure on the 1st of December, knowing that it had to be gone by Christmas! What fun it was to watch their responses and actions. My object was to teach them the joy of giving (serving), which can be addictive once put into practice.

Because, we are doing it for Him! Quite an honor that even little ole’ you and me, insignificant as we are, can serve God! He told us so.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Grade yourself one to ten, with ten the best, within the realm of your possibility, how are you doing on serving others for our Lord?
2. If you have any thoughts of inadequacy on serving, what number is possible for you?
3. What specific thing or things would help move you to where you would like to be?

Serve Through Your Pain

Written by:

Janet Caldon

1 SAMUEL 12:24

Week 13

Day

64

It's hard to believe we are almost at the end of our devotional! I trust God has met you in your quiet time with Him, causing you to know Him more intimately and serve Him more passionately! Speaking of service, this is our theme for the final week.

Serving God when times are good is easy, isn't it? Marriage is great – serve God. Kids are obedient – serve God. Work is running smooth – serve God. Time and energy to serve seem effortless when peace abounds.

But, when challenges hit like a rip tide or hurricane-force trials blindsides you, it's not so easy. In fact, it feels downright impossible. How can we possibly serve God when cancer strikes? Or finances crumble? Or your teenage daughter tells you she's pregnant? Or your husband tells you he's leaving? Or your boss calls you into his office and tells you Friday is your last day.

Serve God? Really?

Yes, really.

Trials are not an excuse to run from God, rather they are opportunities to run to God. In fact, I am going to be as bold as to say that they are your opportunity to demonstrate that He is God! Imagine what would happen if you served God after being served divorce papers? Imagine what would happen after you received notice of bad news and you stepped forward, serving with good news? The kind that saves souls?

Samuel knew the Israelites needed a reminder. It's not about King Saul, it's about the Most High King. Look past your emotions and remember - He is good no matter who is in charge. He has done great things regardless of present circumstances. Fear Him. Serve Him. Remember what He has done for you.

Do you? Remember what He has done for you? We all need reminders. Here are just a few...

He loved you when you were His enemy.

He pursued you when you ran from Him.

He gave His life for you.

He breathed life into your hopeless heart.

He breathed faith into your deflated lungs.

He gave you the victor's crown when all you knew was defeat.

He gave you promises that last a lifetime.

And this promise is sure ...He is with you! Now. In this present moment, sitting alongside you as you read these words. Calling you to rise, stand up and serve. Not yourself – Him. The One True God. Let's rise with the presence He promises, the powers He provides and the provision of His gifts to be light in this present darkness!

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Is there anything keeping you from serving God?
2. Is there something you're holding on to – anger, bitterness, sorrow, shame – that keep you from using your gifts for His good and glory?
3. Will you make yourself accountable to someone in the area of service?

Pay it Forward

Written by:

Lina Asher

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4

Week 13

Day

65

Have you ever been in line somewhere, or in a drive thru where you are getting ready to purchase something, and you get up to the cashier, who is smiling from ear-to-ear, and they excitedly tell you that your purchase has been paid for? I have been the recipient of this a few times in my life and it touches my heart every time. It's called "Paying it forward." It's a selfless, generous act of a stranger for no purpose other than to serve and bless another.

Sadly, we don't see or hear about this very often. Probably, because people are too busy and self-absorbed. In this day and age we are bombarded by, "taking care of #1!" The purchase of self-help books and seminars is on the rise. We are simply focused on self!

Self is the enemy of service! Being focused on self fosters a heart of indifference towards others. We lack compassion, we are distracted, which makes serving others insignificant. But, Jesus shows us that He came not to be served, but to serve. (Matthew 20:28) And, He served with love and compassion. He was the greatest example of selfless living. And, we are called to reflect the quality and character of Christ.

God is a God of compassion. He wants us to have hearts of compassion and service. With a heart of compassion, we have an understanding of another's distress combined with a

longing to help alleviate it. It takes our mind off of us and puts it where it belongs.

The above scripture tells us that God will have compassion over us and comfort us during difficult times. He is also saying that we are to use those times to share with others. Serving others by sharing our story.

When we use our story for His glory, to help others toward healing and restoration, we are serving Christ the way we were created to do.

Let's all practice "paying it forward" by serving others and not self.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What can you do today to pay it forward?
2. If you aren't serving somewhere yet, take the step to reach out and find where there is a need you can meet, and begin serving.
3. Pray for a heart of compassion and service so that self does not stand in the way of service.