

VOL.10

BETWEEN THE
LINES

a frontline devotional

DEDICATION

This devotional is
dedicated to all those
who choose to follow
Matthew 6:33 every day.
“Seek First The Kingdom
of God.”

Thank you to our faithful
Youth Staff who, by the power of the Holy
Spirit, poured out of themselves to
complete this amazing devotional as a tool
to equip the body of Christ through
the power of the Word!

...taking it by FORCE!
Paulie & Nikki



CONTENTS

DAY 1 **1 JOHN 5:14-15**
What's On Your Heart Today?

- Nikki

DAY 9 **PSALM 139:1-4**
Where is Your F.A.I.T.H? (Part 3)

- Jasmine

DAY 2 **PSALM 122:1**
Change Your Perspective

- Miss Dawn

DAY 10 **PSALM 23:4**
Feeling Surrounded?

- Joey

DAY 3 **MATTHEW 16:24**
Roadside Assistance for the Journey

- Mr. George

DAY 11 **JOB 11:7-9**
God is Not a Surface Dweller (Part 1)

- Anthony B

DAY 4 **2 CORINTHIANS 6:14**
You Are Who Your Friends Are

- Joey

DAY 12 **1 CORINTHIANS 13:1**
Truth in Love

- Bre

DAY 5 **MATTHEW 5:3-11**
The Beatitudes

- Paulie

DAY 13 **MATTHEW 18:21-22**
A Time to Forget

- Miss Lois

DAY 6 **EXODUS 10:13**
Wind in the Word (Part 1)

- Niki

DAY 14 **EPHESIANS 3:17-18**
The Immeasurable Love of God

- Nikki

DAY 7 **2 TIMOTHY 3:1-5**
Don't Follow the World

- Mr. George

DAY 15 **EXODUS 20:5**
Jealous?

- Jamie

DAY 8 **JOHN 15:11**
Joy Vs. Happiness

- Amanda

DAY 16 **ROMANS 11:33-34**
God is Not a Surface Dweller

- Anthony B



CONTENTS

DAY 17 **PSALM 91**
Hide and Seek

- Miss Dawn

DAY 25 **LUKE 10:17-20**
Hitchhikers

- Yvonne

DAY 18 **ACTS 17:28, ROMANS 8:9**
Wind in the Word (Part 2)

- Niki

DAY 26 **HOSEA 4:6**
Knowledge

- Amanda

DAY 19 **EPHESIANS 2:10**
You Are a Masterpiece

- Yvonne

DAY 27 **ROMANS 3:3-4**
God is Healing Our Land

- Miss Lois

DAY 20 **PROVERBS 21:1-2**
The Watercourse

- Paulie

DAY 28 **ECCLESIASTES 2:26**
What Makes You Happy

- Mr. Tom

DAY 21 **PROVERBS 15:1**
Speaking Softly

- Mr. Tom

DAY 29 **EPHESIANS 1:5-7**
The Immaculate Reception

- Carrington

DAY 22 **PROVERBS 3:5-6**
Where is Your F.A.I.T.H? (part 4)

- Jasmine

DAY 30 **JOHN 12:47, REVELATION 3:20**
Knock Knock

- Jamie

DAY 23 **EPHESIANS 6:12**
True Enemy

- Bre

DAY 31 **ISAIAH 26:3**
Are You Distracted?

- Mr. George

DAY 24 **EPHESIANS 4:31-32**
Breaking the Bonds of Unforgiveness

- Carrington



PREFACE

What a blessing it is to be able to spend time in the presence of God! I'm reminded of a song that we sing in church that says, "I need you more, more than yesterday, I need you more, more than words can say."

If you are reading this, then you understand the truth of those words. Our need for God grows with each passing day. Thankfully, when we take the time to seek out His truth, His direction, His love, and His instructions, we can be sure that He will show up every time.

God is always faithful! I pray that as you seek the Lord in this time of devotion, your hope is restored, your mind is renewed, and that you gain wisdom, understanding, and specific instructions for your day.

Let your light shine,
Bre

WHAT'S ON YOUR HEART TODAY?

“AND THIS IS THE CONFIDENCE THAT WE
HAVE TOWARD HIM, THAT IF WE ASK
ANYTHING ACCORDING TO HIS WILL HE
HEARS US. AND IF WE KNOW THAT HE
HEARS US IN WHATEVER WE ASK, WE
KNOW THAT WE HAVE THE REQUESTS
THAT WE HAVE ASKED OF HIM.”
- 1 JOHN 5:14-15

God, your Heavenly Father, wants to hear what is on your heart. He desires to listen to you, talk to you, and speak to you. God’s plan of sending Jesus was to give us access to His presence. Now we have an open door to spend time with Him and He is calling for us to do so.

The starting point is to know that God, yes the Almighty God of the Universe, loves you so deeply that He wants time with you! Not to minimize who He is in His Majesty, but to magnify His love for you. His love is so deep that it is calling for you to come into this relationship with Him, that you can freely share what’s on your heart. From your hurts to your joys, your challenges and your triumphs, and all the mundane in between, God wants to walk through them all with you.

Our prayer time can be when we are walking, doing a task, or sitting quietly. Prayer is simply talking to God. Think of having a friend on Face Time at anytime doing anything; you can be in God’s presence. Knowing that God desires to hear you pray and that He is waiting to respond to you is a wonderful privilege we have as His children. Take the time to share what’s on your heart with Him!

What do you want to share with the Lord today?

What is He saying back to you about that?

Walk with the King...
Nikki

CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE

“I WAS GLAD WHEN THEY SAID UNTO ME, 'LET US GO TO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD.'”

- PSALM 122:1

ADDITIONAL READING: PSALM 84:4,
PROVERBS 3:6, PROVERBS 3:9-10,
PROVERBS 11:25, MALACHI 3:10,
MATTHEW 6:33

When you wake up on a Sunday morning, what is your attitude about coming to church? When we've had a busy week, we sometimes look at going to church on a Sunday morning as just another place we are obligated to be in our busy lives. If church seems like a chore, we need to change our perspective. We have to remember that Sunday is the FIRST day of the week, not the last. That means if we start our week by coming to God's House on Sunday to worship Him and hear the Word through our Pastor, our spirit will be built up and we will receive wisdom from God for the week ahead. When we start our week by sowing our tithes, our finances will be blessed and the devourer will be rebuked for our sake. When we start our week by taking the opportunity to sow encouragement to others in our church family, we position ourselves to reap a harvest of encouragement in our own lives as we need it.

God will always bless us when we acknowledge Him and put Him first. Don't miss the opportunity to start your week by coming to God's House. When you really think about how precious it is to start your week by putting God first, you'll have the same attitude that David had. You'll be glad when they say, "it's time for church!"

Be salt and light,
Miss Dawn

ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE FOR THE JOURNEY

“THEN JESUS SAID TO HIS DISCIPLES, 'IF ANY OF YOU WANTS TO BE MY FOLLOWER, YOU MUST TURN FROM YOUR SELFISH WAYS, TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW ME.'”
- MATTHEW 16:24

Some of Jesus’ teachings in the Gospels seem to have “road signs” to them:

STOP: “Go, sin no more.” (John 8:11)

*Jesus’ instruction to the adulterous woman can be seen as a vital first step in making a change in your life. Repent of the sin and proceed.

GREEN LIGHT: “Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

*Jesus’ words clear the road for believers to talk about Him. He promises to work through the words and deeds of His followers to accomplish amazing things in other people’s lives.

YIELD: “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. Also, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-39)

*Believers yield to God by putting His Word and works at the top of their priority list. They also yield their time, treasures, and talents to others in need.

ONE WAY: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man can come to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6)

*Jesus’ words tell us that putting your faith in anything other than Him is a risk you don’t want to take.

DO NOT ENTER: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God.” (Matthew 19:24)

*People can’t enjoy what Jesus has in store for them if their hearts belong to wealth, fame, power, convenience, or anything else that squeezes out a commitment to God.

PROCEED WITH CAUTION: “Don’t let anyone mislead you.” (Matthew 24:2)

*As followers of Jesus, we need to move more carefully to examine people who claim to have the inside track on the truth. You must see how closely they align with the Scriptures.

**Question only you can answer! Am I following the road signs in front of me?

Confession for today: “In the Name of Jesus, Holy Spirit I ask for your assistance to please lead and guide me, pointing out each “road sign” as I journey through my life. Thank you for your faithfulness.”

Stay Connected
Mr. George

YOU ARE WHO YOUR FRIENDS ARE

“DON’T TEAM UP WITH THOSE WHO ARE
UNBELIEVERS. HOW CAN RIGHTEOUSNESS BE A
PARTNER WITH WICKEDNESS? HOW CAN LIGHT
LIVE WITH DARKNESS?”

- 2 CORINTHIANS 6:14

ADDITIONAL READING: 2 CORINTHIANS 6:15-18

Now I am sure every person reading this has heard a parent, family member, or educator say, “don’t hang with the wrong crowd.” This isn’t said by just Christians, but is a basic concept of this world: bad company corrupts good. In this same aspect, God warns the Israelites many times throughout the old testament not to associate too closely with foreigners. What God is warning us of is forming these alliances or bonds with people that have completely different values and belief systems than we do as Christians. The foreign people around the Israelites worshipped many gods and performed immoral rituals. God knew how influential humans can be and clearly felt the need to warn his people of these foreigners. God wants you to be focused on the task at hand, His perfect and blessed plan. Take a look at who you are really friends with at school or work and see how this is impacting you spiritually. Self-reflect on how it is affecting your character.

Some of you might be asking, “but God wants us to love everyone and save the lost right?” This is very true. He wants us to shine His light and make a difference with those around us every day! He wants us to witness that Christ died for them so they can have the chains that bind them broken! We can do this without getting wrapped up and incorporated in their lives. God wants our closest relationships to be with those who hold our same values and beliefs in line with the God we worship! People should be hanging out with people that are headed in the same direction in life, people who love God and who will help us love Him more and more! Put people and friends around you who will spiritually build you up and people that you can build up also.

Be the light and the salt of this world, but choose very wisely by asking God who you should have the closest relationships with, because this could make or break you in your walk of life. Do you have friends who pull you down spiritually? How can you limit or reshape these friendships to change how they affect you?

God is good... all the time... all the time...

Joey

THE BEATITUDES

“BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN, FOR THEY WILL BE COMFORTED. BLESSED ARE THE MEEK, FOR THEY WILL INHERIT THE EARTH. BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR THEY WILL BE FILLED. BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL, FOR THEY WILL BE SHOWN MERCY. BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART, FOR THEY WILL SEE GOD. BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS, FOR THEY WILL BE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD. BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED BECAUSE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. BLESSED ARE YOU WHEN PEOPLE INSULT YOU, PERSECUTE YOU, AND FALSELY SAY ALL KINDS OF EVIL AGAINST YOU BECAUSE OF ME.”

- MATTHEW 5:3-11

If we look at the Beatitudes, we can see that they are listed in a very specific order of a person's spiritual growth as they live a Christ-like life. From "Blessed are the poor in spirit," which is the very first moment in our lives when we realize that the world has nothing to offer us and we begin to see that we are empty inside, despite all of our worldly possessions, relationships, and our status in life, to the last Beatitude, "Blessed are those who are persecuted," when we get to that point in our lives, when we are living for God to such a degree that we find JOY in the persecution we face for what we believe. The joy comes when we see past all that the world has to offer us and we are so fixed on eternity and our heavenly prize that the ridicule and abuse that we may face here on earth does not make us falter from running the race and fighting the good fight of faith. It is the same joy that Jesus experienced when He went to the cross for us. He found joy in His persecution and execution because He saw what was waiting for Him and all of humanity on the other side of His crucifixion.

Live each day knowing that as you serve the Lord and grow in Him, He promises us each day will start out with Him saying you are “Blessed.”

Seek Him First!

Paulie

WIND IN THE WORD (PART 1)

“AND MOSES STRETCHED FORTH HIS ROD OVER THE LAND OF EGYPT, AND THE LORD BROUGHT AN EAST WIND UPON THE LAND ALL THAT DAY AND ALL THAT NIGHT; WHEN IT WAS MORNING, THE EAST WIND BROUGHT THE LOCUSTS.” (HE ALSO SENT A WIND TO LIFT UP THE LOCUSTS AND DRIVE THEM INTO THE RED SEA) “THAT I MIGHT SHOW PHARAOH AND HIS SERVANTS MY SIGNS (OF DIVINE POWER, AND THAT YOU MAY RECOUNT IN THE EARS OF YOUR SON AND YOUR GRANDSON WHAT I HAVE DONE IN THE DERISION OF THE EGYPTIANS AND WHAT THINGS I HAVE REPEATEDLY DONE THERE - MY SIGNS OF DIVINE POWER - THAT YOU MAY KNOW AND RECOGNIZE THAT I AM THE LORD.”
- EXODUS 10:13

In the Old Testament, The Lord uses wind to show us His nature. He used it to demonstrate His mighty working power not only to those present, but to generations to come, “that it might be recounted in the ears of their sons and grandsons.” In this passage, The Lord does something terrible and extreme. The plagues sent upon the land were to show Pharaoh that God confirms His Word and purposes. The Words of Truth divinely inspired and spoken by Moses (“let my people go”) were meant to agitate the status quo to bring about a mighty shift. Man said ‘no,’ but that will never thwart the plan of God, nor will it disturb His timing! God will never speak a word to you and I and not follow it with signs to confirm it. We must remain steady as Moses and His people did, to experience the wonder works of our Mighty God. The Old Testament is filled with other uses of wind as a word picture of God’s mighty nature. In Ecclesiastes it describes what people can chase after, the fleeting things of life instead of the permanence of salvation and Kingdom living. In the Psalms it is used to demonstrate God’s movement – He carries wind in His fists, He walks on the wings of the wind, the wind fulfills His orders, He brings wind out of His storehouses and treasuries, and He makes wind His messengers. In Daniel 7:2, wind is described as social and political agitations that stir up the nations of the world.

Let’s reflect on these things and remember that we serve the same wonder working God as He who demonstrated His power to change Pharaoh's mind. God will never leave His people forsaken. He carries wind in His fists, and creates movement in our personal lives to bring about His mighty plan.

Your sister in Christ,
Niki

DON'T FOLLOW THE WORLD

“DON'T BE NAIVE, THERE ARE DIFFICULT TIMES AHEAD. AS THE END APPROACHES, PEOPLE ARE GOING TO BE SELF-ABSORBED, MONEY HUNGRY, SELF-PROMOTING, STUCK UP, PROFANE, CONTEMPTUOUS OF PARENTS, CRUDE, COARSE, DOG-EAT-DOG, UNBENDING, SLANDERERS, IMPULSIVELY WILD, SAVAGE, CYNICAL, TREACHEROUS, RUTHLESS, BLOATED WINDBAGS, ADDICTED TO LUST, AND ALLERGIC TO GOD. THEY'LL MAKE A SHOW OF RELIGION, BUT BEHIND THE SCENES THEY'RE ANIMALS. STAY CLEAR OF THESE PEOPLE.”
- 2 TIMOTHY 3:1-5

We as Christians must not fall into the trap of the enemy (Satan) and be like the rest of the world. That's why building your relationship with God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit is more critical than ever. Reading the Word of God and understanding what it means to you on a daily basis, praying (simply talking to God), and being a doer of the Word. This isn't a time to be afraid, it is a time to walk in love no matter how hard it may seem. When Jesus spoke about keeping His Commandments, He wasn't only speaking of the Ten Commandments. He was talking about walking in the Commandment of Love – doing what He tells us to do and speaking what He tells us to say in His Word. (John 13:34-35).

Jesus spoke in John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you, not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

Paul wrote in Philippians 4:7, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will protect your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Also read Philippians 4:8 & 9).

The Holy Spirit (The Comforter, Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengtheners, and Standby) is here and in your life. He will lead you, guide you, and get you through every situation that you may be involved in, even your everyday life with its ups and downs. Ask Him to help you, because you can count on Him always!

Confession for today: “In Jesus' name, I am born of Love and I will allow the Love of God that is within me to be in every situation that I am in today.”

Stay Connected
Mr. George

JOY VS. HAPPINESS

“I HAVE TOLD YOU THESE THINGS SO THAT MY JOY
AND DELIGHT MAY BE IN YOU, AND THAT YOUR JOY
MAY BE MADE FULL AND COMPLETE AND
OVERFLOWING.”
- JOHN 15:11

Oftentimes when we read about joy in the Bible, we confuse it with happiness, even though they are not the same thing. Happiness is temporary and tends to be externally prompted. It is based on other people, things, places, thoughts and events. Happiness is external. It is dependent on outside situations, people, or events to align with our expectations so that the end result is our own happiness. Joy, on the other hand, is internal. Joy is not affected by changing emotions, circumstances, or external forces. Our joy comes from the Lord. We feel joy when we are spiritually connected to God. There are plenty of things in this world we can do that might allow us to feel bliss or pleasure, but ultimately they leave us feeling empty.

Joy stays with us even when things around us don't look so great. James 1:2-4 says, “Consider it nothing but joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you fall into various trials. Be assured that the testing of your faith [through experience] produces endurance [leading to spiritual maturity, and inner peace]. And let endurance have its perfect result and do a thorough work, so that you may be perfect and completely developed [in your faith], lacking in nothing.” Many people would say that you aren't happy while you're suffering. We are not called to be happy, but to have joy. The origin of the word joy comes from the Latin word gaudia which means inward joy, gladness, delight.

As we grow spiritually, we begin to come into greater contact with this inherent joy that is given to us from the Lord. As you go through your week ask yourself, “am I experiencing Joy from the Lord, or am I experiencing happiness based on external experiences?”

Love and Nuggs,
Amanda

WHERE IS YOUR F.A.I.T.H? (PART 3)

“O LORD, YOU HAVE SEARCHED ME [THOROUGHLY] AND HAVE KNOWN ME. YOU KNOW MY DOWN SITTING AND MY UPRISING; YOU UNDERSTAND MY THOUGHT AFAR OFF. YOU SIFT AND SEARCH OUT MY PATH AND MY LYING DOWN, AND YOU ARE ACQUAINTED WITH ALL MY WAYS. FOR THERE IS NOT A WORD IN MY TONGUE [STILL UNUTTERED], BUT, BEHOLD, O LORD, YOU KNOW IT ALTOGETHER.”
- PSALM 139:1-4

ADDITIONAL READING: JAMES 4:8

- Focus** - a center of activity, attraction, or attention
- Action** - the accomplishment of a thing usually over a period of time
- Inseparability** - seemingly always together: very intimate
- Trust** - assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something
- Hunger** - a strong desire

I can name a handful of friendships throughout my life where we were described as inseparable. I think that’s because in order to have that deep of a friendship, it takes some work on both ends. Both people have to be willing to spend the time getting to know one another. Moreover, they need to actually enjoy each other’s company. I can think of a couple of situations where I was forced to spend time with someone I didn’t really care for. I can honestly say I never went out of my way to get to know them more than I had to. But, if it was someone who I enjoyed being around, I made sure I was available. The same goes for our walk with God. Would your relationship with God be considered close? Are you and God inseparable? Or do you often let things wiggle their way into God’s rightful place in your life? God has already done His part. He is willing and loves to spend time with you, so much so that He knows you inch to inch. He knows what you will say before you say it. He knows your future and erases your past, all to be with you. If you are struggling with having faith in God, it may be time to check out your relationship with Him.

What are some things that get in the way of your prayer/devotion time and how can you remove those things to leave time for God?

Find peace in His embrace,
Jasmine

FEELING SURROUNDED?

“EVEN THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE DARKEST VALLEY, I WILL FEAR NO EVIL, FOR YOU ARE WITH ME; YOUR ROD AND YOUR STAFF, THEY COMFORT ME.”
- PSALM 23: 4

ADDITIONAL READING: PSALM 91:14-16

This insert comes from a worship song that I cannot get enough of as of late. The song is SURROUNDED by the Upper Room. Like many devotions before this one, I implore you to spend time worshiping your Creator each day! This is so vital in your relationship with God! Like the song says numerous times, “this is how I fight my battles!” We are meant to fight our battles in life not in the flesh and blood as this world does, but in the spirit through worship, praise, prayer and meditation! The main part of the song starts to talk about being surrounded by the things of this world, but what we need to know is that God surrounds us, so what could be wrong! What fear? What disappointment? What overwhelming feeling could OUT SURROUND GOD? NONE! The lyric goes, “It may look like I’m surrounded, but I am Surrounded by You!” What an anointed statement! No matter how surrounded you feel today, no matter what you are facing today, know that God surrounds you and has you in His arms.

I wanted to encourage you with something as you embark in new endeavors in life. This was something I was encouraged with by my wife while going through some of the most difficult phases of my career. She always told me, “Do you think that God got you to this place to let you go now?”

If God brought you to that college or gave you that promotion at work and you feel overwhelmed now that you are there, know that God is a God of Completion! He sees you 100% through the blessing and the door that He has opened for you. He would never leave or forsake you in the middle of a blessing! Hold on to this truth as you embark on the new adventures and blessed doors that only God can open in your life!

Thank you, to my beautiful bride, for being the spiritual powerhouse you are!

Are you feeling overwhelmed today? How are you going to overcome and fight back with those things that are overwhelming you? Fight back in the Spirit!

God is good... all the time... all the time...

Joey

GOD IS NOT A SURFACE DWELLER (PART 1)

**“CAN YOU FIND OUT THE DEEP THINGS OF GOD, OR
CAN YOU BY SEARCHING FIND OUT THE LIMITS OF THE
ALMIGHTY [EXPLORE HIS DEPTHS, ASCEND TO HIS
HEIGHTS, EXTEND TO HIS BREADTHS, AND
COMPREHEND HIS INFINITE PERFECTION]? HIS WISDOM
IS AS HIGH AS THE HEIGHTS OF HEAVEN! WHAT CAN
YOU DO? IT IS DEEPER THAN SHEOL (THE PLACE OF
THE DEAD)! WHAT CAN YOU KNOW? LONGER IN
MEASURE [AND SCOPE] IS IT THAN THE EARTH, AND
BROADER THAN THE SEA.”**

- JOB 11:7-9

The Holy Spirit dwells in a realm so deep, it proves difficult for us to even scratch the surface of it enough to hear a small whisper from Him. The Bible clearly states here that we could never reach the depths of God, but wouldn't it be amazing if we could dig deep enough to hear an audible voice from the Almighty, like they did in the Old Testament? What's happened to humanity? Have we become shallow in modern times, so focused on our natural world that we invest little to nothing in the unseen things of the spirit realm? Look at how much time, effort, and resources are devoted to researching, studying, testing, teaching, building, improving, all for earthly things, and as these things grow more complex, more time and effort is needed to pursue them further. Truly, this world possesses a mesmerizing wonder and beauty that man could never recreate, and it is all for our "enjoyment," (1 Timothy 6:17) but there was a time when man did not devote so much to earthly things alone; a time where even the "sinner" of the day had enough depth to hear the audible voice of God.

It's no wonder that the Word that is sown is so quickly choked out by the cares of this world like in Mark 4:7. Mankind has been sowing most, if not all, of his energy into earthly things so that those earthly things grow so unnaturally large and important—as if pumped full of steroids—that they suck all the nutrients out of the soil and overcrowd the seed of the Spirit. And these overgrown “trees” haven't just been growing for a single generation. It's been hundreds and even thousands of years. Since the beginning: the time of Adam and Eve (more on that in Part 2).

In spite of all our earthly distractions, God, as He has done since the beginning, has continued to focus on the things of the Spirit: how He can bring about His plans in our lives. Plans that would produce a spiritual harvest and that would benefit humanity in a way humanity desperately needs. Plans to bring mankind back to a place where his efforts would once again be devoted to spiritual things and diverted away from earthly things. A place where man's first thoughts in the morning are of God and His precious love, and the first person he goes to for advice is the Holy Spirit. "...ever be filled and stimulated with the [Holy] Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18).

Pursue your purpose in Him,
Anthony B.

TRUTH IN LOVE

“IF I SPEAK WITH THE TONGUES OF MEN AND OF ANGELS, BUT HAVE NOT LOVE [FOR OTHERS GROWING OUT OF GOD’S LOVE FOR ME], THEN I HAVE BECOME ONLY A NOISY GONG OR A CLANGING CYMBAL [JUST AN ANNOYING DISTRACTION].”

- 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1

The Bible tells us to go into the all the world and preach the gospel. As ambassadors of Christ, we need to spread the good news that Jesus died for the sins of man and that He is the only way to the Father. But knowing all the right things to say is not enough. How we speak the truth of the gospel is just as important. God is love, and if we leave out love then we are leaving out the most important part of the gospel. That tender love that we experienced when we first came to know Christ and accept His forgiveness for our sins is the same love that God wants us to emulate towards others. It is through Christ’s love that we are forgiven in the first place, and out of this same love that we are able to love others. This verse in 1 Corinthians says that if we are lacking this love then we become “an annoying distraction.” If our purpose as a believer is to bring others to Christ, then the last thing we should be is a distraction. The word distraction also means interference or hindrance. I don’t know about you, but I want to be used by God to further His kingdom, not to be a hindrance to His plan. So if you find that it is hard for you to love people in the world, take a moment to ask God to search your heart and reveal to you why. Ask God to remind you of His love for you so that out of that you can have compassion for others and show them that same love.

Confession for today: “Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for loving me and revealing that love to me in a powerful way by sending your Son to die on the cross. Forgive me if I have lacked love and compassion for others and have become a hindrance in any way. Lord, give me a fresh realization of Your love for me so that I may pour it out onto the people around me. I desire to be used by You to further Your kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen.”

Let your light shine,
Bre

A TIME TO FORGET

“LORD, HOW MANY TIMES SHALL I FORGIVE MY BROTHER WHEN HE SINS AGAINST ME? UP TO SEVEN TIMES? JESUS ANSWERED, 'I TELL YOU, NOT SEVEN TIMES, BUT SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN TIMES'

- MATTHEW 18:21-22

Most of us love thinking about fond memories around Christmas time, but sooner or later we run across some we would like to forget. The sting of parents or friends criticism, broken promises, rejections, or disappointments. What do we do with memories like that? Do we drag them along from year to year or can we leave them behind? The fact is that we must leave them behind, and there is only one way to do that: forgiveness. Forgiving sounds easy, yet not many of us actually do it. We treat forgiveness like an option, something that we can take or leave, but it's not. It is a basic requirement for every Christian!

Matthew 18 tells a parable of a servant who owed his master millions of dollars. The master, moved with compassion, canceled the entire debt. Soon after, the same servant ran down a man who owed him the equivalent of \$15.00. The man was unable to pay, and the servant that had been forgiven millions of dollars had him thrown in prison. When the servant's master heard of this, he called him a wicked servant and threw him in jail until he was able to pay the debt. Look at the size of the debt that the servant was unwilling to forgive, a mere \$15.00. Sometimes it is the little debts that trip us up. It's the little resentments between you and a parent, sibling, or friend that seem too insignificant to bother with. But beware, those are the kinds of debts that can be used to torment you. After all, Jesus paid off a mountain of debt for you. You can afford to be generous about the “nickel-and-dime” debts of others. Spend time with the Holy Spirit and allow Him to reveal any unforgiveness and release it. Make this Christmas more than a time for remembering. Make it a time to forget and forgive.

Confession for today: “I forgive others as God forgave me.”

“And be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

Have a wonderful, blessed and very merry Christmas..I love you!!

Hugs

Miss Lois

THE IMMEASURABLE LOVE OF GOD

“SO THAT CHRIST MAY DWELL IN YOUR
HEARTS THROUGH FAITH. AND I PRAY THAT YOU,
BEING ROOTED AND ESTABLISHED IN LOVE, MAY HAVE
POWER, TOGETHER WITH ALL THE LORD’S HOLY
PEOPLE, TO GRASP HOW WIDE AND LONG AND HIGH
AND DEEP IS THE LOVE OF CHRIST.”
- EPHESIANS 3:17-18

Today we will break down these verses with some definitions to get a full meaning of what Paul is saying to us...

Start with “for us to be rooted and grounded in Christ’s love.” Rooted means to become stable and grounded, to lay a base for. The simple word “in” means the space within anything.

We can be stable and have a base for our lives inside the love of Christ. This love is Agape love. One of the meanings of Agape love is “doing what the One who loves deems needed for the one loved.”

Then, from this point in Christ’s Agape love we set ourselves in His love, trusting that He knows what is best for us. That love then spreads, giving us freedom to be all He has called us to be. This love lengthens over the extent of our lifetime into eternity, the duration of which we cannot see fully but we can look back on as reassurance. The depth of love brings us deeper and deeper in the revelation, insight, and wisdom to know more and more of Him. Height here means elevation; we will be elevated in all we do, beyond what we could ever ask or imagine.

This love then never stops spreading, expanding your area of influence. This love won’t ever end, nor gradually decline nor abruptly end. You can go deeper and deeper into the mystery of who God is. The more you know Him, the more you will love Him also. Revelation and wisdom continue! The longer you walk with the Lord as Savior you can look back and see just how much He has showed His love to you! He has plans and purposes for you to get to and you will, as this love is your starting point for all success!

This is our prayer today, that you are rooted with your life based inside the love of Christ, and in this place you begin to experience the freedom He has called you to. Walk today knowing this is a love that will be with you every moment of your life! We declare you will have insight and knowledge as you read the Word and listen to the Holy Spirit's voice, and as you do you will fulfill all God has called you to accomplish with Him.

“My response is to get down on my knees before the Father, this magnificent Father who parcels out all heaven and earth. I ask him to strengthen you by his Spirit—not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength—that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in. And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:17-18).

Walk with the King...

Nikki

JEALOUS?

“YOU SHALL NOT BOW DOWN YOURSELF TO THEM OR
SERVE THEM; FOR I THE LORD YOUR GOD AM A
JEALOUS GOD, VISITING THE INIQUITY OF THE
FATHERS UPON THE CHILDREN TO THE THIRD AND
FOURTH GENERATION OF THOSE WHO HATE ME.”
- EXODUS 20:5

ADDITIONAL READING: DEUTERONOMY 4:23-24, JOHN
4:24

I had someone ask me recently, “How can God possibly be jealous? Isn’t jealousy a negative emotion?” This is a very interesting question. When you read the Word, you will find that the Bible never once says that God is jealous of someone else’s possessions, wanting a particular ‘thing’ in the natural that He does not already have. He is God, the Creator of all things, and He lacks and wants for nothing! Then what can God be jealous of?

When you read each scripture verse where it refers to God as being ‘a jealous God,’ you will see that it always involves the direction of our worship. When you are married, you expect that your spouse’s affection and loving attention will be directed toward you above all others (except for God of course!), and rightfully so! If your spouse was aiming their affection and loving attention, that rightfully belongs to you, toward another person or interest, wouldn’t you be jealous?

God becomes jealous when He sees what rightfully belongs to Him; our affection, loving attention and worship, directed away from Him and instead toward other idols in our lives, whatever they may be. Ask yourself today and every day, ‘Where do I direct my affection and loving attention? What consumes my thoughts and my time? What or who is the focus of my daily worship?’

We were created for the sole purpose of having a relationship with our Heavenly Father, to be ‘...true (genuine) worshipers, worshiping the Father in spirit and in truth (reality)’ - John 4:24.

Fight the good fight of faith!
Jamie

GOD IS NOT A SURFACE DWELLER (PART 2)

**“OH, THE DEPTH OF THE RICHES AND WISDOM AND
KNOWLEDGE OF GOD! HOW UNFATHOMABLE
(INSCRUTABLE, UNSEARCHABLE) ARE HIS JUDGMENTS
(HIS DECISIONS)! AND HOW UNTRACEABLE
(MYSTERIOUS, UNDISCOVERABLE) ARE HIS WAYS (HIS
METHODS, HIS PATHS)! FOR WHO HAS KNOWN THE
MIND OF THE LORD AND WHO HAS UNDERSTOOD HIS
THOUGHTS, OR WHO HAS [EVER] BEEN HIS
COUNSELOR?”
- ROMANS 11:33-34**

In the Garden of Eden, life was simple: it was God and the first and second of humanity; simple, but with more spiritual depth than we can comprehend today. Most of us well up with tears just scratching the surface of God’s deep love, but for Adam and Eve that depth was all they knew. God literally walked in the Garden with them (Genesis 3:8).

Unfortunately, after some time, sin found its way into their lives. This sin produced for Adam and Eve an earthly care: the first of its kind. Adam and Eve's simple life just lost its perfect simplicity. Now they had to expend resources on the consequence of their sin. So began the pursuit of earthly things: Adam and Eve tending to their sin-consequence, trying to make it less difficult to deal with so that life would be a little easier for them and their children. Fortunately, God was there to help, and life was better for their children, for a time.

Cain and Abel grew strong in the gifts God gave them, and they inherited a good dose of the spiritual depth of their parents. Cain, it seemed, had less of it, as he sought the life of his brother over a simple matter. Even after he took Abel’s life, Cain had enough depth to hear God's audible voice, but it was another sin among humanity, another consequence, another earthly care to tend to, and another chunk of time and resources to divert from time with the Lord.

Then, unlike Adam and Eve, Cain did not allow God to help him with his sin-consequences. Though he needed God even more than Adam and Eve did when they sinned, Cain condemned himself to living with his sin apart from God, multiplying the burden of its consequences. For thousands of years, humanity has continued in this pattern: all sinning, some allowing God to help overcome sin, others rejecting His help and living in condemnation, and still others refusing to acknowledge any of this in the first place.

But the Holy Spirit is here, just waiting in the depths for the repentant heart. If you have sought the Lord and found Him, then perhaps it's time for you to seek those who haven't.

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”
(Jeremiah 29:13; See also Matthew 25:34-45).

Pursue your purpose in Him,
Anthony B.

HIDE AND SEEK

If you've ever played the game "hide and seek," you know that having a great hiding place is key. If you have a great place to hide, it will keep you hidden and out of reach from your opponent. This advantage keeps you in the game, and eventually your opponent gives up, and you become the winner.

Just like the opponent in the game of hide and seek, we have an enemy who is seeking to get an advantage over us so he can get us "out." God has designated a perfect place for us to be hidden and safe from our adversary. Psalm 91:1 says, "He who dwells in the secret place of the MOST HIGH, shall abide under the shadow of the ALMIGHTY." While it can be intimidating to think that there is an enemy who is seeking to do you harm, this verse tells us that we can be hidden under the ALL MIGHTY and MOST HIGH God! The next verse in Psalm 91 says, "I will SAY of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress. My God, in Him I will trust."

Spending time in God's presence and declaring out of your mouth, "God is my refuge and fortress! He is my God and I trust in Him!" puts you in that perfect hiding place that keeps you out of reach of the enemy. Read through Psalm 91 once a day for the next week. Meditate on God's promise of protection, and establish the truth in your heart that God's presence is the place we go to experience His love and protection. When we face trouble, the enemy likes to point you to the things of this world, such as wrong relationships, alcohol, or ungodly forms of entertainment to be your hiding place so that he can gain access to your life. Don't come out from your perfect hiding place. When you stay under God's protection and let Him be your place of safety and refuge, you will outlast difficulty and you'll always come out the winner.

Additional Reading: Psalm 91, Psalm 32:7, Psalm 119:114

Be salt and light,
Miss Dawn

WIND IN THE WORD (PART 2)

“IN HIM WE LIVE AND MOVE AND HAVE OUR BEING...
FOR WE ARE ALSO HIS OFFSPRING.”
- ACTS 17:28

“BUT YOU ARE NOT LIVING THE LIFE OF THE FLESH,
YOU ARE LIVING THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT, AND THE
HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD REALLY DWELLS WITHIN YOU,
DIRECTING AND CONTROLLING YOU.”
- ROMANS 8:9

Today let's consider wind in the New Testament. John 3:8 says, “as the wind blows where it will, though you hear its sound, neither do you know where it comes from or where it is going, so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” The movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives is such that the human mind cannot reason it, time it, or direct it. The wind of the Spirit in our lives blows as it will. As we are linked up to the circuit of the Holy Spirit, we engage with this movement in the spirit realm. This movement has an impact not only on our lives (events, reactions, interactions), but on the lives of the people around us, quickening in their hearts and stirring up most holy emotions, thus persuading them (1 Corinthians 2:2). We may not see immediate fruit in the natural from being linked up with the wind of the Holy Spirit, but seed is being planted, watered, and God all the while is making it grow and bringing the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6).

It is a mighty way to start the day, speaking over ourselves that in Him we live, move, and have our being. This disarms the movement and influence of the world that is perpetually swirling around us. It can have no effect on the believer whose house is built on the Rock. The wind of adversity beat on both houses, but the house on the Rock was not destroyed. Let's be an example of steadfastness, the ecclesia, the called out ones, the remnant of God's people, that do not bow and break in the face of winds of attack. Just as in the story of Moses, God showed forth His signs to Pharaoh and his servants, people who did not acknowledge Him as Lord. In the same way, the Lord wants to blow His breath in our lives, confirming His Word that we speak with signs that follow, so that people can see His power. We are a people that remain in the flow of the Spirit of the living God, who directs and conducts us in His purpose every day.

Your sister in Christ,
Niki

YOU ARE A MASTERPIECE

“FOR WE ARE HIS WORKMANSHIP [HIS OWN MASTER WORK, A WORK OF ART], CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS [REBORN FROM ABOVE—SPIRITUALLY TRANSFORMED, RENEWED, READY TO BE USED] FOR GOOD WORKS, WHICH GOD PREPARED [FOR US] BEFOREHAND [TAKING PATHS WHICH HE SET], SO THAT WE WOULD WALK IN THEM [LIVING THE GOOD LIFE WHICH HE PREARRANGED AND MADE READY FOR US].”
- EPHESIANS 2:10

Have you ever thought about what you would feel like if you fully realized that you are God’s master work? How would you feel about your appearance? What would you think about your talents and skills? Would you feel limited by your circumstance? My guess is that if we fully grasped what it means to be a work of art, then we wouldn’t struggle with self-image, confidence, or our purpose.

Joe has spent some time in the arts, shocking right? After a paint night date with me, he realized he loved creating something on a blank canvas with paint. We bought him paints and canvases and stuck him in the back of our basement to create. I was actually quite shocked at what came of his efforts. He has a very abstract method and loves using mixed media and varying colors. He did some replicating when he saw a piece of art that he liked, and he knocked those out of the park too. But most importantly, in each artwork he created he felt such a sense of pride and connection to his work. He has made some for family members, but when asked if he would sell his work, he is hesitant because they are his.

God feels the same way about us. He loves us, is proud of us, and He is connected to us. God does not want us to fall into the hands of the enemy and so, as this scripture describes, when we are reborn, God prepares paths for us that allow us to live the good life that He has prearranged for us.

If nothing else, meditate on God’s promise to lay before you paths you need to take and meditate on the reality that you are a work of art created by God’s hands and that you are special!

Meditate – Take a moment to think about yourself through the eyes of God and think of yourself as a work of art

What do you see?

What is the most special thing about you?

Believing with you,
Yvonne

THE WATERCOURSE

“THE KING’S HEART IS LIKE CHANNELS OF WATER IN THE HAND OF THE LORD; HE TURNS IT WHICHEVER WAY HE WISHES. EVERY MAN’S WAY IS RIGHT IN HIS OWN EYES, BUT THE LORD WEIGHS AND EXAMINES THE HEARTS [OF PEOPLE AND THEIR MOTIVES].”
- PROVERBS 21:1-2

If your heart is in God's hands, He can direct you like a watercourse. “What’s a watercourse?” you may ask. It’s a brook, stream, or artificially constructed water channel. Water doesn't change its route on its own because it is submitted to the channel it is in. In our spiritual lives, we need to be fully surrendered to God's will and not dig out our own waterbed according to our flesh. Galatians 1:6 says, “I am astonished and extremely irritated that you are so quickly shifting your allegiance and deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different [even contrary] gospel.” We can become spiritual renegades when we turn away from God's will and adopt another way of living that’s not according to the Word of God. Proverbs 30:18-19 says, “There are three things which are too astounding and unexpectedly wonderful for me, four which I do not understand: The way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship in the middle of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid.”

We do not always understand God's ways or track for us, but if we trust Him with each turn He will never lead us down the wrong path. The water of our lives may be crashing or slow and quiet, but it is always moving forward when God is directing our course. His channel does not break, give way, or leak; it holds. It will always sustain you. Your Heavenly Father is always there to hold up your arms, ease your yoke, and lift you up from stumbling. He takes you in His arms. He does not drive you with force into His will, but instead drapes you with love and gentleness.

Confession for today: “Holy Spirit help me to allow you to direct my life like a watercourse that leads to your will and peace for my life!”

Seek Him First!
Paulie

SPEAKING SOFTLY

“A SOFT ANSWER TURNS AWAY WRATH, BUT A HARSH
WORD STIRS UP ANGER.”
- PROVERBS 15:1

As a lot of you know, I officiate basketball at the youth and high school level. It's a fast pace game, and over the course of any game, many decisions have to be made based on your knowledge of the rules, and how they apply to things that you observe. Do I ever make mistakes, and get things wrong – yes sometimes it happens. In the end, no matter what sport you officiate, you are never going to get all the calls right, have every coach, player or fan agree with you. This makes it very challenging, and at times puts you in situations where you have to react to something being said, and in my case recently a certain fan...

Back in December, during an 8th grade youth game - one particular father was just giving us the business about how we were calling the game. Unfortunately for him, he was being so loud and obnoxious, he was very easy to pick out of the crowd. So I did what I had to do in stopping the game, went over to the stands, and quietly asked him to take a time-out in the hallway. I told him that once you can calm yourself down, you could come back into the gym and watch the rest of the game. During halftime, when he was still out in the hallway, I went up to him and had a short conversation, addressing what had happened, and why it sets a bad example to the kids and other parents sitting in the stands. In the end we shook hands, and he came back into the gym and watched the rest of the game.

This past weekend, I had the opportunity to officiate the team whose father I had kicked out of the gym. Before the game started, he came up to me and asked if he could talk to me. First he apologized for his actions that day. He went on to say that how I handled the situation, and the words of our conversation caused him to go home that day and reevaluate his actions, including what kind of example he was setting for his son and the other parents.

He even went as far as to create a checklist to monitor his actions directed at the officials. He told me he is now able to enjoy the game and watch his son play, not being reactive in anger when the officials make a call – good or bad.

Whether we are led to speak or to be silent, remember that it is our duty and privilege to represent Jesus. So how are we to speak? 1 Peter 3:15 instructs us to “give an answer to those who ask,” to do it with gentleness and respect, and to keep a clear conscience. Colossians 4:6 instruct us: “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” Our goal is “to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people” (Titus 3:2).

Confession for today: “Today Jesus I ask you to help me to set a good example in the words I speak, to quiet anger and bring peace to every situation, whether it is directed at me or another.”

Living for Today,
Mr. Tom

WHERE IS YOUR F.A.I.T.H? (PART 4)

“LEAN ON, TRUST IN, AND BE CONFIDENT IN THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND MIND AND DO NOT RELY ON YOUR OWN INSIGHT OR UNDERSTANDING. IN ALL YOUR WAYS KNOW, RECOGNIZE, AND ACKNOWLEDGE HIM AND HE WILL DIRECT AND MAKE STRAIGHT AND PLAIN YOUR PATHS.”

- PROVERBS 3:5-6

Focus - a center of activity, attraction, or attention

Action - the accomplishment of a thing usually over a period of time

Inseparability - seemingly always together: very intimate

Trust - assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something

Hunger - a strong desire

When you hear the word faith, it is often followed by the word trust. It may even have been used interchangeably. We know that trust is assured reliance of the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something, and faith is a strong belief in God. The question is, can we have faith in God and not fully trust Him? We can believe that someone exists and not truly trust them. Just because I acknowledge that God created the universe, it doesn't mean I trust that He will be there for me. However, if we lack trust in God, our faith in Him is sure to begin to buckle under the weight of doubt. Without trust in God, we will begin taking on issues that we weren't meant to endure. It is easy to spot when we are struggling with trusting God, because we begin to make chaotic decisions that lead to frustration, anger, and resentment. All of these negative emotions start to fester within us until we erupt like a volcano. What is beautiful to me is that even in those moments, God shows us who He is and is faithful to open His arms to comfort us. Our trust in God is directly related to our understanding of who He is. If we do not know Him, we will not trust Him. The definition of trust is, assured reliance on the character, ability, strength or truth of someone. We have to develop an understanding of God's character, ability, strength and truth. To do that, we need to spend time in His Word. As you do that, you will see the truth of who God is revealed to you, and as you see Him for who He is, your trust will continue to grow. If you're struggling with trust, take some time today to reflect on times when God has shown Himself trustworthy in your life. Write them down and remind yourself of them everyday this week. God is faithful and will never let you down!

Find peace in His embrace,

Jasmine

TRUE ENEMY

“FOR WE ARE NOT WRESTLING WITH FLESH AND BLOOD [CONTENDING ONLY WITH PHYSICAL OPPONENTS], BUT AGAINST THE DESPOTISMS, AGAINST THE POWERS, AGAINST [THE MASTER SPIRITS WHO ARE] THE WORLD RULERS OF THIS PRESENT DARKNESS, AGAINST THE SPIRIT FORCES OF WICKEDNESS IN THE HEAVENLY (SUPERNATURAL) SPHERE.”
- EPHESIANS 6:12

When we come up against opposition in our lives from people, it can be difficult to look past the person and see the soul inside. Our flesh naturally reacts to the person we see who was rude to us in the store, or is gossiping about us behind our back. We may become angry or resentful and respond in a way that we might regret. Ephesians 6:12 reminds us that our opponents are not physical but spiritual.

Even though it may feel like we are fighting in the flesh, it is in the spirit where we have our victory. The Holy Spirit can help us discern what spirit we are up against, so that we can speak against it and tell it to go. We have been given the authority through Christ Jesus to do this. But don't forget that although someone may be allowing themselves to be used as a tool of the enemy, they are still a soul that God loves. He does not want to see them perish. We speak against the spirit operating in them and pray that the person allows the Holy Spirit in their life to change them.

Today I want to challenge you to practice responding in prayer instead of reacting in resentment when someone does something that bothers you. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you pray for that person and give you discernment and compassion. In the end, we have the victory against the real enemy; satan himself.

Let your light shine,
Bre

BREAKING THE BONDS OF UNFORGIVENESS

“LET ALL BITTERNESS AND INDIGNATION AND WRATH (PASSION, RAGE, BAD TEMPER) AND RESENTMENT (ANGER, ANIMOSITY) AND QUARRELING (BRAWLING, CLAMOR, CONTENTION) AND SLANDER (EVIL-SPEAKING, ABUSIVE OR BLASPHEMOUS LANGUAGE) BE BANISHED FROM YOU, WITH ALL MALICE (SPITE, ILL WILL, OR BASENESS OF ANY KIND). AND BECOME USEFUL AND HELPFUL AND KIND TO ONE ANOTHER, TENDERHEARTED (COMPASSIONATE, UNDERSTANDING, LOVING-HEARTED), FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER [READILY AND FREELY], AS GOD IN CHRIST FORGAVE YOU.”

- EPHESIANS 4:31-32

ADDITIONAL READING: LUKE 17:3-4

Are you someone that tends to hold a grudge? Have you told someone that you forgive them for something, knowing in your heart you really haven't? Has someone ever wronged you and you purposefully told them you would never forgive them for it? In the moment, it may feel like that's the best way to handle the situation, because now you've made them feel just as bad as you feel, but in reality when you come to your senses later on, it helps nothing. Ephesians 4:31 gives us a long list of things we should avoid in place of forgiveness. Bad temper, anger, arguing, gossip, ill-will of any kind should be avoided at all costs. You may think, "But that's exactly how they treat me, and they deserve the same back." Once you take part in the actions laid out in verse 31, it is like putting handcuffs on your own wrists. When the person who has wronged you has long moved on, unforgiveness will still have you bound all by yourself. The good news is that verse 32 tells us the key to breaking through unforgiveness. We are called to be compassionate, understanding, and quick to forgive, just as Christ forgave us. Yes, this also means even if the person never apologizes or asks for forgiveness. We must consciously strive to forgive right away. Luke 17:4 says that if someone sins against you seven times in one day, you must forgive them seven times. If there is anyone in your life that you are holding unforgiveness against, ask God to help you forgive them. No matter how difficult it may be, I guarantee you will see a difference in your life. Remember, forgiveness not only redeems the person that sinned against you, it releases you from captivity as well.

Stay Strong and Carry On,
Carrington

HITCHHIKERS

Maybe you are unfamiliar with the term, or can't envision someone hitchhiking along the road since our world has become so mistrusting. But there once was a time when it was completely acceptable to stand alongside the road and stick your thumb out in the direction you wanted to go. People would stop and pick you up to bring you as close to your destination as they were going. Why did people start doing this? It was a free ride. I read a bible study once that pointed to the areas that we struggle in, and suggested there are hitchhikers in our lives that contribute to our struggling. Basically things like fear, anxiety, lust, distrust, shame, guilt, they all want a free ride in our minds and hearts. The key to this analogy, and why I felt like it was a great mental image for this topic, is that there is a clear distinction of roles here. As the "driver" we have the right to decline entry to any trespassing entity. It is important that we acknowledge our role and our authority. Often times in conversations with people they say, "well you know, I have anxiety." This is the perfect example of how we have basically let this hitchhiker into our car. We just keep driving around with them and they boss us around. We have been given the authority over such things, so grab a hold of yours today and don't let anything hitchhike into your life unless it is pleasing to God!

Luke 10:17-20 – "The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.' He replied 'I saw satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven'."

What sorts of hitchhikers can you identify in your life?

How do they impact your thinking and your actions?

The next time you recognize a hitchhiker trying to get a free ride on you, just say "no way hitchhiker, I know you and I am not stopping to pick you up!"

Believing with you,
Yvonne

KNOWLEDGE

“MY PEOPLE ARE DESTROYED FOR LACK OF
KNOWLEDGE [OF MY LAW, WHERE I REVEAL MY
WILL].”
- HOSEA 4:6

According to Merriam-Webster, knowledge is the fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience or association, the range of one's information or understanding. When we have a relationship with God, we increase what we understand through spending time in His Word. Think of a relationship you have with another person. Would that relationship survive if you never spent time with one another? Would you increase your knowledge and understanding, or would your relationship be ruined because you don't know one another?

During this time, the Israelites were conducting themselves how we know them to be, living as if they were not God's people. They weren't following God's Word, they were worshiping other gods and striving to be like the people in the land they were inhabiting. The Israelites were living in ignorance of the true God; an ignorance for which they were responsible, because there was the light of God's truth in their land. The Israelites were often described as committing spiritual adultery in their relationship with God. The Israelites were constantly warned about coming judgment and punishment, but they chose to ignore it. But punishment is not ultimately what the Lord wants for his people. He desires that they leave their sin. He wants them to return to the One who first loved them and who can provide what is best for them.

Since the Israelites were willfully ignoring God's Word, they weren't growing in their relationship, which led to their demise. Their choice to not put effort into their relationship hindered them from God's promise, will, and purpose. Our relationship with God is like that. When we spend time with God, we increase our knowledge of Him, His plans, and His Will for our lives. The more time we spend with God, the better we will be able to discern His voice among all the others. We can't access God's promises if we don't know His Word.

Love and Nuggs,
Amanda

GOD IS HEALING OUR LAND

“WHAT IF SOME DID NOT HAVE FAITH? WILL THEIR
LACK OF FAITH NULLIFY GOD’S
FAITHFULNESS? NOT AT ALL!”
- ROMANS 3:3-4

Faith-filled words change things. They turn pain into joy. They turn sickness into health. They can turn a sinner into a child of God. There’s something else faith-filled words can do...they can take a sin-filled nation and turn it into God’s own country. If Christians would back up the prayers they pray for their nation with words of faith instead of doubt, division and discouragement, we would see spiritual revival all around our Nation and even the world.

God promised that if we, His people, would humble ourselves, pray, seek His face, and turn from our wicked ways, He would heal our land (2 Chronicles 7:14). And there are prayer warriors all over the world (hopefully you are one of them) who are doing just that. Do not discount yourselves because of your age...God does not say it is only for the adults to do this, as a Child of God this is something you should be doing in your daily time with God. You don’t hear many folks these days saying, “this nation is great, God is sure moving in this land...” Instead, you hear folks talking about how bad and downhill bound it is, or some other destructive thing. Listen, we need to stop preaching what satan is doing and start speaking what God promised He would do...heal this land!!

God said He is healing the land! No matter what the world says, their unbelief will not stop God’s Word from working. George and I don’t even listen to the news anymore, instead we praise and thank God for the mighty things He is doing for our nation and that He’s protecting us from evil. That releases faith in our hearts. So get determined to take a firm stand with other praying believers that things are changing for the better in our country. Settle it in our hearts as you pray. The prayers you pray today will determine the kind of country you live in tomorrow.

Confession for today: “I humble myself and pray and seek God’s face. I turn from wicked ways and He forgives my sin and heals this land”
(2 Chronicles 7:14).

Hugs,
Miss Lois

WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY

“TO THE PERSON WHO PLEASES HIM, GOD GIVES WISDOM, KNOWLEDGE AND HAPPINESS, BUT TO THE SINNER HE GIVES THE TASK OF GATHERING AND STORING UP WEALTH TO HAND IT OVER TO THE ONE WHO PLEASES GOD.”
- ECCLESIASTES 2:26

If only I had . . . if only I drove . . . if only I wore . . . if only I knew . . . if only I won . . . then I would feel better about myself. Then I would be happy. Every time you open a magazine, listen to the radio, go on the Internet, or watch television, people you’ve never met create shows, movies, books, and ads that tell you what will make you happy. Every single one of us has fallen for someone’s promise of the secret of happiness at least once or twice . . . if not 100 times. Quick-fix happiness can be marketed and sold, but not the real stuff—not lasting happiness.

If happiness were about a “what,” we would just go out and get our happy “what’s” and we’d be happy all the time. The problem is that a happy “what” always leads to happy “what else.” The happy “what” is like caffeine. It wears off over time. You were as excited about your old phone when you first bought it as you are about your new phone. Soon, your new phone won’t be new anymore, and you won’t be excited about it. You’ll need a new one. The same can be said about your car, or your “insert blank.” Happiness is about “who,” not “what.” Happy people are at peace with God, others, and themselves. Sin undermines peace because it separates you from God, others, and yourself by substituting things for people. Sin makes a happy promise it can’t keep. Sin isn’t your friend. When we opt for sin, we undermine our happiness and the happiness of those closest to us. This stands in stark contrast to what we are all tempted to believe: that God gets in the way of our happiness. The truth is, when we resist God, we resist happiness. God provides the way to happiness. We create regrets when we abandon peace with ourselves, others, and God, when choosing unhealthy pursuits of happiness in isolation from God.

Confession for today: “Today Jesus I ask you to help me to be content with everything I have, and not give into the temptation of want and sin, so that I will be happy, at peace, and a blessing to those I’m around.”

Living for Today,
Mr. Tom.

THE IMMACULATE RECEPTION

“HE PREDESTINED US FOR ADOPTION TO SONSHIP THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, IN ACCORDANCE WITH HIS PLEASURE AND WILL – TO THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORIOUS GRACE, WHICH HE HAS FREELY GIVEN US IN THE ONE HE LOVES. IN HIM WE HAVE REDEMPTION THROUGH HIS BLOOD, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE RICHES OF GOD’S GRACE.”

- EPHESIANS 1:5-7

ADDITIONAL READING: ACTS 13:38-39

One of the most miraculous plays in NFL history occurred in the 1972 AFC Divisional Championship game between the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Oakland Raiders. With 22 seconds remaining in the 4th quarter and no timeouts, the score was 7-6 Raiders. The quarterback led his team back onto the field for what was assumed to be one of the last plays of the game. The ball was snapped and the quarterback was immediately under pressure, so much that he had to throw a short pass to his running back rather than to a wide receiver. As soon as the running back got his hand on the ball, he was hit and knocked to the ground sending the ball backwards in the air for many yards. Just as the ball was about to hit the ground, the full back was there to grab it and run it in for a touchdown. Many of the announcers calling the game said that the catch was miraculous and the full back didn't have to do anything but be right there because the ball went right to him. But no matter what the announcers said, that fullback had to work to run past all of the defenders into the end zone. In this scenario, we are the full back. In Ephesians 1:5-7, it says that “we are freely given grace and the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus,” but how often do we receive God's gift of grace and do nothing with it? What if in that game the full back caught the ball and then decided he was tired of running and began walking? Or what if he just stood there and did nothing? God desires for us to receive His gifts of grace and forgiveness, and then to move forward and not be caught in the same old things. He wants us to grow and mature, and His grace and forgiveness are always there to stand us back up and brush us off when we fall.

Stay Strong and Carry On,
Carrington

KNOCK KNOCK

“IF ANYONE HEARS MY TEACHINGS AND FAILS TO
OBSERVE THEM [DOES NOT KEEP THEM, BUT
DISREGARDS THEM], IT IS NOT I WHO JUDGES HIM.
FOR I HAVE NOT COME TO JUDGE AND TO
CONDEMN AND TO PASS SENTENCE AND TO INFLICT
PENALTY ON THE WORLD, BUT TO SAVE THE WORLD.”
- JOHN 12:47

“BEHOLD, I STAND AT THE DOOR AND KNOCK; IF
ANYONE HEARS AND LISTENS TO AND HEEDS MY VOICE
AND OPENS THE DOOR, I WILL COME IN TO HIM AND
WILL EAT WITH HIM, AND HE [WILL EAT] WITH ME.”
- REVELATION 3:20

ADDITIONAL READING: JOHN 3:16

Hell was not created by God with man in mind. Our Heavenly Father does not want us to share in the inevitable judgment of satan and his demons. God loves us so much that He sent His only Son, not to judge and condemn and to pass sentence and to inflict penalty on us, but to save us!

Jesus is a gentleman. He stands at the door of our heart and knocks, longing to share the simple truth of His Word with us so that we might be saved! That starts with us choosing to open the door of our heart and inviting Him in. We then need to listen to what He has to say, by and through His Word. Then we have a choice: to either observe His teachings by adhering to them daily, or disregarding His Word.

Choosing to disregard the Truth of God's Word after hearing it means we willfully accept to share in the punishment of satan. While choosing to keep God's Word after hearing it means we accept and acknowledge that Jesus came to save us from a judgment that was never meant for us in the first place. Jesus is knocking... will you answer?

Fight the good fight of faith!
Jamie

ARE YOU DISTRACTED?

**"YOU WILL KEEP HIM IN PERFECT PEACE,
WHOSE MIND IS STAYED ON YOU."
- ISAIAH 26:3**

Distractions are everywhere. In today's fast paced, connected world, it can be challenging to keep your focus.

Peace depends upon your ability to keep your mind in one place: stayed on Him. The absence of Peace is the product of a wandering mind. You must build your ability to stay focused or you risk your peace. We need to stay focused on the Word (seed) and we have to receive it into our lives. That is the message Jesus taught in Matthew 13 & Mark 4.

You need to have the Word of God (seed) be in the good ground of your spiritual heart, where you hear it and understand it, so that you can get a harvest. To get that harvest, you have to value the Word, honor the Word, and refuse to be distracted from the Word.

Remember, satan is like a master pickpocket, always trying to steal the Word from you. There are things you can do to guarantee that the Word will take root in your life and produce fruit. Make it a habit to spend time in the Word and in prayer. Make a quality decision to keep your mind on God's Word.

Stay connected,
Mr.George.