

Devotionals
from
God's Daily Word Ministries

April 2007

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Shiny Stones

4-2-07

There are many types of monkey which can be captured with nothing more than a hollow wooden ball and a few shiny stones. The wooden ball contains a hole just large enough for the open hand of the monkey to pass through. The shiny stones are placed inside the ball and the ball is then tied to a tree.

The curious monkey reaches into the hollow ball and grasps the stones but then finds his hand will no longer pass through the hole while he clings to his prize. The monkey fights to free his hand but will not drop the stones and is therefore easily captured.

This is a fun story - but I don't really think it's true. Monkeys are actually much smarter than this illustration makes them appear. But I wonder how many of us are being trapped by similar tactics.

Jesus had chosen His twelve disciples and was giving them instructions as He sent them out to minister. He told them where to go and some of the hardships to expect. He also told them one of the great secrets of a successful journey.

Matthew 10:39

"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."

Another translation of this same verse reads: "If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give it up for Me, you will find it." This is a truth the world doesn't want us to hear! The only way to find the freedom of true life is to let go and give God our complete trust.

We are saved only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8) - but a saving faith must be faith in the complete Jesus, all He is and all He represents! He came as our Savior, the Lamb who was sacrificed for the forgiveness of our sin. But He also came as the Son of God, our Sovereign Lord. A saving faith cannot pick and choose what portion of Jesus to accept; we either let go and give Him our complete trust or we show we have rejected Him as we cling to self-control.

The world is packed full of "trappings" which lure us and keep us from surrendering to Jesus as Lord. We're continually enticed to follow "The Road to Happiness" with promises of pleasure and power; but if we look close we'll see nothing but a handful of worthless stones which keep us from true freedom.

We can no longer cling to the empty values of the world; we must let go and present ourselves to God as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). If we want to find the freedom of true life, we must have a faith which allows us to lose our life to the will of our Lord - we must be willing to let go of our shiny stones.

Have A Great Day!

Take Up Our Cross 4-3-07

In the message "Shiny Stones" we saw how we are often trapped by the seductive temptations of the world and kept from a truly free life - a life found only through complete surrender to Jesus; "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39). This may seem a little radical - maybe only something for those "really serious" Christians - but God's Word clearly sets this as the standard for all His children.

Matthew 10:38

"Anyone who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me."

Luke records similar words as Jesus spoke to a large crowd: "and anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27). Jesus also said that anyone who would come after Him must "take up his cross daily and follow" (Luke 9:23).

But what does it mean to take up our cross? I've heard people refer to a hardship or difficult situation as "my cross to bear," but God's Word contains no such reference. The cross has only one Biblical association: Death! The only time anyone would carry their cross was when they were about to die.

Yes, we are called to die. But the call is not to a physical death - this death will eventually come to us all, and there's never a need to hasten its arrival. The call of Jesus is to a death of "self," the old sinful nature with its evil desires, dreams, and ambitions: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in this body, I live by faith in the Son of God" (Galatians 2:20).

This is a death which leads to true contentment and peace. But this death is not a one time event, nor is it easy. We are called to die daily! Don't be surprised when every day seems to bring life to our old nature - when we seem to talk, act, and think contrary to the way of Christ. When this occurs, simply praise God for the conviction of His Spirit, take up the cross, and continue to follow down His path.

As we "die" and completely surrender control to God, temptations of the world lose their pull and anxieties lose their source of concern. As we no longer live, we no longer focus on the cravings of our flesh nor about what tomorrow may or may not bring. As Christ lives in us, the enemy loses their ability to effectively attack - they are no longer attacking us but Christ!

Our call is to become a follower of Jesus Christ and be transformed into His image. But to follow we must die! Let's become His worthy disciple as we love Him and trust Him with all our heart. Let's set aside all that is not directed by God and take up our cross.

Have A Great Day!

Light And Momentary

4-4-07

There is no more dramatic example of a Christ-changed life than the Apostle Paul. While on his way to Damascus to capture Christians and put them in jail, Jesus blinded Paul and asked: "Why do you persecute Me?" (Acts 9:4). When Paul asked who was speaking, Jesus replied: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do" (Acts 9:5-6).

Jesus identified Paul as "My chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15). This special selection did not make Paul perfect, but he was gifted with a close relationship with Jesus as well as special insight into the true gospel message.

Paul suffered many hardships and trials during his years of ministry. His life was continually threatened; he was beaten many times, placed in prison for extended periods, and faced the frustration of ministering to people who failed to truly appreciate his message. And yet, Paul weighed his trials on the scale of eternity.

2 Corinthians 4:16-17

"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."

Paul had learned "the secret of being content in any and every situation" (Philippians 4:12). This secret involved knowing who he was in Christ and viewing his life from the perspective of eternity. This secret gave him a new understanding of his trials.

Our life must no longer be viewed with a beginning and an end, but truly as being eternal. Though our days on earth may sometimes be difficult, our days are very few. A hundred years is not even a visible speck on the canvas of eternity. And the weight of our burdens vanish to nothing when compared to the glory of Heaven. This is the lasting power of an eternal perspective.

God's peace and contentment require us to expand our view to include an eternity we cannot see and a glory we may not understand; "I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace" (John 16:33). His peace is available today; it's available in our relationships, our work, our finances, our health, and our ministry.

Let's allow the world to see our confidence in His promised eternal glory by the peace which fills our life. Let's live by the faith of an eternal perspective and be renewed as we rightly consider ALL our trials to be light and momentary.

Have A Great Day!

Times of Waiting

4-5-07

As Paul was returning to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey, he already had a sense of where his next journey would lead; "after I have been there, I must visit Rome" (Acts 19:21). But he also knew he was about to face many difficulties; "in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me" (Acts 20:23). Paul was arrested less than ten days after arriving in Jerusalem. He probably didn't realize it at the time, but his journey to Rome had just begun.

Paul's journey to Rome would last about two and a half years and include many legal and physical trials - and many opportunities to demonstrate his faith in Jesus Christ. Surprisingly, it also included two long years where Paul had nothing to do but sit in prison and wait for an occasional visit with the Governor before being transferred to the courts of Rome.

Acts 24:25

"As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, 'That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.'"

This must have been a difficult time for someone accustomed to being so actively involved in ministry. Paul was treated well in this prison, but after receiving specific instructions to minister in Rome, two years must have felt like a painfully long time.

We're never told of God's reason for this waiting period. Many times, waiting is necessary to allow other events to occur and other people to be properly positioned; and many times, waiting is necessary because we need to better learn some of God's truths...or simply need a good rest.

Paul was about to face his most challenging journey and possibly his most significant ministry opportunity; "Take courage! As you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome" (Acts 23:11). On his journey, Paul faced a severe storm, shipwreck, snakebite, and many threats on his life; but Paul was also given the opportunity to minister to the leaders of the Roman Empire.

Much of our own journey involves patience and learning how to trust and wait on God. Almost nothing seems to occur as fast as we would like: difficult situations take longer to resolve, people take longer to mature, and ministries take longer to grow. But our present circumstances always serve a purpose!

If we've earnestly sought God and not received specific direction, it's possible we're simply being told to wait - wait and be refreshed; wait and spend time abiding in His presence; wait...and prepare. Let's continue to rejoice and learn to trust Him even more during our times of waiting.

Have A Great Day!

Stand On Solid Ground

4-9-07

In the last two messages, we've been encouraged that as we begin to view our life more from God's perspective - an eternal perspective - our heavy burdens can seem "Light and Momentary" and we can find purpose even in our "Times of Waiting." But this view cannot be truly obtained apart from belief in Jesus Christ. It's a life changing benefit found only through an understanding of the gospel.

The gospel message is one of hope which says, God loves us and has an ETERNAL plan for our life through faith in His Son Jesus. Without the hope of the gospel, we would continue to live a life of emptiness and an eternity separated from God. Even if we were to stumble onto temporary fulfillment, without the gospel our life would end without hope.

But as we place our trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sin, He lifts us up, gives our life new meaning, and transforms us into a new creation through the power of His Spirit.

Psalm 40:1-2

"I waited patiently for the Lord; He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand."

These words were written by King David over one thousand years before the death and resurrection of Jesus. And yet, they provide an excellent illustration of the hope found in the message of Salvation.

In our sinful nature, we all "have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6). Our nature is to follow our own sinful desires and walk down paths which cause us to "fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Each of us have been firmly embedded in the mire of sin and none of us can climb out of the slimy pit with our own strength - we cannot construct an eternal hope!

But praise God that before the creation of the world He loved us and had a plan to bring us back to Himself - a plan to rescue us: "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). The death and resurrection of Jesus allows us victory over sin and creates a way out of the mud: "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

If we truly desire to be clean and live with hope and a new view of this life, we must call out to Jesus and believe He is who He claimed to be: our Savior and Lord! If we will trust Him and cry out in faith, He has promised to hear our cry and lift us up. He will pour His cleansing love upon us and fill us with purpose! He will set our feet for all eternity upon Himself and we will forever stand on solid ground.

Have A Great Day!

Stand Firm On The Rock

4-10-07

In the message "Stand On Solid Ground" we compared Salvation through faith in Jesus to the words of praise written by David: "He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand" (Psalm 40:2). We saw how God gives us an eternal hope by lifting us up, washing us clean, and setting our feet upon a new and solid path. But what should we do now that our feet have been set?

When we are in the slimy and muddy pit we're vulnerable to attack. It's difficult to move and we easily lose our balance. We tend to live in fear, not knowing who to trust or which way to turn. But as Christ lifts us up we become "a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Life on solid ground should not be the same as life in the pit!

As the Spirit of God transforms us, He also provides everything we need to accomplish God's work and live a victorious life; "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). Knowing that our Heavenly Father has created us anew and gifted us with ALL we ever need, we must now be resolved to stand firm.

1 Corinthians 15:58

"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

We must make every effort to firmly stand; and yet, we must realize that we cannot stand in our own strength. The ground is solid only because of Christ. He IS the rock upon which we have been set - the Rock of our Salvation. Whenever we feel unworthy or unable to follow - whenever we feel we can no longer stand - we have surely begun to look to our own strength rather than God; "Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:21). He alone gives us the strength.

We have trusted Him to lift us out of the pit. Now that we are His child, we must continue to trust Him to strengthen us and be the stable Rock of our life. "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life!" (Romans 5:10).

The solid Rock is no place to tremble, no place to fear. He will remain solid for all eternity; and, as we stand on Him, He will accomplish through us what we are unable to do in our own strength. He is our new life, our strength, our identity, and all our self-worth. Let's honor our Heavenly Father as we continue to stand. Let's bring Him glory as we resolve to stand firm on the Rock!

Have A Great Day!

Lift Him Up

4-11-07

In the message "Stand Firm On The Rock" we saw how Christ is the solid Rock upon which we have been set. He alone is our stable source of direction and strength. We will need to visit this truth again and again as we continue to answer the call to follow.

When Jesus called Peter and Andrew to "Come, follow Me" (Matthew 4:19), He was calling them to become His disciples (the word disciple means follower). But Jesus places strong conditions on a disciple; "Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27).

The call to be a disciple is not simply a call to live a good moral life; it's a call to crucify (put to death) everything of our self that hinders our relationship with God. We must hold loosely to everything but God; "Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:33).

The life of a disciple must clearly demonstrate a commitment to Christ by producing fruit for His Kingdom; "This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourself to be My disciple" (John 15:8). A disciple must flow with pure love; "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). And a disciple must maintain a commitment to all Jesus taught; "If you hold to My teachings, you are really My disciples" (John 8:31).

Discipleship appears to be a VERY difficult call! It's difficult to be His disciple and even more difficult to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). In fact, if we focus only on these "requirements," our task is impossible. We are called to glorify God by drawing very near to Jesus and loving Him with all our heart. But in our own strength, we have no ability to draw near - no ability to be His disciple.

John 12:32

"But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself."

When Jesus was "lifted up" on the cross and died for our sin, He provided the way back to the Father - the way to become His disciple. He drew us to Himself so we could be forgiven and stand in the presence of God. Likewise, the only way to draw near and follow today is to lift Him up to His rightful throne over our life and give Him our pure praise and absolute worship.

If we fail to lift up Christ, our efforts to carry our cross become nothing more than a list of restrictive rules; we will have no ability to produce Kingdom fruit, and our love for others will be selfish and artificial. Let's "make disciples" by first being His devoted disciple. And let's be His disciple by ensuring that in ALL we do, we love Him and continually lift Him up.

Have A Great Day!

A Free And Secure Servant

4-12-07

The night before Jesus was crucified He was celebrating the Passover meal with His disciples. We traditionally call this the Last Supper. Jesus knew this would be the last time He would eat with His disciples; He knew in just one more day He would be hung on a cross to die.

Knowing He only had a few short hours remaining with this select group, Jesus used His time to leave a lasting impression of what it meant to truly follow Him.

John 13:3-5

"Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God; so He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him."

Without using words, Jesus gave perhaps His greatest sermon. Jesus was absolutely secure in who He was and where He was going: "He had come from God and was returning to God." But He was not proud or arrogant in His security - He didn't use His position to force others to submit or demand they satisfy His needs - instead, His secure position allowed Him to be completely humble and serve His disciples by washing their feet.

Our Heavenly Father desires for us to have this same level of security in Him. He wants us to KNOW we are His children and where we will spend eternity. Jesus came to set us free, and we are to walk in this secure freedom. But rather than using our freedom to arrogantly strut according to our own desires, a secure freedom should give us the necessary confidence to humbly serve without being offended; "do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love" (Galatians 5:13).

Being a follower of Jesus Christ means, first and foremost, that we love the Lord with ALL our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30). But next, it means we are to love, serve, and "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21). Knowing where we will spend eternity, and keeping our eyes set on this eternal perspective, allows us to focus more on the needs and concerns of others (Philippians 2:3-4). It allows us to "use whatever gifts received to serve others" (1 Peter 4:10). My earthly needs become few when I have a clear picture of my eternal home.

Let's learn to live as Jesus lived: in fellowship with our Heavenly Father; with absolute assurance of who we are in Christ; with confidence of our eternal destiny; and with the complete abandoned humility of a free and secure servant.

Have A Great Day!

John 8:37-38 - Lesson #89
4-13-07

The conversation between Jesus and the Jews turned to the topics of freedom, truth, sonship, and the word. Jesus tied all these together as He stated that those who would abide in His word would know the truth and be made free (John 8:31-32). Apart from the declarative testimony of the life of Christ as recorded in His word, we have no ability to know the truth about God which leads to eternal life. Without God revealing Himself through His Son, we would forever remain "a slave of sin" (John 8:34).

But God did not leave us as a hopeless slave, He sent His Son; "if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). Jesus Christ is the ONLY way to be set free. There is nothing we can ever do to free ourselves. But what does this actually mean? Set free from what?

The first freedom we have been granted is the freedom from condemnation; "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). This is freedom from the condemnation of sin which is an eternal death; "life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). This freedom grants us eternal life. But we have also been made free from the daily slavery of sin.

Before Jesus makes us free, sin has mastery over our life. We are a slave of sin and routinely present our body in obedience to sin. But when we are made free we are given to a new master; "having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:18). Jesus made us free to live each day in holy worship; "so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness" (Romans 6:19). But the Jews believed they were already free because of their heritage from the line of Abraham.

John 8:37-38

"I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father."

Jesus acknowledged their ancestry but made it clear that this does not yield freedom. They had not abided in His word, did not know the truth, and had not been set free. And the validation of what Jesus said was demonstrated in their desire to put Him to death. The words of Christ came directly from God, but the deeds of these Jews came from "your father the devil" (John 8:44).

We have been set free because of Christ. Our eternal as well as our daily freedom is because of Him. Let's praise the One who has made us free. Let's allow His word to fill our heart and freely give Him every moment of our life as a sacrifice of holy worship.

Have A Great Day!

Give From The Heart

4-16-07

In the book of Malachi, God called the people back to the law He established 800 years earlier with Moses. God spoke of the necessity of a pure sacrifice (Malachi 1:7-8), and the need for the priests to speak a message of truth (Malachi 2:7-8). He also addressed the issue of giving back a portion of our resources - a portion referred to as the tithe.

Malachi 3:8, 10

"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob Me. But you ask, 'How do we rob You?' In tithes and offerings. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house."

The principle of an offering began with Cain and Able (Genesis 4:3-4). Abraham then demonstrated the concept of the tithe when he gave Melchizedek "a tenth of everything" (Genesis 14:20). But systematic tithing was not established until God gave the law to Moses, (Leviticus 27:30-33).

In the time of Malachi, God not only called for a return to the discipline of tithing, He also directly linked tithing to blessings and gave the ultimate challenge: "Test Me in this and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of Heaven" (Malachi 3:10). God certainly never "owes" us because of anything we do; but His Word contains a consistent call to obedience, and true obedience always results in true blessing.

When Jesus died on the cross, He fulfilled the law for all who believe. And though the legalistic letter of the law has passed away, the intent of the law (which is the heart of God) remains for all time; "These {laws} are a shadow of the things to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ" (Colossians 2:17).

The intent, or "reality," of all the law is that God is Lord over ALL areas of our life. The law teaches this truth and shows us how far short we fall of His standard. The purpose of the law was much more than teaching us to comply with a written code. The shadow contained in the written law says "Thou shalt not kill," but the reality in Christ says to not even have hatred in our heart, (Matthew 5:21-22). The shadow in the law also says "Thou shalt not commit adultery," but the reality in Christ says to even refrain from lust (Matthew 5:27-28).

When we debate about the "rules" of how much and where to give, we are focused on the shadow and miss the reality of Christ - He is Lord of ALL! As we focus our eyes on Christ, we will give. We will give generously, "not reluctantly or under compulsion" (2 Corinthians 9:7). We will gladly give of our time, talents, and finances to whatever need He directs. When He is truly Lord, we will not simply give according to a "formula" dictated by the law, we will live under His grace and give according to the law's intent. When He is Lord, we will cease to rob God and will joyfully give our lives as we give from the heart.

Have A Great Day!

Follow Him To Nineveh 4-17-07

The subject of God's will is often one of great concern to growing Christians. Those who have accepted the forgiving grace of Jesus now have a desire to live a life which brings Him glory and honor. We have read we are to present ourselves as "living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God" (Romans 12:1), and we're ready to do His will; but what does God want us to do, where does He want us to go?

Fortunately, much of God's will is found directly in His Word. It's God's will that we live a pure and holy life (1 Thessalonians 4:3-7), and obey His commands (John 15:10). It's God's will that we love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30), that we remain in Him and bear much fruit (John 15:1-8), that we forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15), love others (1 John 4:7), and share the message of Jesus with others (Matthew 28:19-20). It's also God's will to "be joyful always; pray continuously; {and} give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

This list is not complete, but it's a good sampling of what is referred to as God's "general" will - His will for all His children as we are "conformed to the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29). God's general will involves a lifetime of worship and abiding in His presence. We still must pray for guidance and strength in following His general will, but we need not desperately search - His general will has already been revealed in His Word.

But God's "specific" will for our life comes as a very direct, clear, and persistent call. This call is perhaps best demonstrated in the life of Jonah.

Jonah 1:2

"Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before Me."

God's specific will for Jonah was clear and with a definite purpose. Jonah then had a choice whether to obey and follow. Jonah tried to run from God's will - run from Nineveh - and spent three days inside a giant fish. After the fish vomited Jonah onto dry land, God calmly revealed His will a second time; "Go to the great city of Nineveh..." (Jonah 3:2). God's call remained exactly the same; His specific will for Jonah was unchanged. This time, "Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord" (Jonah 3:3).

There are vast portions of God's will which are already revealed in His Word. We must develop the discipline of reading and studying His Word - studying His will - and then follow what He has already commanded. And for the part of God's will which is specific to our life, we must listen intently, pray diligently, and wait very patiently. But when His specific direction arrives (and we will know when God calls) we must be prepared to abandon all else and boldly follow Him to Nineveh!

Have A Great Day!

Ministering to Nineveh 4-18-07

In the message "Follow Him to Nineveh" we discussed the will of God in terms of His "general" and "specific" will. We saw that God's Word has already given a great deal of direction which applies to every Child of God. Our Heavenly Father desires each of His Children to be "conformed to the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29). And the process of being conformed is primarily one of obedient worship in ALL areas of our life. But then comes Nineveh!

The story of Jonah and the giant fish is one of the best known in the Bible and provides a wonderful example of how we need to follow when God calls. When God has a specific call for our life He will persistently give us clear direction and use all His infinite resources to make sure we understand. But as we read through the entire Word of God we must conclude that this type of specific call is relatively rare. For most, God's will never moves beyond a general call to walk in His love.

Yes, Jonah teaches us to follow when God's call is specific. But there's an even more important principle regarding God's general will which applies to all of us nearly every day of our life. This principle is discovered by examining why Jonah ran from God: "'Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before Me.' But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish" (Jonah 1:2-3).

Jonah didn't run from God simply because Nineveh was located in a distant and foreign land. Jonah ran because he disliked (even hated) the people who lived in this leading city of the growing empire of Assyria. The people of Nineveh had a reputation for cruelty in war, idolatry, and a general disrespect for God. Jonah had grown up with a hatred of Nineveh and couldn't bear being sent there to preach. He couldn't bear the thought of these hated people actually repenting and being blessed by "his" God.

Jonah 4:2

"O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."

God desires all the world to turn from their wicked ways and receive His blessings. And His general call is for us to deliver this message of love. We are called to deliver this message to ALL - especially those we may naturally dislike or have been "taught" to fear and hate. This becomes a form of worship because it demonstrates our understanding of the grace we have been given through faith in Jesus - none of us can ever earn God's love! Let's take the general will of God into the mission field placed before us and worship our Father by accepting the challenge of ministering to Nineveh.

Have A Great Day!

Grace-Filled Holiness

4-19-07

We often speak of God's Word as the absolute truth by which we are to live. We encourage one another to live without compromise and not to be pulled by the temptations of the world. But these type of discussions always imply a standard for Christian living; and, as much as we hate to admit it, a standard implies rules. Oh, how these words make some uncomfortable - some even angry!

Much of the Christian teaching we receive today is focused on the free gift of God's grace; "For it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:8), and this grace seems to be in conflict with the presence of rules. Since our sins have already been forgiven, and "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1), how can we talk about rules or standards or expectations?

It is absolutely clear in the Word of God that we are saved by grace and can do nothing to earn or improve upon our Salvation - we live and breathe under God's grace. However, it's also perfectly clear in His Word that there exists a standard of holiness for which we must strive. Sin is defined against a standard and the precious gift of God's grace never gives permission for sin!

Romans 6:1-2

"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may abound? By no means!"

As children of God, we now have complete freedom; "the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). But the freedom we have been given is the freedom to claim victory over sin and live a pure and holy life; "But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do" (1 Peter 1:15). We will never attain perfect holiness, never live in perfect compliance with God's standard. And though we who belong to Jesus are no longer under condemnation, we are called to live free of sin.

So why do we strive? First, holiness is honoring to God because God hates sin. Sin kills those our Father loves - those He loves so much that He sent Jesus to die as a sacrifice for the penalty of sin. God hates sin and we ought to hate what God hates. And next, as we strive for holiness (while remembering that our striving plays no part in our Salvation) we will see even more clearly how far we fall from God's required perfection. As we strive, our sin will become even more apparent and we will see with ever increasing thankfulness how much grace and forgiveness we have been given through faith in Jesus.

Salvation is ALL grace!! We live under His grace and have been set free from the law of sin and death; so now, let's truly learn of His grace by seeking to follow in His steps and striving for a thankful heart through a life of grace-filled holiness.

Have A Great Day!

John 8:39-41 - Lesson #90
4-20-07

Jesus came to set us free, "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). We have seen this is a freedom from condemnation, a freedom from the mastery of sin, and a freedom unto eternal life. The process of this freedom is through faith in Jesus Christ as we are born again as a child of God. This is the central message of the gospel, and a message which many of the Jews continually debated.

John 8:39-41

"They answered and said to Him, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said to them, 'If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. You do the deeds of your father.' Then they said to Him, 'We were not born of fornication; we have one Father - God.'"

The Jews traced their heritage back to Abraham, which they believed made them a child of God. God had made a covenant with Abraham which extended to all future generations; "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you" (Genesis 17:7). But Jesus explained that being a true child of Abraham meant so much more.

Abraham modeled a right relationship with God; "he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). God would later describe Abraham as one who "obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (Genesis 26:5). Jesus stated that a true child of Abraham was one who did the works of Abraham, one who believed and obeyed.

God's entire plan for bringing about the full restoration of an intimate relationship between Himself and man was based from the very beginning on faith; "Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham" (Galatians 3:7). Abraham heard the words of God, believed, and obeyed. Jesus brought the true Word of God and these Jews sought to kill Him. This was not consistent with the character of Abraham and certainly not consistent with the character of God.

The reference to fornication may have been to contrast their pure heritage with the mixed heritage of the Samaritans, or it may be to contrast with possible stories about Jesus' heritage because of Mary becoming pregnant before being wed to Joseph. The reference may have also been used to say they had remained true to the Law of God. Either way, the only defense the Jews could raise was that they had an outward heritage and outward works. But Jesus said the true work of Abraham was an inward faith.

Let's live as true children of Abraham and children of God by reflecting the character of our Heavenly Father - by trusting in Him alone for our Salvation and by living each and every day as a life of faith.

Have A Great Day!

The Great Cloud of Witnesses

4-23-07

I ran my first marathon (January 2004) in Phoenix Arizona. I'll spare you some of the painful details of running out of energy at the twenty mile point and being passed in the last mile by a 65 year old woman (I'll run better next time!). I learned many lessons that day, but the thing that struck me the most was how the cheering crowd helped me to run faster and farther than I thought possible. The 26 mile course was lined with thousands upon thousands of people. No one except my dear family knew my name, but they were ALL shouting words of encouragement.

Our journey with the Lord is like a marathon in many ways. We must maintain a disciplined training program to ensure we are prepared. The race itself can be long and hard - there will be times we run out of energy and want to quit - but crossing the finish line will be more rewarding than anything we can imagine! And along the way, we will certainly learn to appreciate the encouragement we receive from the cheering crowd.

Hebrews 12:1

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."

This verse follows what we often refer to as The Great Hall of Faith. Hebrews, chapter 11, describes many people from the Old Testament who were commended for their faith: Able, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, Samson, David, and many others.

At the end of this impressive list, we read that even though they were faithful, "none of them received what had been promised" (Hebrews 11:39). Their reward was postponed until the coming of Jesus; "God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect" (Hebrews 11:40). It's as if the faithful from the past are now watching and cheering us on with great excitement and anticipation, knowing that one day we will be "caught up together with them" (1 Thessalonians 4:17) to receive our eternal reward.

This cloud of witnesses now also includes the New Testament believers as well as Christians throughout the last 2000 years. It also includes Brothers and Sisters who love us and pray for us today. As we run the race and sometimes grow weary - sometimes even stumble and fall - these witnesses continue to cheer and encourage our every step.

We can run faster and farther than we think! Yes, the race is long and sometimes difficult, but we're definitely not alone. Let's run with renewed perseverance; and when we become discouraged, let's listen for the cheers from the great cloud of witnesses!

Have A Great Day!

Proving Our Faith

4-24-07

We begin our Christian life in faith; "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). And just as we begin our life in faith, so we must also continue to walk in faith; "Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him" (Colossians 2:6). We are to live in Christ, and continue to walk with Him, in the same manner as we received Him...in faith.

We cannot come to Christ without faith and we're unable to live a victorious Christian life without continuously walking in faith. Our faith is of great worth!

1 Peter 1:6-7

"For a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

One of the beautiful truths in God's Kingdom is that everything along our walk has a purpose; "In all things God works for the good of those who love Him" (Romans 8:28). Even our difficult times of hardship and trial are being directed by God "for the good." As we continue to love Him with all our heart, God will use our trials to reveal and strengthen our faith. And a truer understanding of our faith is one of the greatest "goods" we can receive.

Do we really believe our faith is "of greater worth than gold"? Until we've been sustained through times of great trial and testing, it's difficult to understand the true value of faith. Our faith is shown to be real ("proved genuine") only as we trust Him when no other hope can be seen. We never need to prove our faith to God - He sees deep within our heart and already knows the genuineness of our faith. God gave us our faith and calls us to live "in accordance with the measure of faith God has given" (Romans 12:3).

But our measure of faith is ALWAYS greater than what we believe we have, and can sustain us through greater trials than we believe possible. As we more clearly see the strength contained in this wonderful gift of faith, we are able to give all praise, glory and honor to God as Jesus is revealed through the testimony of our life. As we trust Him with all our heart, He will cause us to emerge from our trials much stronger and more confident, more "mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:4), because we will KNOW He is by our side.

As our faith is strengthened and refined, the presence of God will cease to be an interesting theory or an empty hope; it will become real and an integral part of our life! Let's rejoice that our trials last only "for a little while." But let's also rejoice that our trials are being used for His glory and for the purpose of proving our faith.

Have A Great Day!

Live Daily By Faith 4-25-07

In the message "Proving Our Faith" we saw how our faith is revealed and strengthened as we walk through our trials. It's not surprising that we often discuss the importance of faith, for "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). If we desire to live a life pleasing to God, we must increase our faith and learn what it means to live by faith.

2 Corinthians 5:7

"We live by faith and not by sight."

The first step of faith is when we recognize our sinful condition, repent of our sin, and believe Jesus died so our sin can be forgiven. This belief in Jesus is not a result of what we see, but a result of faith - and without this first step of faith it is definitely not possible to please God.

As we continue our walk with Christ, He becomes more and more real. With each new step our eyes are opened a little wider and we are allowed to see a little clearer. The challenges of yesterday which required great faith have become easier to bear...for now we can see!

But the increase of Spiritual sight is not the same as an increase of faith. As our Spiritual sight grows, our need for faith in order to walk the same path is actually reduced. Less faith is required when we clearly see; "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). True faith always involves a confidence of the unknown, an assurance of what is unseen. This point is easy to misunderstand so stay with me here.

Our Heavenly Father desires to lead us in a life of faith. He continues to draw us into the unknown, for it is only in the unknown that we truly learn to "trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). And as the unknown becomes known, He will surely call us to take the next step and trust Him more.

Where is God calling us today? For some it's to take the awesome step required for Salvation through faith in Jesus; "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 4:7). For some it's a step of trust for a burden which right now seems completely unbearable; and for some, it's a step into a level of service which appears impossible to achieve. Each of these require a step into the unknown, into a place we cannot see; but each is part of the great adventure of faith!

Though the unknown is sometimes uncomfortable and maybe even a little scary, being guided by God into what we cannot see is the essence of a life of faith - a life which pleases God. Until the day He calls us Home, we must continue to listen, step, and grow - we must continue to live daily by faith.

Have A Great Day!

Create Lasting Memorials

4-26-07

After the people of Israel wandered in the desert for 40 years, God led them across the Jordan river into the promised land of Canaan. This was not an ordinary river crossing. God stopped the Jordan from flowing and allowed the priests to stand in the middle of the river bed, with the ark of the covenant, as the Israelites walked passed. This spectacular event was an obvious miracle that God wanted His people to remember and pass down to future generations.

Joshua 4:5-7

"Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever."

Memorials are anything that help us remember a specific time when God revealed Himself and said: "I am here!" We must never forget the miracles in our life, nor the times God gave us clear direction or rescued us from darkness.

When David went to fight Goliath, he did so without fear because he knew: "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine" (1 Samuel 17:37). David had seen God's power and felt His presence during previous battles. It's easy to imagine David with a lion's tooth or a bear's claw around his neck as a reminder that God was very near.

The presence of God is a wonderful place to be - it's where our Heavenly Father desires for us to live each day of our life! But His presence can often be illusive and fragile; when we find it, it seems to quickly fade away. Most of us have so much input from the world that we become easily distracted from God. We must not allow this to happen!!

We must become more aware of God as He works in our life and in the world around us. As we see and hear Him, we must find ways to create memories for ourselves and those we love; "I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago" (Psalm 77:11). Memorials help and encourage us to remember.

Let's never forget He is by our side and desires for us to draw, and remain, near. Let's be a living example of a life devoted (each and every moment) to God. Let's regain the heart of worship and share the stories of God's love. Let's remember...and look for ways to create lasting memorials.

Have A Great Day!

John 8:42-47 - Lesson #91
4-27-07

The Jews were claiming to be children of Abraham and therefore secure in their position as children of God. Jesus responded by basically saying that children act like their father; "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham" (John 8:39). Jesus made it clear that being a physical descendant of Abraham did not make one a child of God. But if God was not the Father of these Jews...who was?

John 8:42-47

"Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.'"

The first indication that someone has God as their Father is their love for Jesus Christ, His Son. There is a certain Family bond among children of God, and that bond must begin with a love for the One who came from God. But these Jews did not love Jesus; in fact, they could not understand or even listen to what He was saying. Jesus introduced the concept that those who are in the Family can hear what the Family is saying; "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (John 18:37).

We tend to not consider the fact that there are only two options for an eternal father. We are either a child of God or a child of the devil. Making such clear and opposite designations is not a popular way to teach today. We need to be concerned about things like self esteem; and telling someone they are a child of the devil might hurt their feelings. But perhaps Jesus was more concerned with sharing a truth which could provide a feeling of worth and esteem for all eternity.

Satan is presented as the spiritual negative of Christ. Jesus came to give life, Satan came to murder; "your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Jesus came as absolute truth; "Nor was any deceit found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22). But Satan is the father of lies and has spoken lies from the very beginning: "Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God'" (Genesis 3:4-5).

The lies of the devil are still with us today, but Jesus spoke the truth! And those who are children of God hear His words and believe; "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John 5:1). Who is our eternal father? Have we taken the time to listen to His words? Let's intently listen, and never stop listening, as we live each day as a true child of God.

Have A Great Day!

Whom We Will Serve 4-30-07

Joshua led the people of Israel into the promised land of Canaan and helped them fight many battles. Toward the end of his life, Joshua gathered the leaders of Israel for some final encouragement: "You yourselves have seen everything the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the Lord your God who fought for you" (Joshua 23:3).

Joshua wanted the leaders to know that God would continue to fight for them; but he also wanted them to know that God expected obedience to His Word: "If you violate the covenant of the Lord your God, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the Lord's anger will burn against you" (Joshua 23:16). Joshua then gathered all the people and told them the time had come to make a choice.

Joshua 24:15

"But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

The Israelites had seen God's mighty hand as they fought their enemies in Canaan, and had heard many stories of God's protection as He led them out of Egypt - the time had now come to make a decision. Either they would commit to serve the Lord with ALL their heart, or they would serve the man made gods of the world.

We face the same decision today. We either decide to follow and serve Jesus, or we have decided to serve the priorities and "gods" of this world. There is no middle ground, a choice must be made! And failure to choose is itself a choice; "Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:18).

Everyone must make their own decision about Jesus, but each of us have a wonderful opportunity to influence others - especially those in our family. Notice that Joshua boldly spoke for his entire home: "WE will serve the Lord!" We can't force others to drink (and we can't quench their thirst by drinking for them), but we can definitely lead them to the water.

We can no longer float through life waiting to see where the pulls of this world will lead; we must live with intention and purpose, and decide once and for all to serve God with unrestricted devotion. Today, we stand at a crossroad and must choose. Today, we must choose whom we will serve.

Have A Great Day!