

# Devotionals from God's Daily Word Ministries

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## An Anxious Heart

8-1-07

In the message "Consistent Trust" we were encouraged to "trust in the Lord with all your heart" (Proverbs 3:5). We saw how a consistent trust ought to invade all areas of our life. We must be able to trust God for our eternity as well as our daily walk. A good measure of our trust (or lack of trust) is in our level of anxiety.

Being anxious, or having anxiety, is defined as being mentally troubled with worry or concern. Unfortunately, we have all been battling anxiety ever since Adam ate the forbidden fruit and tried in vain to hide from God; "I heard You in the garden, and I was afraid" (Genesis 3:10). The negative effects of anxiety were understood three thousand years ago when King Solomon wrote his proverbs of wisdom; "An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up" (Proverbs 12:25).

Anxiety remained a necessary topic as Paul preached the Good News of Jesus. Almost in the same breath that he instructs us to "Rejoice in the Lord always!" (Philippians 4:4), Paul teaches on removing anxiety from our life; "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6).

When we find ourselves being overly concerned or mentally troubled about ANYTHING, we must go to God (with thanksgiving) and give our burdens to Him. This doesn't mean we ignore our problems, but we must learn to view the things of this world against the backdrop of eternity. The concerns of this life always fade as we compare them to the eternal glory of His Kingdom.

Matthew 6:25,34

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry {or be anxious} about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? But seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

When we feel weighed down, pressured, or stressed - when concerns are coming in fast motion from all directions and we don't know where to begin - we must stop and take a long, deep breath! We must refocus on Jesus and His Word. We must be reminded of eternity in the presence of a loving God and diligently seek His Kingdom; "make every effort to enter that rest" (Hebrews 4:11).

As we draw closer to our Heavenly Father, our eyes become adjusted to His light and we see He has already given all we really need. As we love Him more, all fear is removed: "perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18). And as we trust Him more and more, we will receive His gift of peace and no longer live with the burdening weight of an anxious heart.

Have A Great Day!

## Crucified And Resurrected

8-2-07

Our new life begins with faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sin. When we are "born again," we cross from an eternal death to an eternal life; "whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24). Sin caused our condemnation and required our death; but Jesus took our sin and received sin's punishment. When we identify ourselves with Christ, we also identify with His death; "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?" (Romans 6:3).

True Salvation requires that we are "baptized into Christ," that we completely identify with His life and sacrifice on the cross. He was put to death for our sins, and has crucified the old sinful nature of all who believe; "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

The old nature has been crucified - it is dead! Granted, we often attempt to bring that comfortable old nature back to life and allow it to war with the things of the Spirit, but the old nature can no longer take control - it can no longer win!

This understanding will bring a glorious victory and freedom. The life we live in this body is not our own, we have died with Christ; "The world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14). And if we are already dead, how can anything in this world possibly harm us or cause us to fear?

Romans 6:4-5

"We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with Him like this in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection."

The purpose of being crucified with Christ is so we can also be resurrected with Him and live a resurrected life. We have not been crucified so we can simply wait to be called Home and taken out of the world. The new life we have received ought to set us free - free from the pulls of this world, free from the world's definition of success and failure, free from the concern of how others evaluate our life, and free to live each day for the glory of God.

Our lives must be a witness to the power of the gospel. If the gospel message resides in our heart, it WILL cause a change in the way we live today! We will be dead to the power of sin but alive in the contented joy of Christ. Let's demonstrate the power of the gospel by living a life which is both crucified and resurrected.

Have A Great Day!

John 9:35-41 - Lesson #99  
8-3-07

The religious leaders trusted in their ability to accomplish what they believed was God's requirement for righteousness. They had a system which made them feel secure. So when Jesus came claiming to be from God and upset the foundation of their beloved system, they were naturally defensive. They could not explain how the man born blind had received his sight, but neither could they allow talk that Jesus was responsible for this kind of miracle. So they cast the man out of their fellowship.

John 9:35-41

"Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of God?' He answered and said, 'Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?' And Jesus said to him, 'You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.' Then he said, 'Lord, I believe!' And he worshiped Him. And Jesus said, 'For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.' Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, 'Are we blind also?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, "We see." Therefore your sin remains.'"

The man who had received his sight had been growing in his understanding of Jesus. He initially said he was healed by "A man called Jesus" (John 9:11). And when questioned more, he said Jesus was "a prophet" (v.17). The man acknowledged that Jesus was from God (v.33) - an intellectual understanding - and yet Jesus had to seek out the man for him to be brought to the point of a saving belief and worship. Salvation always requires God's initiative: "There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God" (Romans 3:11). We have no hope without Jesus.

The life and message of Jesus became a judgment to the world. Jesus came so that "the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17), but His presence has drawn a line of judgment; "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already" (John 3:18).

Jesus came to save, to give spiritual sight, to those who understand they are spiritually blind. But those who believe they can already see do not believe they need to be healed, so they remain eternally blind. Jesus clarified this basic salvation principle when the Pharisees asked, with some indignation, "Are we blind also?" Their sin remained because they believed they could already see.

The judgment of Jesus remains today. He remains lovingly ready to save, but we are people like the Laodiceans who say; "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing" (Revelation 3:17a). We do not realize that we are "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (3:17b). And even when we recognize our need, we tend to create systems to earn our healing - and yet remain blind. He will graciously give us sight, but first we must acknowledge we are hopelessly blind and in desperate need of His healing.

Have A Great Day!

## Laboring In Vain

8-6-07

As we are "crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20) and live "united with Him in His resurrection" (Romans 6:5), we begin to view more and more of our life through the eyes of God. What we once saw as critically important begins to fade; and what we once neglected, we now begin to see as beloved by our Heavenly Father.

We can no longer build according to our old set of priorities. In fact, when we truly come in full submission to the cross of Jesus, we find we can no longer build anything according to our own design or in our own strength. We discover we must make God the Master Builder of every area of our life or we are wasting precious time, energy, and resources.

Psalms 127:1

"Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain."

Our life goes by so fast and our eternal vision is so very limited. Many of us are frantically building our castle and have failed to see we are building with sand which will crumble with the swell of the next tide. We may be struggling to build in our marriage, children, parents, job, school, friends, or even our ministry. But if we are expending great effort without results which are pleasing to God, we must honestly ask the question: "Who is doing the building?"

Even if our effort meets with apparent success, we must ask the same question and relinquish controls to God. Our greatest projects, if built in our own strength, will one day pass through the fire and be consumed; "the fire will test the quality of each man's work" (1 Corinthians 3:13). The standard of quality is determined by God, not man! It will be a sad day if we find we have spent a lifetime building that which is consumed by fire; "he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames" (1 Corinthians 3:15).

In order for God to properly build, we must first submit to the refining He desires to accomplish within us. He will mold us into the likeness of His Son as we are fully devoted to loving Him, learning His Word, and applying His Truth as the absolute foundation of our life: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22-24).

God is not just the best solution, He is the ONLY solution worth pursuing. Heavenly Father, help us to not waste another moment of this precious life you have given. Help us see where we have taken too much control and give us the strength and courage to turn over ALL to You. Dear Lord, work through us to build what will last for eternity! Beginning right now, help us to stop laboring in vain!

Have A Great Day!

## The Rock of Obedience

8-7-07

In the message "Laboring In Vain" we saw we must remove ourselves from the construction process and allow God to build every area of our life. We still must put forth effort - sometimes GREAT effort - but we can no longer build according to our own plans or rely on our own abilities; "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain" (Psalm 127:1).

We also saw one way to ensure God is building is to live according to the truth of His Word and "do what it says" (James 1:22). We cannot serve our Heavenly Father without aligning our life to His Word. At the end of a passage commonly referred to as "The Sermon on The Mount" (Matthew 5-7), Jesus stated the importance of being obedient to His Word.

Matthew 7:24-27

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

In this wonderful mountainside message, Jesus taught about Salvation; "enter through the narrow gate" (Matthew 7:13), but He also taught extensively about basic Christian living - what Paul referred to as being "in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25). Jesus said that both the foolish and the wise man heard His words and set out to build a house, but only one man followed God's design - and only one house remained standing after the storm.

Salvation is never earned by "doing." But true believers will strive to be obedient to what Jesus taught; "If you hold to My teachings, you are really My disciples" (John 8:31). We are obedient because our heart has been transformed and His Spirit now compels us to follow; "We know that we have come to know Him if we obey His commands" (1 John 2:3). We may stumble and sometimes fall, we may even become frustrated at the frequency of our falls, but if we are a child of God we will continue to get back up and move toward obedience because of who we are in Christ!

Each of us have been given a choice on how to build our life - our way or God's way. We must allow our Heavenly Father to become our Master Builder. We must trust Him with ALL our heart as His plan for our life unfolds. He promises to work through us to build something eternally beautiful that will weather all storms. But His promise is only applied as we faithfully allow Him to build upon the rock of obedience.

Have A Great Day!

## A Lifetime of Transformation

8-8-07

In the message "The Rock of Obedience" we considered our call to hear His words AND to "put them into practice" (Matthew 7:24). In fact, we saw that obedience to His Word is an indicator of our eternal position in Christ; "We know that we have come to know Him if we obey His commands" (1 John 2:3).

Salvation is a work of the Spirit, a "circumcision of the heart" (Romans 2:29), for those who truly believe in Jesus Christ. This miraculous work of the Spirit will always cause a change and will always produce fruit. However, we must balance this truth with the understanding that spiritual change is a process which is sometimes painfully slow. Each new creation in Christ is given the Holy Spirit as a guide, but we will spend the rest of our life learning who we really are in Christ and how to "keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25).

Even Paul recognized his spiritual maturity was not complete. He had the unique opportunity to receive truths and understanding directly from God; "this is what we speak, not with words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:13), but Paul still fell short of God's glory and had to strive to reach the place Christ desired.

Philippians 3:10-12

"I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."

Paul knew the goal of his life was to bring glory and honor to God by living in the fullness and power of the resurrection. He knew he was to live a submitted life as one who was born "into an inheritance that can never perish" (1 Peter 1:3-4). But he also knew he had not fully attained this goal.

At the moment of salvation, Jesus "took hold" of our life. Every single day we are given a new opportunity to pick up the pieces and bring Him glory and honor in ALL we do as we "press on toward the goal" (Philippians 3:14). We only arrive at the goal when we are called Home and see Him face to face, when we are fully "transformed into His likeness" (2 Corinthians 3:18). But until that time, we are to press forward in the obedience of worship, holiness, and eternal priorities.

No matter how difficult our current circumstances, how terrible our past mistakes or how seemingly hopeless our future, the only step under consideration is our very next. We must begin today to live as a new creation in Christ who desires to step in obedience and glorify His name. Then, we must continue to walk through a lifetime of transformation.

Have A Great Day!

## A Vessel of Purity

8-9-07

When Jesus was asked to identify the greatest commandment, He said it was to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30). God wants ALL of our love! He has no desire to share our love with any of the little "gods" of this world; "For the Lord your God is a jealous God" (Deuteronomy 4:24).

Giving God the fullness of our love requires that we live a very focused and holy life; "But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do" (1 Peter 1:15). Our love must be intently focused on the holy things of God rather than the corrupted things of this world. Any time we allow our love for God to mix with our love for the world, the worldly love initially dilutes and eventually completely overtakes any love for God.

James 3:11-12

"Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water."

Are we trying to walk on both sides of the fence? Do we maintain our "Godly" activities along side our "ungodly" activities? Do we praise God and discuss Biblical issues during certain portions of the week and then lust after the world during the other? If so, beware! The ungodly will soon overtake and totally consume the Godly - and we won't even be aware it's happening. If we're not careful, we will one day look at what consumes our attention and say, "How did I come to this place in my life? When did I leave God's path?"

The good news is we have been given the Holy Spirit as the Great Purifier. If we make the time to carefully listen, He will "guide us into all truth" (John 16:13). If we submit to His leading, He will strain, sift, distill, and refine until all that remains is the fresh and the pure.

Purity does not come by separation from the world, it comes as our heart is wholly separated unto God. We have been planted amongst the weeds of the world and there we will remain until the day of the great harvest (Matthew 13:24-30). But while we must live and minister among the things of this world, and while we can certainly be thankful for some of God's worldly blessings and provisions, we must never give our worship to the things of this world: "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).

Jesus has made us into a new vessel and asked that we be filled with what is pure and holy. Let's stop mixing fresh and salty water, Godly and ungodly devotion. Let's commit every area of our life (without compromise!) to our Heavenly Father and glorify Him in all we do by maintaining a vessel of purity.

Have A Great Day!

## Destroy The Ites

8-13-07

Moses had led the people of Israel through the desert for 40 years and was now preparing them to cross the Jordan River into the promised land of Canaan. As part of this preparation, Moses reminded the people how God had provided for all their past needs and reviewed the laws by which God expected them to live; "and if we are careful to obey all this law before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us, that will be our righteousness" (Deuteronomy 6:25).

The people of Israel would be brought into a right relationship with God as they worshipped Him and obeyed His commands. But as they entered the promised land, there were many enemies which had to be removed.

Deuteronomy 7:1-2

"When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations - the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you - and when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy."

These enemies posed a serious physical threat, but the longer term danger was to their spiritual survival. God wanted these "Ites" completely destroyed because their worldly gods would continually pull at the heart of His chosen people; "Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods" (Deuteronomy 11:16).

This can be a difficult message with today's soft view of sin. But there is an important lesson for each of us who desire a close relationship with God. Today, we have a new path to righteousness; "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (Romans 3:22). But God still desires the entirety of our heart and expects us to turn from anything which pulls us away from an unhindered and unrestrained devotion.

As he leads us into His promised land of rest and peace, there will always be enemies which entice us to turn from God, many temptations which compete for our time and thoughts...and for our worship. These "Ites" will appear stronger than our ability to conquer. But as we follow hard after God, He will grant us victory; "the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you" (Deuteronomy 7:22).

What enemies take us away from the worship of God? What addictions, activities, desires or fears are consuming our heart and keeping us from being focused on Jesus - keeping us from a closer relationship with our Heavenly Father? Let's be determined to possess the land and fully give our heart to God. Let's identify the enemies which hinder our walk and, without mercy, let's completely destroy the Ites.

Have A Great Day!

## Newly Defined Love

8-14-07

In the message "A Vessel of Purity" we were told; "Do not love the world or anything in the world" (1 John 2:15); and in the message "Destroy the Idols" we saw our call to destroy, without compromise, those areas which take us away from the worship of God. While these messages are absolutely true, they must be placed in the context of the entire Word of God to be properly understood.

God's Word is a message of love: His love for us and His call for us to love Him. We are to receive His love, return His love, and demonstrate His love by loving others. In addition, we ought to be thankful for His blessings of provision and for the beauty of His creation. We ought to be so filled with peace and contentment that we love our life...or should we?

Luke 14:26

"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters - yes, even his own life - he cannot be My disciple."

These may be the most difficult words Jesus ever spoke. Clearly, Jesus is not calling us to a life of hate. That would be completely inconsistent with the rest of God's Word; "A new command I give you: Love one another" (John 13:34), and "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). The problem is not with Jesus' use of the word hate but with our understanding of the word love. With the same word we say we love our food, our pet, our spouse, our home and...our Jesus? Oh Lord, forgive us!

Jesus is not saying we should love our life or family any less, rather that we should love our Heavenly Father more - much more! He is saying that unless our love for God is so great that our love for the things of this world appears as hatred by comparison, then we do not yet understand the love He desires and deserves.

We are called to love God with ALL our heart, soul, mind, and strength. But this love cannot be properly defined with our limited vocabulary. As we live a life of love, NOTHING must ever come close to competing with His rightful place on the Throne. He alone is worthy of our worship and praise - He alone is worthy of our true love.

There are certainly some addictive behaviors and time consuming bad habits which greatly hinder our relationship with God. These must be removed and destroyed without mercy or compromise. But most areas of our life can be placed in proper order by elevating our love and passion for God. Let's allow our attachment and feelings toward the blessings of this world become as dust when compared with the mountain of hunger and passion for our Heavenly Father. We may never have the proper word, but let's live with a heart dedicated to loving God with a newly defined love.

Have A Great Day!

## Enter The Mission Field 8-15-07

The apostles were instructed by the best Teacher the world has ever known, and witnessed the miracles of Jesus' life as well as His death and resurrection. It had been forty days since Jesus walked victoriously out of the tomb and He was now returning to the loving arms of His Father. But first, Jesus visited with His friends one last time and gave them a charge which would last the rest of their life.

Acts 1:8

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Jesus' death initiated the new covenant agreement between God and man; "this cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:20). And on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was given to all who believed and had entered into this new covenant. Jesus' final instructions to the apostles were for them to take this message of hope, this message of the new covenant in Christ and the power of His Spirit, into the mission field.

Jesus defined the mission field as "to the ends of the earth," meaning the extent of the known world (as far as anyone could possibly travel), but He also said to witness "in all Judea and Samaria" (the surrounding area or countries), and "in Jerusalem" (the city where they currently lived). Jesus was saying: Wherever you go - whether near or far - be My witness and boldly proclaim the good news. "He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant" (2 Corinthians 3:6).

All who truly profess Jesus as Lord and Savior have been sealed and empowered by His Spirit and are now to be witnesses of the Gospel; "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Our mission field will not necessarily be in a foreign land, or different language, but it WILL be filled with those who need to hear, see, taste and feel the message of Jesus - and our life ought to be a clear demonstration of that message!

We should praise God for the missionaries in foreign lands. They are accomplishing a vital service and are in need of our prayers and support. But we should also praise God for ALL who faithfully look for the hurting and lonely, who seek out those in need of love and encouragement, who minister the love of Jesus and proclaim His message through all they do - right where they are!

"I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (John 4:35). The field is all around us - in our church, our neighborhood, our work place...even in our own family! Let's accept the charge today to be faithful ambassadors and proclaim the good news wherever He leads. Let's boldly step out in faith and enter the mission field!

Have A Great Day!

## Motivated By Obedience

8-16-07

In the message "Enter The Mission Field" we saw how God has called us to be His witnesses and "ministers of a new covenant" (2 Corinthians 3:6). Our mission field may span the globe or be focused on a few, but our ministries are all the same - we are to glorify God as we proclaim the true gospel of Christ through our words as well as the actions of our life.

Let me start by first saying, "Welcome to the ministry!" If you have dedicated your life to following Jesus, you ARE in full time ministry!! Ministry work can be extremely rewarding as we share the truth and witness real change in the life of someone God places in our mission field. However, ministry work can also be very frustrating and discouraging whenever we forget the reason for our ministry and take our eyes off the One we are serving.

1 Thessalonians 2:4,6

"We speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. We were not looking for praises from men, not from you or anyone else."

God has entrusted us with His gospel message, and we must minister out of an obedience to this trust and a desire to glorify Him in all we do. Anytime we find ourselves motivated by results or praises for our effort, we are setting up for failure and our heart is no longer passing His test. God will often bless us and confirm His leading with fruit in our ministry, but our focus and motivation must always remain on loving Him through our simple obedience. He has called and we must follow for a lifetime - regardless of the result of each individual step.

We must serve and trust that God will bring the harvest in His perfect timing; "for the battle is not yours, but God's" (2 Chronicles 20:15). These are God's battles and ultimately His harvest. Our job is to simply enter the field, plow, and continue to scatter seed. The praises of men will come and go, but the joy of knowing God is glorified by our obedience is steady and unshakable.

Our efforts may sometimes seem futile and we may feel completely unqualified, but we must continue - we have been "approved by God!" Our love and encouragement toward others may appear to have minimal effect, but a small nudge today can cause a lifetime of change. An offer of prayer can give renewed hope, and a testimony of God's faithfulness in times of trial can soften a heart to the saving gospel of Jesus.

As each of us enter the mission field, God will use us to change the lives of those He places in our path. One day, when we stand in His presence, we may be allowed to see the true impact of our service. But until that time, we must continue to serve and be motivated by obedience.

Have A Great Day!

John 10:1-6 - Lesson #100  
8-17-07

Jesus healed the man born blind in order that "the works of God should be revealed" (John 9:3). The religious leaders could not fit this miracle into their system so they cast the man out of the synagogue and refused to believe Jesus was from God; "this Man is a sinner" (John 9:24). The man who was healed believed and worshipped, but the religious leaders rejected and scorned. While speaking to this same group of so-called leaders, Jesus declared Himself to be the true leader or shepherd.

John 10:1-6

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.' Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them."

Everyone during the time of Jesus could understand this illustration, though many did not perceive its meaning. When shepherds gathered their sheep, they would put them into a sheepfold - a designated area, usually with mud walls and only one entrance, the door, used for protection against thieves and predators. Since the area could hold the sheep of different shepherds, a doorkeeper was hired to guard the sheep and open the door for those who were authorized.

Shepherds spent a great deal of time with their sheep, knew them by name, and led them with their voice. The Pharisees, as the religious leaders, ought to have known and been known by the sheep. But they had ceased to be shepherds who cared for their sheep and had become thieves who only wanted to "acquire" sheep to increase their own status; "You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock" (Ezekiel 34:3). The pastoral exhortation for our day is clear.

We can all be viewed as being part of the sheepfold. And if we listen, a time will come when a voice beckons us to follow. How will we know this is the voice of the true Shepherd or a thief who has come to destroy? Following the wrong voice can be extremely painful, and potentially disastrous! "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15).

We can prepare for His call by first learning the discipline of quiet. We cannot hear until we become still and block out all competing noise. It seems this discipline becomes more and more difficult in our "modern" age. We must then spend the necessary time getting to know the precious words our Shepherd uses when He calls. Fortunately He has recorded and preserved His words so we need not be deceived. Let's recognize His voice by knowing His Word and then boldly follow the leading of the One True Shepherd.

Have A Great Day!

## Trust His Vision

8-20-07

After entering the promised land, the Israelites were ruled by a series of Judges. This time was characterized by God's discipline when the hearts of His children turned away, and deliverance when they repented and cried out for help. Unfortunately, this cycle was repeated many times! Deborah led the Israelites to forty years of peace, but then; "the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years He gave them into the hands of the Midianites" (Judges 6:1).

After seven years of oppression, "Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help" (Judges 6:6). The Israelites were living in such fear that when God answered their cry and called Gideon to be the next deliverer of Israel, he was "threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites" (Judges 6:11). Gideon would eventually lead a small army to victory and rule Israel for another forty years; but when God first called, he was fearfully sifting grain for his next loaf of bread.

Judges 6:14-15

"The Lord turned to him and said, 'Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?' 'But Lord,' Gideon asked, 'how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.'"

Gideon was scared and saw himself as one with little worth, "the least in my family," but God saw the next brave leader of a nation. Gideon saw weakness, but God saw strength. Gideon saw his past failures, but God saw the future victories of a mighty warrior. Gideon's vision required him to fearfully work for his next loaf, but God's vision was calling Gideon to boldly lead many others closer to His side.

God sees each of us much differently than we see ourselves; "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Not only does God see deeper, He sees with an expanded spiritual spectrum which we can scarcely imagine. Our Father is intimately aware of all our failings - and He loves us anyway! He not only sees who we are, but also who we will become as our heart is fully devoted to Him and we learn to walk in step with His Spirit...He sees every opportunity we will ever have to glorify His name.

Let's put aside the baggage of our past which clouds and distorts our view. Let's refuse to look through the filter of our present understanding and perceived limitations; "fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen" (2 Corinthians 4:18). God has called us into His Glorious Kingdom, uniquely equipped us for His service, and given us an assignment to share His love and truth. Our Heavenly Father sees our full potential as we walk in His strength. Let's answer the call and move forward with confidence as we trust His vision.

Have A Great Day!

## The Cry of Our Heart

8-21-07

In the beginning, after the creation of the heavens and the earth, "God created man in His own image" (Genesis 1:27). The image of God did not refer to our physical appearance but rather the character of our spirit. The spirit of man was created in the image of God for the purpose of bringing Him glory and dwelling with Him for all eternity; "God saw all that He had made, and it was very good" (Genesis 1:31).

But when man sinned, a separation immediately formed with God; "they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden" (Genesis 3:8). Though man was physically banished from the garden and forbidden to experience the joy of walking side by side with his Creator - and though sin and the resulting separation was inherited by all future generations - there forever remains a damaged spirit which longs to return home.

Psalm 84:1-2

"How lovely is Your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God."

This passage was written by one who knew God and the joy of His presence. But the author also knew of man's inability to be satisfied with anything less.

Before we know God we attempt to stop the cry with all sorts of pacifiers, but nothing satisfies. We pursue pleasures of the flesh, challenges of the mind, and advancement in status, but the cry remains. Sooner or later (Oh Lord, may it be sooner!) we realize that Solomon was correct when he said; "I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind" (Ecclesiastes 1:14).

Many things of this world are worthwhile as they are done for the glory of God; but in the sense that they attempt to satisfy, they are all meaningless. The ONLY answer to the unsettled and restless longing deep within our soul is to return to a restored relationship with God. When we place our life in the Father's Hands through faith in Jesus, He gives us His Spirit and says, Welcome Home! "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Romans 8:16). And as we learn to walk in this restored relationship, we will finally be at peace.

There are so many things of this world which can occupy our time and consume our thoughts, but none that will truly satisfy. Our search can continue until our time on earth is gone but the emptiness will remain. Let's return to the Father today and live the rest of our days fully devoted to loving Him. Let's put an end to the chasing and wandering, and finally allow Him to satisfy the cry of our heart.

Have A Great Day!

## He Will Be Found

8-22-07

In the message "The Cry of Our Heart" we saw how the Psalm writer longed to be close to God; "my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" (Psalm 84:2). The writer knew his heart would only be satisfied by being in the presence of God; but unfortunately, not many of the children of Israel shared this same understanding.

The Israelites continually rebelled and failed to devote their hearts to God. They sought pleasure and security in the world, and turned to worship idols and false gods. And though God sent many messengers to call His children home, they refused to change. Finally, God allowed the armies of Babylon to destroy the temple and lead the people into seventy years of captivity. But even in this most severe discipline, God demonstrated His love and true desire for His Children to return Home.

Jeremiah 29:10-13

"I will come to you and fulfill My gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.'"

God's plan has always been to give us hope and a future, to prosper us and keep us from harm, but His plan can never be separated from a life devoted to Him. There is no hope - no future or security - apart from resting in His arms. And the only lasting prosperity and peace comes as we walk in step with His Spirit. Why do we not trust Him to fully guide our path? And why do we seek His plan for our life without bothering to first seek Him?!

God's plan is for us to be restored to Him and glorify His name as we love Him with all our heart. All other plans regarding the specific circumstances of our existence flow out of His plan for a loving relationship filled with worship; "seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33). Seek Him first!

Yes, He has promised a glorious future - not necessarily a future free of trouble, but a future filled with "the peace of God which transcends all understanding" (Philippians 4:7), a future where we can learn real prosperity by "being content in any and every situation" (Philippians 4:12). But this future can only be had by those who seek Him with all their heart.

Let's allow God to be the all-consuming top priority of our life. Let's diligently seek Him in times of quiet as well as in the midst of the endless multitude of daily activities. And let's be filled with hope and encouraged by His promise that as we faithfully seek Him with all our heart, He will be found!

Have A Great Day!

## Full Measure of Our Heart 8-23-07

In the message "He Will Be Found" we saw that God promises to be found by those who will seek Him. But the qualifier is that He will be found by those who seek Him with ALL their heart; "you will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

The consistent message through all of God's Word is that He is calling us back to a restored relationship with Himself - a relationship which is only possible through faith in Jesus. We enter in by His loving grace, but His expectation for this relationship is that, through faith, we give Him ALL of our heart.

If we desire this restored relationship with God - if we desire to truly "find" Him - then our heart must be fully devoted to Him; there can be no rivals or competing affections which pull us away. When Jesus was asked to name the most important commandment, He replied; "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30). All means all - no cheating or deceiving!

Our Heavenly Father deserves that we give Him our love honestly and completely; "You must have accurate and honest weights and measures. For the Lord detests anyone who deals dishonestly" (Deuteronomy 25:15-16). It's foolish to think we can cheat God and withhold even a small portion of our heart, for in doing so we ultimately cheat ourselves.

Luke 6:38

"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

God has promised to bless those who come to Him with a true and uncompromising faith in Jesus. His blessings include the right to be called children of God, and the inheritance of eternal life. But it also extends to our days on earth as we receive the blessings of true joy, peace, and contentment.

It should not be surprising that the measure of blessing we receive from God is directly related to the measure we use to give back to Him. Our true blessings graciously flow as we give Him our worship and obedience; as we desire to walk in His presence and praise Him with every breath. But blessings are never earned through obedience, good deeds or financial gifts - they are always a gracious gift of God.

Our dealings with God become dishonest and deceitful when we expect a full measure of His blessing of peace, His blessing of clear direction, or even His blessing of assurance and freedom from doubt, and yet cheat Him with every measure we return. Let's be restored and truly receive the full measure of His blessing. Let's enter into His presence and, each and every day, give Him the full measure of our heart.

Have A Great Day!

## Enter His Sanctuary

8-27-07

In the last several messages we've considered the importance of seeking God and loving Him with ALL our heart. This is an important issue with regard to our Salvation and the eternally restored relationship to which we've been called. But it's also critical to how we view the world around us and function in our day to day activities.

The author of Psalm 73 writes with words of frustration about the things he sees in the world. He can't understand how the wicked can be so carefree and yet so successful; "For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Psalm 73:3). He felt he may have even wasted his time in maintaining Godly values; "Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence" (Psalm 73:13). He kept searching for answers, but found none until he returned to worship in the presence of God.

Psalm 73:16-17

"When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me - till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood."

Many issues in our life simply cannot be resolved through our human understanding and reasoning. We often try to make sense of events in the world, or in our particular situation, only to discover there are no easy answers or apparent solutions. But no matter how confusing our life may become, we must always remember we're a child of God - a child of the Creator of the Universe! "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of His mouth" (Psalm 36:6).

Our Heavenly Father does not function according to a set of human rules. He is not confined by time or space, and He's certainly not guided by our set of values; "as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways" (Isaiah 55:9). We must give God all our mind as we seek to understand Him through His Word and study how He has moved throughout history; but we must also give Him all our heart as we worship Him despite what we see, think, or feel. Only in the sanctuary of worship will we begin to truly understand.

We must come to our Heavenly Father with a heart-felt belief that being in His presence is more important than anything else in the world; "Whom have I in Heaven but You? And earth has nothing I desire besides You" (Psalm 73:25). This type of passion allows us to draw near and begin to see the disconnected pieces of our life fit neatly into God's perfect plan.

Let's return to the place where He's everything we desire and all we really need. Let's worship Him with all our heart and begin to understand His wonderful plan for our life. Let's once and for all open the door and enter His sanctuary!

Have A Great Day!

## Live in His Presence 8-28-07

In the message "Enter His Sanctuary" we saw how the seemingly complex and confusing portions of our life are most often made clear as we open the door of our heart and enter His sanctuary. His ways are much higher than ours, "as the heavens are higher than the earth" (Isaiah 55:9), and His true purpose cannot be understood without a heart dedicated to glorifying Him in worship.

We are called to a life of worship; and though we use the phrase "enter His sanctuary," I pray it comes as no surprise that the presence of God is not confined within the walls of our church buildings. We do not call Him "down" to join us as we sing our songs, and He is not any closer because of the outward expression of our worship.

Matthew 28:20

"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

One of the last promises Jesus made was though He was returning to the Father, He would always remain with us - to the very end! The presence of God is with us right now! He is as near in our most decorated centers of worship as He is when we are on the bus or alone in our car; "never will I leave you" (Hebrews 13:5).

One of the great blessings most believers miss today is that our Heavenly Father is much closer than we realize: "If I go up to the heavens, You are there; if I make my bed in the depths, You are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there Your hand will guide me, Your right hand will hold me fast" (Psalm 139:8-10). He is VERY near, and His great desire is that we would join Him in an intimate and worshipful fellowship in whatever circumstances our day may bring.

We fellowship with our Creator by continually communing with Him, whether in deep prayer or simple conversation, throughout the day. We must present EVERY thought, word, and deed at His feet as our absolute best offering of love. When impure thoughts or our deceitful tongue pulls us away, we should immediately turn them away, ask His forgiveness, and return to His presence. As impossible as this may seem, this is the worship God desires - and the worship He deserves. We ought to adopt this as our lifestyle today and continue until He takes us home.

His presence is available to every believer! Some jobs or home environments may pose a challenge, but He has promised to be with those who desire to walk with Him, regardless of the circumstances. Let's be determined to bring Him glory and honor, and love Him through ALL we do, say, and think. Let's be determined that for all our remaining days we will worship and live in His presence.

Have A Great Day!

## An Unsearchable Love

8-29-07

As I look back through the Scriptural account of history, I can see how God sent His Son to be born in a manger, grow and live among us, and die for our sins upon a cross. I can clearly see how the sacrifice of Jesus allows us, through faith, to enter into God's presence. I can even see the purpose of His humble birth as an example of humility and service. But what I don't think I'll ever fully understand is why. Oh, sure, I know the reason is love; "For God so loved the world that He gave..." (John 3:16), but I seriously doubt I'll ever understand the amount of love required to sacrifice so much - the amount of love He had (and has)...for me!

Paul wrote to the Romans with the intent of setting foundational beliefs for the church. In this letter, Paul presented the greatest amount of teaching found anywhere in the Bible. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote on topics ranging from sin and judgement, to faith and Salvation; from the purpose of the Law and life through the Spirit, to the sovereignty of God and the future of Israel. But toward the end of the letter, Paul paused and wrote a short prayer of praise and glory.

Romans 11:33-36

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay Him? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen."

We get the feeling that Paul reviewed the first portion of his letter and just couldn't continue without praising the Lord. Paul had wrestled through many difficult issues and learned a valuable lesson: God is God, and sometimes this simple truth defies understanding.

God has a perfect plan where every piece fits neatly together; but there are many connections my finite mind fails to comprehend. I can't always see the purpose of my trials or the lessons I'm to learn, and I get frustrated with His timing (I want to know His plan, now!). But I know His love gave everything; "He humbled Himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:8). I may not fully understand this love, but the little I know is enough to create a desire to live a life of devotion and faith. One day, all His mysteries will be perfectly revealed. Until then I will simply continue to worship and trust.

We may never fully understand, but I pray we are all drawn a little closer today. If you have never experienced His love, I pray that you will release your heart into His care. If you're feeling unloved by the world, I pray you will look to Him and see a Father who gave His Son so He could hold you for all eternity. He is an unsearchable God who is glorified by pouring out, for you, an unsearchable love.

Have A Great Day!

## Teach The World His Grace 8-30-07

When Jesus was asked to name the greatest commandment, He said; "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). Jesus clearly said the most important thing we can do in this life is to love God with absolutely every part of our being. But He immediately added; "the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39).

After our love for God, we are called to love others. But at the end of His ministry, on the night before He was crucified, Jesus set a new standard for our love.

John 13:34

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

Love for others had always been important, but now Jesus called the command "new" and changed the standard from the way we love ourselves to the way He loved us. Why is this significant?

Jesus came into the world with the single purpose of dying for the forgiveness of our sin so we could be restored to a right relationship with God - this is true love; "God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son..." (John 3:16). We didn't do ANYTHING to deserve this love. While we were completely lost in a world of sin, God looked down on us, and loved: "God demonstrated His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

This degree of love, poured out for those who are utterly undeserving, is the definition of God's grace. Peter said we are saved by this undeserved love; "it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved" (Acts 15:11). Paul said the same in many different ways: "{We} are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24), and, "it is by grace you have been saved, through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). God's love is demonstrated through grace.

The concept of grace is essential in beginning our relationship with God as well as continuing with every step of our journey along His path. But, try as we might, we can never adequately convey the meaning of God's grace with words. We must continue to proclaim His truth through spoken and written words, but in this important area of God's grace, we are given a "new command" to teach through our actions.

We have been given an incredible gift! We are given a gift we can never repay, but a gift we must share. The world is in great need! It's lost and desperate to know the grace of our Lord and Savior. Let's pour out love to those around us in the same manner it was poured out on us - undeserved and without restraint! Let's live out Jesus' new command and, through love, teach the world His grace.

Have A Great Day!