

Devotionals
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God's Daily Word Ministries

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His Gentle Knock

4-3-06

In the message "The Most Holy Place" we saw how Jesus became the final sacrifice for our sin. When Jesus died on the cross, "the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51). The curtain had, up to that point, formed a barrier for the Most Holy Place in the temple where God resided with His people. The tearing of the curtain was a clear demonstration that anyone who believes in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin can now enter the presence of God; "We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus" (Hebrews 10:19).

We are a fortunate people! Not since Adam has man had such access to the presence of God. We no longer need a priest with a specific sacrifice, and we need not pray a specific prayer - but there IS a condition. The Most Holy Place of the presence of God can only be entered by those who come by faith in Jesus Christ. If we desire the presence of God, we must first open the door of our heart.

Revelation 3:20

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me."

Here is contained the great mystery of God's plan for man - He desires a people who recognize their need, hear His voice, and open the door to invite Him in. He then promises to enter and "set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (2 Corinthians 1:22).

God's Word never indicates that Jesus will crash through the door of our heart; He's never pictured as huffing and puffing to blow the door down. And He certainly NEVER sneaks in through a side window! He simply and patiently stands at the door and knocks - He says, "I am here. Won't you invite Me in?"

Opening the door involves an understanding of who Jesus is, and an act of submission which releases control of our life. We may hear His voice through something someone says or something we read - we may "hear" Him knocking as we sit in silence - but when we hear, we must be willing to open the door; "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 3:15).

Many people will hear the knock of Jesus, but few will open the door. Most will spend a lifetime evaluating the knock and analyzing the One who is knocking; some will even push a little food onto the front porch; but few will actually recognize their need and open the door. Let's invite Him in today and commune with Him EVERY day for all eternity. Today, let's answer His gentle knock.

Have A Great Day!

His Disciples

4-4-06

One of the last commands Jesus gave was to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). The making of a disciple is the complete work of the Holy Spirit; but we are told to join in this work by teaching people to believe in the sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of sin, to humbly submit control of their life into His hands, and to "obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20).

God's Word contains the complete description of what it means to believe, submit, and obey. Jesus taught extensively on each of these issues. But the single command which will have the greatest impact on the world around us is the command to love.

John 13:34-35

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another."

The phrase "As I have loved you" ought to rip at our heart. Though there was nothing in us to deserve His love, Jesus gave His life. And long before He gave His physical life, He laid down the very essence of who He was; "but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (Philippians 2:7). Jesus loved enough to give up who He was for those completely unlovable; and this is the level of love we are called to demonstrate to one another.

We are called to a sacrificial love - a love that gives and considers others needs ahead of our own. We are called to give our time, our tears, our understanding, and even our material resources when necessary. We are called to love enough to rejoice when others rejoice, but also to hurt when others hurt; and to forgive simply because Jesus first forgave us. We are called to love!

But notice why we are called to such love. Our love for others is certainly an expression of gratitude to God and a maturing process as we grow into the likeness of Christ; but Jesus also says our love for others is the one sure way of telling the world we are followers of Christ. Our love becomes an act of worship because, through love, we are boldly declaring: Jesus is Lord! As we love - even when others may not "deserve" our love - we actively show the world the joy and peace found only in Jesus.

The world is overflowing with people who need love - who have run out of hope, longing for someone to let them know they care. We are those who must care! We must reach out to one another with a love that defies all worldly wisdom and understanding. We must love as Jesus loved us. This love will be used to work miracles; this love will bring glory and honor to our Heavenly Father; this love will show the world that we are truly His disciples.

Have A Great Day!

United in Purpose

4-5-06

In the message "His Disciples" we saw how our love for one another demonstrates we are true followers of Jesus Christ; "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). We saw our call for a sacrificial love, and focused on those with clear needs - the lonely, hurting, anxious, depressed or hungry - needs which require definite action.

But there's another expression of Christian love - a love which is still sacrificial, but one that requires us to withhold certain actions, place restraints on our words, and definitely increase our time in prayer. This is the love which leads to unity in our local fellowship.

1 Corinthians 1:10

"I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought."

There's a story of a man lost at sea. He's treading water and has given up all hope. Suddenly, a ship appears on the horizon and moves his way. His strength surges as he wildly waves his arms, rescue is near! But as the ship gets closer, he sees the passengers yelling at one another; many are punching, kicking and spitting; and some are even being thrown overboard. It doesn't take long for the man to begin swimming as fast as he can AWAY from the ship.

We are passengers on the gospel ship, and God's Word continually calls us to unity; "conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ...stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27). If we are united with Christ, we ought to be "like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose" (Philippians 2:2). As Jesus prayed to the Father, He made it clear why we are to unite: "so the world may believe that You have sent Me" (John 17:21).

Unity is never a call for compromise on the essentials of the gospel. We must never give a single step of ground regarding the necessity and sufficiency of faith in the sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of sin. But when we begin to divide over issues like the format of our worship service, the structure of our programs, or the look of our facility, we have clearly stepped over the line of Biblical unity.

I can't define the exact line of unity in your local fellowship. But I can confidently suggest there is greater room for unity than what first appears. If all of us will honestly remove our pride and understand God's purpose in a unified fellowship, we will see much more room for grace and love. Let's truly show the love of Christ. Let's all draw closer and closer to Jesus and show the world we are united in Spirit, united in purpose.

Have A Great Day!

We Will Not Fear

4-6-06

In these times of great uncertainty - with concerns about war, terrorism, and the economy - let's always remember, our Heavenly Father is the Creator of the Universe. He formed the Heavens and the Earth out of nothing, and as we place our trust in Him, He has given a basic promise: "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). His desire is for us to draw nearer in our love and worship, and allow His Spirit to remove all fear.

Psalm 46:1-3

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging."

Although we are uncertain what tomorrow may bring, we ought to have confidence in the One who really controls tomorrow. If we believe Jesus died for our sin, rose again in victory over death, and is seated at the right hand of the Father - if we surrender our life to who He is and what He has done - our eternal home has been firmly established; "Our citizenship is in Heaven" (Philippians 3:20). As a child of the Sovereign King - as one who believes in our eternal future - we no longer have reason to fear; "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship" (Romans 8:15).

We no longer have a reason, but still we fear. The unknown is scary and makes us feel out of control. But as we pray for an end to violence - as we strive to make this world safer, better educated, and more prosperous - we must understand there is only one true solution to our fear.

Our fear will only be removed as we love the Lord with ALL our heart, soul, mind and strength. When we understand that our life is not our own, we will love with a complete abandonment to His desire. We will pray and live each day with the surrender demonstrated by Christ; "Father...not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). As we live each day to bring Him glory and honor, fear WILL be removed: "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18).

Yes, these days contain some uncertainty. If we continue to focus on what we can see, there will always be uncertainties. But our faith, hope, and joy are in His eternal glory - not in this world which will one day pass away. Let's refuse to allow our fear of the unknown cripple our service for God. There is still much work He has for us to do. Let's pray that our love will increase, that our worship will intensify, and that we will boldly stand up and proclaim: "We will not fear!"

Have A Great Day!

John 4:31-34 - Lesson #43
4-7-06

Jesus had remained at the well while "His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food" (John 4:8). While the disciples were away, Jesus taught a Samaritan woman wonderful truths about everlasting life; about the Father; about worship; and about Himself. When the disciples returned, the woman hurried into the city to call others to come; "Could this be the Christ?" (John 4:29). The disciples had brought back food from the city and were concerned that their weary and beloved Rabbi was not eating as they felt He should.

John 4:31-34

"In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, 'Rabbi, eat.' But He said to them, 'I have food to eat of which you do not know.' Therefore the disciples said to one another, 'Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.'"

This has now become a familiar pattern of conversation within John's gospel. When Jesus spoke with Nicodemus, His statement "unless one is born again" (John 3:3), was taken literally and completely misunderstood: "How can a man be born when he is old?" (John 3:4). A similar misinterpretation occurred when Jesus offered the Samaritan woman "living water" (John 4:10); "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep" (John 4:11). In both cases, the Spiritual message was missed.

The disciples could not yet understand Spiritual messages; so when Jesus spoke of food, all they could do was wonder who brought Him something to eat. Jesus had just experienced the full satisfaction which only complete obedience to the will of God can bring, and all the disciples could think of was lunch. How often do we miss true satisfaction and peace because we are consumed with our physical surroundings? "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

Physical food is certainly important, but many believers all around the world today are sadly malnourished because they know nothing of the Spiritual food available only through doing the will of God - and of finishing His work. In the immediate context, Jesus was nourished because He obediently came through Samaria and ministered truth to the Samaritan woman. In the broader context, Jesus lived in perfect harmony with the will of God as He revealed the Father and proclaimed truth to all those given into His hands. At the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus would say His work of declaring and glorifying the Father was finished (John 17:4). And on the cross, He made His work truly complete; "It is finished" (John 19:30).

His food is available, and His food is good! But to eat it means to consume it as it is presented. We can't manipulate God's will so it conforms to our own, nor can we bargain with God to change His will into something more "acceptable." God's will is perfect and we are called to obediently follow. Let's refuse to live another day as weak, malnourished followers of Jesus. Let's receive all He has to offer by obediently doing His will all the way to completion. Let's begin today to feast on true Spiritual food.

Have A Great Day!

Just Passing Through

4-10-06

It's a great privilege to be part of God's creation. It's an honor to view "God's invisible qualities - His eternal power and divine nature" (Romans 1:20) - through the beauty of this world. Every plant and animal; every hill, valley and body of water; every star in the sky and every man, woman and child declare the glory of God and attest to His majesty. And yet, as glorious as this world may be...it is not our home.

Philippians 3:19-21

"Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in Heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body."

When we place our trust in Jesus, He provides a way for us to be united with God and "adopted as His sons" (Ephesians 1:5). We are adopted by grace and become "fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household" (Ephesians 2:19). If we could gain even a small understanding of "God's household," we would hold very loose any of our attachments to this world.

Abraham lived his life by faith. When God called Abraham to pack all his household and move, he obeyed "even though he did not know where he was going" (Hebrews 11:8). Abraham was never concerned with his earthly dwelling; he was "longing for a better country - a Heavenly one" (Hebrews 11:16). Abraham honored God through faith while remaining an "alien and a stranger on earth" (Hebrews 11:13).

We have been placed in this world with all its beauty and with all its temptations. In fact, when we give our life to Christ, we are specifically sent into the world for the purpose of ministry; "As You have sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). But we must NEVER become identified by the values of the world nor driven by anything it can offer. We are sent into the world, but we must never be of the world; "They are not of the world, even as I am not of it" (John 17:16).

Our home is defined as the place we feel most comfortable; the place we store our treasures and find rest for our soul. If we are a child of God, our eternal home is Heaven and we ought to be able to say, "Take everything I own but leave me Jesus and I will have enough!" This world can be VERY beautiful and our lives should always be a productive expression of worship for our Lord. But we must remember that our citizenship is in Heaven; and for all the days we walk this earth, we must walk as though we're just passing through!

Have A Great Day!

In Whom We Trust

4-11-06

Hezekiah became the king of Judah soon after the northern tribes of Israel had been taken captive by the Assyrians. Judah was now being threatened by this same Assyrian army. Hezekiah was young and had a strong desire to do right in the eyes of God, but his faith was being greatly tested.

Seeing his kingdom would soon be under attack, Hezekiah sought help through an alliance with Egypt. Though this alliance was not wrong in itself, the action was taken out of fear and without consulting God. This action was not only foolish, it was sin!

Isaiah 31:1

"Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the Lord."

Hezekiah made the same mistake all too common among believers today. We say we believe God's Word is true, but fail to trust Him with the real trials of our life. It was easier for Hezekiah to place his trust in what he could see, than in the Hand of God which he "believed" but remained unseen.

When the Assyrian's actually attacked Jerusalem, Hezekiah's faith had greatly increased. As he spoke with his soldiers, Hezekiah demonstrated full confidence in God.

2 Chronicles 32:7-8

"Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles."

Where do we turn when the enemy threatens? If our faith is restricted to the inside of church walls on Sunday morning, we are definitely ill-prepared. We must learn to walk in the presence of God all through our day so we KNOW God is with us.

When we trust Him and love Him with ALL our heart, we begin to walk in victory regardless of the physical outcome of a particular battle. God may certainly direct us to protect ourselves, or avoid conflict; but with our eyes firmly set on Jesus, we must understand the real war has already been won. This is simply worth repeating: regardless of the outcome in each of life's many battles, the end of the Book has already been written...Jesus wins! When we are under attack, let's put substance to our faith and allow our lives to demonstrate in Whom we trust!

Have A Great Day!

The Most Important Question

4-12-06

We seem to spend an enormous amount of time evaluating questions about our future: what school we'll attend, what job we will work, who we will marry, and where we will live. These are important questions and deserve careful consideration. But have we given proper thought to the question which determines our eternal future?

If the Bible is simply a collection of stories and the thoughts of crazy men, then there is no eternity and you need read no further - the next several years are all we have, so make the most of them. But if the Bible is God's direct message, then there is nothing of greater importance! His message says we continue to live long after our physical body ceases to breathe. Though we pass from this earth, we continue to live - we either live in eternal joy and peace, or eternal pain and suffering. There is no greater question: Where WILL we spend eternity?

When Jesus died, He was nailed to a cross along with two other men. These men were thieves and both mocked Jesus for claiming to be the Son of God. But at some point during those long hours on the cross, one of the men demonstrated a changed heart and had his eternal future radically altered.

Luke 23:40-41

"Don't you fear God,' he said, 'since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.'"

In the last moment of life, this common thief pointed the way to eternal peace. He recognized his sin and understood he deserved death. We ALL sin and fall short of God's standard; and this sin deserves death, eternal pain and suffering. But praise God we need not dwell in this hopeless state. The thief turned from his sin, toward Jesus as the One who would conquer death; "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom" (Luke 23:42).

Though the thief had nothing to give, he surrendered ALL. God's Word never says there are specific acts which determine our eternal future. We are simply told to believe in Jesus with such a belief that we call out with complete surrender. When the thief recognized and turned from his sin, with humility toward Jesus as his only hope, Jesus answered as He promises to answer us today; "I tell you the truth, today you will be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

In that moment the thief had his answer. No longer a thief but a Child of God, he would live forever in joy and peace. Let's not allow another day to go by without knowing where we will spend eternity! Have we recognized and turned from the sin within our heart? Have we humbly placed our life in His hands? Do we really believe? Today, let's make sure we know the answer to the most important question.

Have A Great Day!

Let It Shine

4-13-06

After walking with His disciples for three years, Jesus gave the command to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Jesus taught them the full gospel message and revealed the wonderful truths about our Heavenly Father: "I have made You known to them and will continue to make You known" (John 17:26).

The disciples had been blessed with an awesome knowledge of the truth and now had the responsibility to take this message to all the nations; "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). This was not a new command. Toward the beginning of Jesus' ministry, He taught about the need to share our life in Christ with others.

Matthew 5:14-16

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on a stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men."

When we place our faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin we are "rescued from the dominion of darkness" (Colossians 1:13). Where darkness once ruled, the Light of Jesus now reigns supreme: "Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the Light of life" (John 8:12). Receiving His free gift of light allows us to see His path and also lights the path for others to follow!

Being given the Light of Christ is an awesome blessing, but with this gift also comes a very real responsibility. Every day God gives us opportunities to share our faith, to share our light; but when we keep silent, we cover our lamp and deprive our flame of vital oxygen. It doesn't take long for such a flame to begin to weaken, flicker, and die!

We must keep the fire going by sharing our faith! As a child of God, we have become "Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Though God doesn't need us to accomplish His work, He has invited (even commanded) us to play a part in His wonderful plan. The world was Spiritually dark when Jesus arrived and there remains many areas of darkness today. But we have the responsibility, and the privilege, of helping to light one small corner.

Let's faithfully share the truth of Jesus wherever we are sent. When we receive the Light of Christ, we should no more keep it to ourselves than we should keep our breath inside our body once we are born (neither are very healthy). This precious gift, given by grace through faith, comes with a command. We must continue to hold the Light high and let it shine!

Have A Great Day!

John 4:35-38 - Lesson #44
4-14-06

As we near the end of our time in Samaria, it's useful to view with the disciple's eyes. The journey through Samaria was not enjoyable. The Samaritans were unworthy of their time, even despised. But Jesus led the disciples through the heart of Samaria and stopped beside a well. As the disciples left Jesus and traveled to a nearby town to purchase food, they passed a woman carrying an empty water pot. It would have been common to pass the woman in silence and even make her walk off the path so they could freely pass.

The disciples then conducted their business in the town, only interacting when absolutely necessary in order to obtain lunch, and hurried back to Jesus. When they return, they see Jesus talking with the woman but decide it best not to question Him. Instead, they try and convince Him to eat. But Jesus, always the teacher, begins to tell about the truly satisfying food of doing the will of the Father, "and to finish His work" (John 4:34). Jesus continues by describing this work.

John 4:35-38

"Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors."

The disciples had missed several opportunities, but Jesus simply continued to teach and encourage. It was a common proverb that you plant a seed and then wait at least four months until the harvest. But Jesus said the field was "white for harvest." Some translations differ, but the Greek word is "white." One possible meaning of white is to be very ripe, as though the plants will spoil if not harvested right away. This interpretation conveys the urgency of the harvest. But it's also possible Jesus was looking out at the field and motioning to the large group of people approaching in their white robes - the harvest was on the way.

A great harvest was coming, but the labor of planting had been done by others - by Jesus and by the woman as she testified throughout the town. John the Baptist may have even ministered in the area, John 3:23, preparing the way with a message of repentance. We all stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before, and we must learn to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish any good work. But as we continue our journey, we must be prepared to plant, water, or harvest, knowing each is part of God's wonderful plan; "Now he who plants and he who waters are one" (1 Corinthians 3:8).

We are each being called to look past any prejudices or preconceived notions regarding those in the field. Wherever we are sent, there is a great work to be done. The world needs to hear the truth, and our first steps come as we recognize the fields are ready, and they are truly white for harvest.

Have A Great Day!

Compelled To Minister

4-17-06

In the message "Let It Shine" we considered our responsibility to shine the light of Jesus into the world. God will sometimes use powerful preachers to share the gospel message with thousands; but most often, He uses common people like you and me to share His love with one individual at a time.

But for most, sharing the gospel doesn't come naturally. We fear offending, fear rejection, and mostly we fear not having the right answers. A portion of these fears are perfectly natural. But our fears are always magnified by the enemy who seeks to keep us silent. Satan hates for us to speak the truth!

God chose Jeremiah to be a prophet forty years prior to Israel's captivity in Babylon. This was a difficult time to be God's spokesman - His message was not at all pleasant. From his first days as a prophet, Jeremiah was told to speak of approaching doom; "From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land" (Jeremiah 1:14). God was going to discipline the nation for their many years of sinful rebellion and Jeremiah was sent to warn and explain why.

Jeremiah had his share of fear about sharing God's message; "Ah, Sovereign Lord, I do not know how to speak; I am only a child" (Jeremiah 1:6). His words certainly match some of ours today. But Jeremiah was obedient and placed his trust in God's promise; "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you" (Jeremiah 1:8).

After many years of proclaiming God's message, Jeremiah's life had become nearly unbearable. Nobody believed his message and, instead of repenting, the people mocked and ridiculed; "The Word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long" (Jeremiah 20:8). Jeremiah had every reason to walk away from his calling, but something wonderful had taken root in his heart.

Jeremiah 20:9

"If I say, 'I will not mention Him or speak any more in His name,' His Word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot."

For many years, Jeremiah had pressed close to God - seeking His direction and desiring to do His will. Jeremiah knew the presence of God and could not conceive of life apart from His Lord. Despite great hardship, he could no longer imagine his life void of ministering and proclaiming God's Truth!

His Word is never a burden too heavy to carry. But we will continue to struggle until we draw close and fill our lives with His presence. When we can see nothing but His majesty and glory, His Word will no longer be contained. Only then will we truly shine. Only then will we be compelled to minister.

Have A Great Day!

Leave Everything And Follow 4-18-06

When Jesus walked on the earth, He called a few select people to follow Him as He ministered. There was something irresistible about His call - something that opened eyes to a new reality and caused a radical change.

Luke 9:23-25

"If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?"

Peter, James and John were partners in a small fishing business on the Sea of Galilee. This was their source of support for themselves as well as their families. Yet when they heard the call to become "fishers of men," they eagerly responded; "So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed Him" (Luke 5:11).

Matthew (also called Levi) was a tax collector - a Jew appointed by the Roman government to collect taxes from his Jewish brothers. As a tax collector, Matthew made a good living; but he walked away from his life of security when Jesus called: "'Follow Me,' Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed Him" (Luke 5:27-28).

In the Old Testament, Abraham moved his entire household to follow God without even knowing where he was being sent (Genesis 12:1-5). Moses, at eighty years old, left the peaceful life of tending flocks to follow God's call to confront Pharaoh (Exodus 3). And Elisha completely destroyed his old way of life when Elijah called: "He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people. Then he set out to follow Elijah" (1 Kings 19:21).

Answering the call to follow will always require a change; but the change may not be in physical location, profession, or status. King Solomon followed God and was the richest man on earth. Joseph followed God and was the second most powerful man in Egypt. There will always be a change as we take up our cross to follow, but the change is in our heart. It's a change where we learn "the secret of being content...whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want" (Philippians 4:12). It's a change where we leave our old values and priorities, and find complete fulfillment in following Jesus.

As we draw closer to our Heavenly Father, we will find His call to be irresistible. We will learn the freedom and power of daily being led by His Spirit. And, as with the Saints of old, we will NEVER regret answering the call to leave everything and follow.

Have A Great Day!

Into The Storm

4-19-06

Immediately after feeding five thousand men, plus women and children, with five loaves of bread and two fish, "Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to the other side" (Matthew 14:22). The disciples began to cross the Sea of Galilee when a storm arose which caused them to "strain against the oars" (Mark 6:48). It was the middle of the night and after already rowing about three and a half miles they found themselves fighting against the wind and waves.

Why had this happened? The disciples had done exactly what Jesus told them to do and now they were facing a major struggle. They had clearly heard and obeyed; but they were still confronting a very difficult situation. The story continued as Jesus walked on the water, called Peter out of the boat to join Him, and then miraculously calmed the storm. But couldn't the struggles have been avoided by telling the disciples to simply wait until morning to travel?

This wasn't the first time the disciples faced a storm with Jesus. During a prior boat ride, Jesus had been asleep when the storm arose: "The disciples went and woke Him, saying, 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!'" (Matthew 8:25). When Jesus calmed the wind and waves of this first storm, the disciples asked each other "What kind of man is this?" (Matthew 8:27). During the first crisis, the disciples saw Jesus as an amazing man. But now, in the middle of the night, when Jesus again calmed the storm, the disciples began to understand.

Matthew 14:33

"Then those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, 'Truly You are the Son of God.'"

As was the case with the disciples, Jesus often sends us into a storm for the purpose of revealing Himself and drawing us closer to His side. For it's in the storms where we see God's love and witness His ability to protect, strengthen, and guide. "These {storms} 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" (1 Peter 1:7).

Our Father loves us very much. He loves us enough to give us His Son as a sacrifice for our sin; enough to give us His Spirit as our guide; enough to never leave us, and enough to finish the good work He began in our lives. Let's receive His love and learn to rejoice in ALL things. Let's learn to look with new eyes and see His hand working around us each and every day. Let's praise Him and look for new revelations of His love, even as we are sent into the storm.

Have A Great Day!

Loving Hands of Discipline

4-20-06

In the message "Into The Storm" we saw that God sometimes sends us into difficult situations to get our attention and draw us closer to Himself. These storms may be used to teach us basic truths or gently nudge us back onto His path; but the storms may also be used to make major corrections in our course or adjustments in our character. Each is a form of discipline. Each is given with His perfect love. And each should be viewed as a wonderful opportunity for growth.

Hebrews 12:6-7

"The Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?"

The discipline we endure while in the storm teaches us who we really are, who God really is, and the importance of our eternal relationship with Him. When we receive the gift of Salvation through faith in Jesus, we are adopted as a child of God; "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17). Our Heavenly Father loves us simply because we're His child, not because of what we do or accomplish. He desires nothing more than for His children to say, "I love You, Daddy!"

But He also loves us enough to shape and mold us until we are "conformed to the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29). We are all flawed vessels with many rough edges. None of us have yet been perfected, and the process of being conformed to the likeness of Jesus can be, at times, quite uncomfortable: "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11).

We have so much "self" that gets in the way of our relationship with God - so many hindrances to truly loving Him and following where He leads. We must desire a closeness with God above all else. So much so, that we are willing to pray: "Heavenly Father, do NOT withhold Your hand of discipline from my life. I submit to Your molding and shaping and ask that You remove anything which stands between us."

His hands of discipline are always purposeful and precise, and administered with great love. They are never out of control like so many angry hands of the world. His hands welcomed us into His Kingdom by grace and are now there to guide us on a wonderful journey. Our values and goals will begin to change as we draw closer to God and keep our eyes focused on Jesus. But along the way, as our rough edges are smoothed, we must learn a joyful submission to His loving hands of discipline.

Have A Great Day!

John 4:39-42 - Lesson #45
4-21-06

As the Samaritans from the nearby town approached, Jesus told His disciples the fields are "white for harvest" (John 4:35). Jesus had ministered to one woman; but she took her limited information, along with the baggage of a bad reputation, and became God's messenger who called others to come see Jesus.

John 4:39-42

"And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, 'He told me all that I ever did.' So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His own word. Then they said to the woman, 'Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.'"

We need to be careful not to read into scripture our present understanding of words and phrases. When we say someone "believed in" Jesus, we think of someone who believed that Jesus is the Son of God who came to die as a sacrifice for sin. We would tend to say that someone who believed in Jesus is someone who is saved. This cannot be the meaning for the Samaritans when it is first recorded that they "believed in" Jesus.

The Samaritan woman had little information. She thought Jesus was a prophet like Moses who "will tell us all things" (John 4:25). This was her definition of the Messiah, her understanding of Christ. And yet, this was enough to call others to come and see. The belief of the Samaritans when they first came to Jesus was far from a belief which would save, but it was enough for them to listen and earnestly try to understand.

We should note that John uses a form of believe over eighty times in his gospel. The other three gospels combined use the forms of believe less than half as many times. John often uses believe as a faith which leads to eternal life, but he also uses believe as a present acceptance and willingness to follow. The Samaritans had not heard about the forgiveness of sin, which is essential for eternal life, but they believed what they heard. And this belief compelled them to urge Jesus to stay longer and teach them more.

During the two days of teaching and fellowship, the substance of their belief definitely grew. No longer did they simply believe in the Christ presented by the woman; but now they had listened to Jesus and believed Him to be "the Savior of the world"! This statement intentionally removes all doubt - the Samaritans truly believed!! His sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin was still a future event, but Jesus fully revealed His plan and confirmed the gospel message was to be taken "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

What is the substance of our belief? The Jesus of our parents or friends is a great place to start, but only as it compels us to personally ask Jesus inside and learn of His truth. Let's trust Him enough to desire Him more. Let's invite Him in and sit at His feet until we truly believe that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

Have A Great Day!

Trust While We Soar

4-24-06

In the last two messages we've considered how God uses storms in our life to shape and mold us "to the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29). James says that storms (or trials) are used to make us "mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:4). When will all our storms end? Not until the process is complete and we're at home with the Lord!

But there is certainly much more to our Christian walk than storm survival. The storms will continue to come, but we will also experience wonderful victories. As we mature and grow closer to our Heavenly Father, we will see more clearly His purpose and learn to actually rejoice during our times of difficulty. Rather than fight the wind, we will allow it to teach us and cause us to soar!

These times of victorious soaring WILL come! For they are as much a part of God's plan as the storm. But they are equally a time of teaching - a time where we must be reminded to keep our eyes on Jesus and trust the guidance of His Spirit.

The Israelites had wandered forty years in the desert and were now ready to cross into the promised land of Canaan. But Moses warned never to stop praising and trusting God: "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land He has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 8:10-11). Moses warned that when we fail to trust God during the peaceful times of blessing, we tend to forget and quickly become susceptible to our sinful pride.

Deuteronomy 8:17-18

"You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms His covenant."

We must continually "trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). We must trust as the storm approaches and as the waves threaten to sink our boat; but we must also trust as the wind and waves are calmed. In fact, we must focus on trusting Him even more when the storm ceases. In difficult times, we are continually reminded of our need for God; but times of blessing can cause us to trust our own ability...and forget.

God desires far more than to just be available during our times of great need. He desires to walk with us in an intimate relationship every moment of the day. Let's continue to trust Him while we're sailing through the storm; but as we victoriously rise up on the wings of eagles, let's also remember to praise Him and trust while we soar.

Have A Great Day!

At The Lord's Command 4-25-06

When God led Moses and the people of Israel out of Egypt, He had many lessons for them to learn. While on the journey to the promised land, God taught His chosen people about living a life of worship and holiness; but He especially taught about the need for obedience and trust.

Though we often refer to Israel's forty years in the desert as a time of wandering, their movement was very carefully controlled. God gave directions through a cloud which settled over the tabernacle. The cloud appeared as a normal cloud during the day, and at night "the cloud looked like fire" (Numbers 9:15). The movement of the people was directed by the movement of the cloud.

Numbers 9:22-23

"Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out. At the Lord's command they encamped and at the Lord's command they set out."

During those forty years, God taught an entire generation the importance of looking to Him for their daily direction. When they set up camp, they didn't know how long they would stay; and when they began to move, they didn't know where they were going or how long they would travel. The importance of the journey was in the lessons of obedience and trust - in learning how to follow God's leading - not in the actual steps taken along the way.

Today, we are also on a journey to a land of promise, and God still has many lessons for us to learn - lessons of worship, holiness, trust, and obedience. We may not have the benefit of a cloud, but if we listen very carefully, we can still "hear" His direction. The same God who directed the Israelites is directing us today, and He longs for us to trust Him and obediently follow.

One of our hardest lessons is to understand that God does not need us to move, nor does He need us to stay. God will accomplish ALL He desires with or without our assistance. But He invites us to join Him and witness the awesome movement of His hand - He invites us to follow.

Our Father is able to direct our steps much better than we can direct them ourself (another difficult lesson). We must learn to listen for His leading by drawing near and living in His presence. Then, whether He says to stay or go, we must trust Him with all our heart and obediently move at the Lord's command.

Have A Great Day!

In Spite of Our Weaknesses

4-26-06

In the message "At The Lord's Command" we saw how, for forty years in the desert, the Israelites moved or stayed based on the movement of God's cloud. Being able to recognize God's "cloud" and sense its movement is one of our greatest challenges. For this, there is no answer but to draw closer to God through prayer, study, and worship. He will reveal Himself if we will wait and place all our hope and trust in Him. But when we hear Him call, we must be prepared to look beyond our ability and trust He knows our strengths...and weaknesses.

After His death and resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples and many others. He called them to believe, and tell the world of the truth. But with Peter, Jesus took time to speak directly and personally.

John 21:15a

"When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love Me more than these?'"

Jesus used a word meaning absolute, unconditional love (agape). With one simple question, Jesus was forcing Peter to analyze his faith. Peter had previously stated: "Even if all fall away, I will not" (Mark 14:29), and even more boldly, "Even if I have to die with You, I will never disown You" (Mark 14:31).

And yet, Peter failed Jesus in the garden: "Are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour?" (Mark 14:37). Peter failed again when he denied Jesus three times - the third denial being violent: "Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, 'I don't know the man!'" (Matthew 26:74). Peter knew how his actions had fallen tragically short; so he now said he had a deep affection for Jesus - a brotherly love (fileo).

Jesus continued His questioning until Peter finally replied; "You know all things, You know that I love You" (John 21:17b). In this statement, Peter was humbly saying that Jesus knew (from experience) his level of love...or his lack! But even with a complete understanding of Peter's weaknesses, Jesus still called: "Follow Me!" (John 21:19). Jesus had a plan for Peter that would not be hindered by Peter's failures.

As we grow to a better understanding of God's love, we will ultimately face how small our love is by comparison. But let's take comfort that God knew our weaknesses when He called us into His Kingdom. He has a wonderful plan and will always provide what we lack in order to accomplish all He desires. There is nothing hidden from God. He knows those He calls; so let's boldly follow, in spite of our weaknesses!

Have A Great Day!

Promotion to Servant

4-27-06

In the business world, a good job title and description can be extremely valuable. We often evaluate one another, and evaluate our own level of "success," by the significance of our title and the importance of our description. We seem to have a great need to be esteemed; and employees have even been known to trade an increase in pay for a more important title.

The Apostle Paul received his call into God's service in a very dramatic fashion. While traveling on the road to Damascus, "A light from Heaven flashed around him" (Acts 9:3). Jesus spoke directly to Paul and told him exactly who He was. A few days later Jesus said Paul was "My chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15).

With this endorsement, Paul could have chosen any title he wished - maybe "God's Chosen Instrument" or "Chief Name Bearer of The Almighty." After all, Paul's new boss was the Creator of the Universe.

But once Paul developed a close relationship with Jesus, he saw Him as one who was, "In very nature God" (Philippians 2:6). But at the same time, Paul saw Jesus as one who "made Himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant" (Philippians 2:7). With this type of role model, Paul was proud to receive his new title.

Romans 1:1

"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God."

There is no greater title in God's Kingdom than: "Servant of Christ Jesus" - no more significant job description than: "Set Apart for the Gospel." Once Paul understood how Jesus lived and obediently served all the way to the cross, he rejoiced and devoted himself to serving with every last breath; "I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well" (2 Corinthians 12:15).

It's understandably difficult to maintain the walk of a servant. All our worldly training tells us to climb higher and achieve more; but God calls us to love Him and humbly serve as His Spirit leads - nothing more, nothing less. We have been set apart for the gospel, and our lives are to be lived as Christ living through us. We always fall short of God's plan when we attempt to promote ourself and take control.

There are many openings in the Kingdom of God, but there can be only one job title and only one job description. Our Heavenly Father has called and offered a permanent promotion which far surpasses anything this world could ever offer. Let's put aside our "need" to be in charge. Let's humbly bow and proudly accept the promotion to Servant.

Have A Great Day!

John 4:43-45 - Lesson #46
4-28-06

Jesus had finished His ministry in Samaria - a ministry which was certainly successful. The woman at the well and many in the nearby town did not just believe in a good teacher, or prophet, or worker of wonders, they listened intently to Jesus and proclaimed He was "the Christ, the Savior of the world" (John 4:42).

His ministry in Samaria was no slight detour from His path. This time of ministry WAS the path! Recall that when Jesus departed Judea, "He needed to go through Samaria" (John 4:4). The true need is now clear. In these few days, Jesus taught that God truly loved the whole world. His sacrifice would not just be for a select group, but for the world. And now it was time for His journey to continue.

John 4:43-45

"Now after the two days He departed from there and went to Galilee. For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they also had gone to the feast."

Jesus continued the journey to Galilee which began several days earlier. The statement about a prophet having no honor in his own country is saying Jesus expected a difficult time of ministry in Galilee. These words are also recorded in the other gospels and each time they reference those who would not believe because they thought Jesus was just a man who lived among them: "Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary?" (Matthew 13:54-55).

But in spite of the difficulty He knew lie ahead, and in spite of the wonderful reception He was presently receiving in Samaria, He also knew His own country needed to hear His message. The ministry of Jesus was focused on accomplishing the will of God. He would not be deterred because of possible difficulty nor influenced by the actual praise from men. Each step would be directed by God for the purpose of glorifying Him and proclaiming His Name.

The Galileans "received" Jesus, but they did not honor Him. They wanted to be near Him, not because of who He was but because of what they had seen Him do. The Pharisees looked down on the Galileans, and they had witnessed Jesus triumph over the Pharisees while in Jerusalem. Jesus was their hero, their champion, their hometown boy made good, but He was not their Savior.

We are all aware of the fear of failure. This must be given to God and overcome. There should never be anywhere we cannot follow. But we would also be wise to cultivate a healthy fear of success. We must never allow apparent success to keep us from moving out when our Father calls; for this is always a failure in the eyes of God. Let's continue to live a focused life where our only desire is to glorify God in ALL we do. And let's believe He came to save the world - came to save us - and truly receive Him with honor.

Have A Great Day!