

Devotionals from God's Daily Word Ministries

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Surrender And Live

8-1-06

Jeremiah warned the people of Jerusalem for many years that they must repent or be destroyed. He often warned with direct words from God: "I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways" (Jeremiah 18:11). It's hard to imagine a more direct warning.

But the people of Jerusalem ignored God's warning and failed to repent. And once the attacks on Jerusalem began, the promised destruction would not be stopped; "I will hand all Judah over to the king of Babylon, who will carry them away to Babylon or put them to the sword" (Jeremiah 20:4).

The righteousness of God requires that sinful hearts be punished. But the mercy of God always provides a path for those who place their trust in Him. This path may contain some painful consequences; but as we continue to trust, it will always lead us closer to His side. Jerusalem would be destroyed, but God provided one final opportunity for His chosen people to live.

Jeremiah 21:8-9

"I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death. Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague. But whoever goes out and surrenders to the Babylonians who are besieging you will live; he will escape with his life."

The people of Jerusalem felt secure in their city. They had weapons, strong walls, and a location which was hard to attack. Their worldly nature told them to remain in the safety of their "created" security - but God said the only way to survive was to trust Him and surrender.

Jesus used similar words when teaching the disciples; "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will find it" (Matthew 16:25).

Though we say we believe, have we come to the place of complete surrender? Have we lost our life, in the sense of our control, agenda, and even dreams, for the sake of our faith in Jesus? Our flesh wants to place trust in what we can touch and feel - in what we can create and control - but Jesus says the only way to truly live is to surrender ALL into His hands. His promise is that if we release all we think we hold, we will find a life more abundant and fulfilling than any we could imagine!

We may not understand how all this works, but the truth remains and the truth will set us free! (John 8:32). God has a wonderful plan for our life - a plan which will bring fulfillment and peace - but it's a plan which requires surrender; and often this surrender will require us to trust Him in an area filled with great uncertainty and fear. Let's begin today to place EVERYTHING in the loving control of His hands. Let's begin a new life as we completely surrender and live!

Have A Great Day!

From A Pure Heart 8-2-06

As Jesus watched people place their offering into the temple treasury, He noticed a poor widow who put in two coins valued at less than a penny.

Mark 12:43-44

"Calling His disciples to Him, Jesus said, 'I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything - all she had to live on.'"

This passage gives us a wonderful example of faith and how God must be the Lord of our finances - but the real message actually goes much deeper.

We have all been blessed in so many ways; and we are called to be good stewards, or managers, of all our blessings. As a good steward, we must present all we possess back to our Heavenly Father as an offering of love. Yes, this relates to our financial resources, but it also means we are to offer our gifts, abilities, talents, and time back to God through service and ministry to others. God created us (the complete package of who we are) for a purpose. We will need to spend good quality time with God to fully understand our purpose, but we can be absolutely sure that God has NOT blessed us so we can advance our own selfish agenda!

Every one of our blessings, no matter how small, are given so we can bless God in return. We often hold back from ministry opportunities because we feel our "offering" is insignificant - we feel inadequate to serve or unworthy to make a true contribution to the work of God's Kingdom. But God is never concerned with the magnitude of a gift - He is, and always has been, concerned and blessed by the condition of our heart: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22). How we give is much more important than what we give.

God does not need our money, time, ability, or anything we accomplish or produce. He loves us dearly and desires to receive the complete love and devotion which is given with our offering. Jesus was blessed by a widow who gave from her heart, even though the actual gift carried very little earthly value.

If we want our service or ministry to have significance in the eyes of God, we must focus on the One to whom we are giving rather than on the value of the gift in the eyes of man. With our eyes focused, we must then give with all the love in our heart. If our heart is pure in the giving, God will receive our offering as a true blessing. There are no worthless or insignificant gifts when the gift is given from a pure heart.

Have A Great Day!

Out of Our Poverty

8-3-06

In the message "From A Pure Heart" we saw that God has blessed each of us with gifts, talents, and abilities; and we're to be good stewards by faithfully giving our blessings back to God with a pure heart. But what determines a pure heart?

When Jesus saw the widow offer her two small coins, He said she had given "out of her poverty" (Mark 12:44). It required great humility to offer those coins; a true lack of self importance. She knew her coins had no real value, but with a deep devotion for God and a strong desire to obediently serve she gave what she had. The widow offered her gift with a pure heart!

We are all called to this type of pure giving - a giving motivated by love and "valued" by obedience. Our gifts to God may appear big or small in our eyes and in the eyes of the world, but when lovingly given in response to His leading, each gift is received as a sweet and fragrant offering.

As we give back to the Lord by ministering to the needs of others, we often find actual "results" fall far below expectations. To keep from being discouraged, we must always remember that our true "offering" is in our obedience and love. Our offering must never be judged by the outward appearance of results.

This truth is even more crucial when the results of ministry begin to exceed our expectations. The great danger of "success" in any ministry effort is the tendency to shift our focus to what WE have accomplished and given with OUR abilities. But again, our offering must NEVER be judged by the outward appearance of results!

1 Corinthians 4:7

"For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?"

God deserves the glory for ALL the results. He gave us our ability as well as the opportunity to minister and give. We fall into sinful pride anytime we forget Him who has provided all; "Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough?" (1 Corinthians 5:6). We must always maintain a sense of poverty as we give back and minister to the Lord. We can give nothing of real value - indeed, we are very poor! Yet, we continue to give our all and love Him with all our heart.

Let's give praise and glory to the Potter who continues to shape and mold us into a vessel of great beauty. Let's guard against every attempt to place a value, large or small, on what we offer our Heavenly Father. And, with a spirit of humility, let's continue to abundantly give out of our poverty.

Have A Great Day!

Rend Our Heart

8-4-06

Every prophet in the Bible proclaimed a message which called the people to repentance. From Moses to John the Baptist, Jesus and the Apostles, the message was consistent: "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" (Acts 3:19). Repentance is essential to a restored relationship with our Heavenly Father - essential to Salvation. Repentance is a condition of our heart whereby we recognize our sin and, in desperation and sorrow, turn and cry out to God for help.

Joel 2:12-13

"'Even now,' declares the Lord, 'return to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.'"

In the Old Testament times it was common for someone to tear (or rend) their clothes when they were expressing great sorrow. For example, when Jacob thought that Joseph had been killed by wild animals, he "tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days" (Genesis 37:34). When the Israelites were beaten when attacking the city of Ai, Joshua "tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the Lord" (Joshua 7:6).

Tearing your clothes was an outward expression of sorrow. But all through Scripture, God makes it abundantly clear that He looks deep into our heart; "These people come near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. Their worship of Me is made up only of rules taught by men" (Isaiah 29:13). Jesus referenced this exact passage when He confronted the hypocritical worship of the Pharisees (Matthew 15:7-9).

We must never even hint that repentance involves "right" outward behavior. We have no ability to do right in the eyes of God without receiving, by faith, His gift of Salvation and allowing His Spirit to transform us into a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Only through His power can we be set on a path of being "conformed to the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29) - only in His strength can we ever do "right."

God has more grace to forgive than we can possibly imagine; but our loving Father expects - even demands - true repentance. He's fully aware of the many ways we sin and fall short of His glory; but until WE understand how far we have fallen and genuinely desire to change, we will never appreciate His grace in making us clean - never experience His "times of refreshing." Let's seek His forgiveness and walk in closer harmony with our Heavenly Father. Let's confess our sins and, with repentant sorrow, stand before Him today and rend our heart.

Have A Great Day!

Clean From Within

8-7-06

In the message "Rend Our Heart" we saw how God commands us to recognize our sin and tear our heart in sorrowful repentance as we cry out for His gracious and abundant forgiveness. The instant we first place our complete trust in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we are born of the Spirit and released from the bondage of our sinful nature. Sin may still war within us and sometimes cause us to stumble, but it no longer has dominion and control over our lives - we have been set free!

Jesus often taught of this radical transformation in terms of our need for a clean heart.

Mark 7:20-23

"What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'"

Our heart pumps life into all the other parts of our body. If our heart is made clean through the forgiveness of Jesus, the rest of our life will also become clean as His life flows through us; "First clean the inside...and then the outside also will be clean" (Matthew 23:26). But if our heart remains soiled by an unrepentant sinful nature, no amount of outside scrubbing and polishing will ever make us clean.

Jesus presented the above list of "evils" for our self evaluation - as an outward test of inward cleanliness. Our lives may be free from the obvious stealing, murder, and adultery; but the rest of the list requires us to look a little deeper. Folly is the lack of good sense. Arrogance is an overbearing confidence. Slander is making false statements against someone. Envy is discontent due to another's good fortune. Lewdness is indecent language or action. Deceit means to conceal the truth. Malice means to cruelly tease, and greed is excessive desire.

A transformed, "circumcised of the heart" (Romans 2:29), believer in Jesus Christ should never be characterized by this type of behavior. As the Spirit of Jesus makes us into a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17) and begins to flow through our life, these old sins ought to slow to a trickle and eventually pass away.

Is the cleansing power of Jesus flowing into all areas of our life? Or are there areas we still claim as our own? If we desire to offer our lives as "living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God" (Romans 12:1), then we must allow our sacrifice to be completely cleansed - we must place our heart more fully in His hands. Let's come before our Heavenly Father, confess our sins, and allow the transforming forgiveness of Jesus to make us clean from within.

Have A Great Day!

A Divided Kingdom

8-8-06

Solomon was the third king of Israel, the son of David and Bathsheba. And although not the eldest son, he was chosen by David to be his successor. As David was about to die, he gave Solomon some final counsel for ruling this precious kingdom.

1 Kings 2:2-3

"Observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in His ways, and keep His decrees and commands, His laws and requirements, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go."

David knew that Solomon would influence an entire nation - influence it either toward the good...or the bad. This was an awesome responsibility which would require a deep commitment to God.

Solomon initially established a God-centered kingdom; "Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the statutes of his father David" (1 Kings 3:3). He ruled with great wisdom and spent seven years building a magnificent temple in which God would be worshipped. Yet Solomon failed to demonstrate total commitment to the One True God.

Solomon married many women from the surrounding nations and allowed these wives to turn his heart toward other gods; "His heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God" (1 Kings 11:4). God was greatly angered at Solomon's lack of commitment and rose up enemies who would eventually divide the kingdom and create civil war.

In a sense, every believer in Jesus has been given a kingdom. Jesus said, "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). This kingdom is established when we believe, in faith, that Jesus died for our sins; it is therefore a kingdom of "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17).

The kingdom we've been given is more precious than ANY other. But, as with Solomon, it's also a kingdom which must be "ruled" with an absolute, undivided love for the Lord; with a commitment to walking in the ways He establishes for our life and worshiping Him with the pure focus of our heart.

If we desire God's kingdom to remain firmly established and at peace in our life, then we must keep our heart completely devoted to Him and guard against the influences which seek to pull us away. Let's not become distracted by the other "gods" of this world. Let's make the necessary adjustments to our priorities and schedules which allow us the time to continually draw closer to the one true God and prevent a divided kingdom.

Have A Great Day!

Resolve To Be Transformed

8-9-06

What will we do different this year? There are more resolutions made during the first week of January than at any other time of the year - more diets are begun and more attempts at various forms of self-improvement. I confess I made a resolution to run one thousand miles this year. I'll also confess I'm not off to a great start - I've only run two miles in the first five days. [Note: This message was written on January 6th, 2003. I ran 1508 miles in 2003 - Praise God!!]

No matter when this message is actually being read, today is the beginning of a new year. Most good-intended resolutions will soon be forgotten, but some will make lasting changes for the better. If it takes the commitment of a "New Year" resolution to break free of a bad habit, restore a broken relationship or improve your health, then by all means resolve!

But as we reflect on the past and excitedly plan for the future, let's focus our effort on changes which have eternal significance. Jesus said it well as He admonished the Pharisees: "You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. First clean the inside...and then the outside also will be clean" (Matthew 23:25-26).

The Bible speaks about the initial transformation which occurs when we become a "new creation" in Christ. But it also speaks about the on-going transformation as we draw closer to God and achieve the peace and contentment found only in His presence.

Romans 12:2

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - His good, pleasing and perfect will."

The renewing of our mind is an inward change where we are "conformed to the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29). It's a process of changing our thoughts, priorities, and goals to be aligned with those of Christ; "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5 KJV). The mind of Christ was pure, focused on the Father, and determined to do His will; "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work" (John 4:34).

On our list of things to do different this next year, I pray we include more time with God in prayer, more time in His Word, more time loving Him with ALL our heart, seeking His presence, and earnestly desiring to know, and do, His will. Let our prayer for one another be that we draw ever closer to our Heavenly Father and experience His love new and fresh every day. In this new year, let's make eternal resolutions as we resolve to be transformed!

Have A Great Day!

Pay More Careful Attention

8-10-06

In the message "A Divided Kingdom" we saw how Solomon's divided heart - his lack of complete devotion to God - eventually led to the division of the kingdom of Israel. We were then encouraged to continually draw closer to our Heavenly Father and prevent the kingdom of God within us from becoming divided in the sense of rebellion and lack of pure worship.

When we consider our closeness to God, we tend to look at our priorities and schedules. Closeness to our Heavenly Father requires a certain amount of dedicated time; we cannot expect to hear His direction if we don't spend time learning to recognize His voice and make the effort to turn off the competing inputs so we can truly listen. And once we have set aside those times to hear God through prayer, preaching or reading of His Word, we are encouraged in the very strongest of terms to pay close attention to what we hear.

Hebrews 2:1

"We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away."

It will do no good to make adjustments to our schedule - to give God more priority - if we don't become disciplined students of His Word. We can fill our time with good preaching and quality books, but if we don't do as the Bereans who "examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11), we will be easily swayed and subject to Spiritual drift. As disciplined students we must maintain an excitement for the things God has done as well as for the promises He has made for our future through every letter of His Word.

God has given us a wonderful gift. Through inspiration of the Holy Spirit working in the lives of many different writers, God has dictated a love letter which calls us into fellowship through Jesus Christ - we call His letter the Bible. In His absolutely authoritative and essential letter, God has revealed the fullness of His character and established a set of unchanging truths. A deep belief and understanding of these truths will push aside fears, erase lingering doubts, and instill a new sense of hope.

We need not allow our kingdom to be divided; we need not drift away. The Spirit has made our hearts receptive and hungry for God's Word. We must now submit to His leading and become as the workman who "correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Let's give Him the total devotion of our heart as we pray, read, and listen to His Word. And as we hear, let's maintain a great excitement and always pay more careful attention.

Have A Great Day!

John 6:5-7 - Lesson #60
8-11-06

In the middle of a glorious season of ministry, Jesus led His disciples into a time of rest and solitude; "And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples" (John 6:3). We all need times when we are quiet and can simply sit at His feet; but alas, such times seldom last long. Times of refreshing are absolutely necessary. But they are necessary because they prepare us for further ministry, and for further testing which is used to continue the process of being "conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29).

John 6:5-7

"Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?' But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do. Philip answered Him, 'Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.'"

When Jesus first saw the great multitude of people, "He began to teach them many things" (Mark 6:34). Jesus demonstrated great compassion for those who were gathered and even "healed their sick" (Matthew 14:14). Phillip had directly seen the miracles of Jesus, had just returned from a successful ministry trip, and was now in the middle of a great healing and teaching service. But when Jesus tested Phillip by asking how to deal with a seemingly impossible physical problem, he looked only at the available physical solutions and determined the situation to be hopeless.

A denarius was the acceptable pay for one day of work (Matthew 20:2). The term 200 denarii is therefore sometimes translated as "Eight months' wages" (NIV). Phillip was making the point that it would take a completely unreasonable amount of money to buy enough food for each person to have even "a little." Did Phillip fail the test?

In one sense, Phillip surely failed. Phillip had walked side by side with the Creator of the Universe but, when faced with a physical difficulty, had failed to look past his physical surroundings. But in another sense, this was not a pass or fail type of test. Jesus already knew what was in the heart of Phillip, and He didn't need the answer to the question of where to buy bread. Yet He asked as a way of revealing a weakness so it could be refined and made stronger; "knowing the testing of your faith produces patience...that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:3-4).

We never stop needing to rest, minister, or learn. Neither are we ever freed from times of testing. Jesus loves us so much that He continually strengthens us by stretching us past what is comfortable and revealing our need to make His Spiritual truths a practical reality. He can be trusted in ALL things - and that means our eternal destiny as well as our daily physical circumstances. Let's embrace His truth and apply it in every area of our life. Let's trust Him more - right now - and be made complete through our times of testing.

Have A Great Day!

To Whom We Sacrifice

8-14-06

By the time Jeremiah became a prophet, the people of Israel had occupied the land of Canaan for about 800 years. Those years were generally characterized by a continuing rejection of God - time and again the people turned from God and embraced the gods of the world.

Through Jeremiah, God called His people to return and worship Him as the One True God: "Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word. Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil way" (Jeremiah 26:2-3). His words reflect the heart of a Father longing to be reunited with His children. We can almost feel God's heart breaking as He tells Jeremiah how far His children have fallen.

Jeremiah 19:4-5

"For they have forsaken Me and made this a place of foreign gods; they have burned sacrifices in it to gods that neither they nor their fathers nor the kings of Judah ever knew. They have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as offerings to Baal - something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter My mind."

When God led the Israelites out of Egypt, He warned them about following the practices of the local people; "You must not do as they do in the land of Canaan" (Leviticus 18:3). The Canaanite values were evil in the eyes of God. In fact, anytime we seek to follow the path of God, we soon discover the values of the world are always in conflict with the values God calls us to hold.

God's chosen people not only turned their backs, but they even became involved in a local form of "worship" that included sacrificing their own children. It's almost as if God was shaking His head in sad disbelief: "How could they have drifted so far away?" Of course, we must wonder if God is still shaking His head today.

Through faith in Jesus Christ, we have become children of God and can enjoy the blessings of a restored relationship with our Heavenly Father. We have also been given the ability to be blessed through relationships in our family and among our friends. And yet, how often do we sacrifice these blessings to the gods of this world? How often do we follow the practices of the world - with its "rules" for value and importance - and watch as our children are sacrificed in the fire of materialism? How often do we sacrifice loving relationships on the altar of selfish pride or lustful pleasure?

Our Heavenly Father calls us to sacrifice. But His call is to a complete sacrifice of worship to Him; "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God" (Romans 12:1). This sacrifice involves the continual releasing of our will until we are "poured out as a drink offering" (2 Timothy 4:6). Let's bring Him our very best and worship Him with a pure and complete devotion. Let's evaluate our actions today and carefully consider what, and to whom, we sacrifice.

Have A Great Day!

Never Choose Barabbas 8-15-06

In the message "To Whom We Sacrifice" we saw how our daily actions reflect our priorities and values, and become, in a very real sense, the sacrifices we place on the altar. Everyday we make many decisions which either draw us closer to God or lead us further away - few decisions are truly neutral.

The Jewish leaders had passed judgment on Jesus; "He is worthy of death!" (Matthew 26:66). But Roman law required a sentence of death to be approved by the Roman Court. Therefore, Jesus was brought before Pontius Pilate, the governor of the region around Jerusalem.

Pilate was in a tough situation. He had talked with Jesus and could find nothing deserving death; "I have examined Him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against Him" (Luke 23:14). But Pilate was also under great pressure to keep peace in the region, so he allowed the people of Jerusalem to make the final decision.

Matthew 27:17

"Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?"

Barabbas was a convicted murderer, Jesus was the Son of God. The people loved Jesus when He was feeding them or healing their sick; but when required to make a decision, the people chose Barabbas: "'What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?' Pilate asked. They all answered, 'Crucify Him!'" (Matthew 27:21-22).

We take the first crucial step in our Christian walk when we believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins. But as important and significant as this first step is, the purpose of this step is to then begin a lifetime journey of abiding in His presence and living a life which is "holy and pleasing to God" (Romans 12:1). The presence of God is never found through specific prayers or religious activity; rather, the peace of His presence is found only through our moment-by-moment choice to allow Jesus to be Lord of our life and to follow wherever He leads. We must learn to choose each daily step based on what is pleasing to a loving and holy God.

Are we part of the crowd who is easily swayed, or are we willing to stand firm in our faith? Has God become a God of convenience, used only in emergencies, or is He truly LORD of our life? We all face the same decision (many times each day) as the people in front of Pilate: Jesus or Barabbas; the ways of God or the ways of the world; life or death? If we desire a life of closeness with God - a life given as a living sacrifice to bring Him glory and honor - then we must begin to choose wisely. We must boldly face the multitude of daily decisions and be determined to never choose Barabbas.

Have A Great Day!

The Look of Holiness

8-16-06

During the week before He was crucified, Jesus was asked many questions by the religious leaders. However, their questions were never asked for the purpose of education or to satisfy their true curiosity, they were asked with the intent of finding fault; "The Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap Him in His words" (Matthew 22:15). Jesus answered each of their questions, but then He warned the crowds about the hypocrisy of those who were trying to trap Him.

Matthew 23:5-6

"Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues."

The phylactery was a small box containing scripture, worn on the forehead or arm to fulfill the command of God as given through Moses; "Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads" (Deuteronomy 11:18).

The Pharisees strictly followed God's commands, but they also followed many self-created rules and "enhanced" God's commands to make themselves feel more righteous. Jesus never rebuked them for following rules, but He greatly questioned the motivation of their heart. The Pharisees had forgotten that the purpose of everything they did was to worship God and glorify His name. Instead, they began to focus on their outward appearance as they sought to look holy and obtain the approval of others: "You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self indulgence" (Matthew 23:25).

This problem was definitely not new. Over 700 years earlier, God's children had lost their heart for worship: "These people come near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. Their worship of Me is made up only of rules taught by men" (Isaiah 29:13).

Unfortunately, this problem is still with us today. We've created a list of rules and religious activities which somehow define our relationship with God. We define our "Godliness" by our church attendance, our acts of service, or even our time spent reading His Word. But all these good and worthwhile actions do not define our relationship - they do not define our love. Our love is, and always has been, defined by the condition of our heart; "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). All our actions simply flow as an outward expression of the condition of our heart.

EVERYTHING we do must be motivated by a desire to praise and honor our Heavenly Father. Our religious acts mean absolutely nothing if not accompanied by a heart full of love and thanksgiving. Let's become true worshipers who express our love for God in all we do and say! Let's never allow our lives to be driven by the look of holiness.

Have A Great Day!

His Message and His Ministry

8-17-06

Ahithophel was a highly regarded advisor to King David; "Now in those days the advice Ahithophel gave was like that of one who inquires of God" (2 Samuel 16:23). But when David's son, Absalom, rebelled and sought to become the new king, Ahithophel joined with Absalom. Ahithophel had reason to be angry with David; he was the grandfather of Bathsheba and had watched as David violated his granddaughter and then had her husband killed (2 Samuel 11).

In his anger Ahithophel advised Absalom how to defeat David, but God had other plans; "The Lord had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom" (2 Samuel 17:14). When Absalom refused to follow his advice, Ahithophel took the rejection very personally.

2 Samuel 17:23

"When Ahithophel saw that his advice had not been followed, he saddled his donkey and set out for his house in his hometown. He put his house in order and then hanged himself."

Ahithophel had once been close to God and was used for many years to give godly direction. But at some point Ahithophel began to take ownership of his ministry. He determined his self-worth based on the results of his ministry and began to use his gifts for his own selfish purpose. When his message was no longer trusted and his ministry was not going in the direction he desired, his self-worth fell and he found he had no reason to continue.

God has called each of us to be His messengers and has given us a ministry of sharing the Gospel; "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Some are called to preach a message of hope to a large congregation. Others have been called to instruct a small group or to encourage just one...but we have all been called!

We are never responsible for the outcome of a ministry, only for the obedience of faithfully delivering His message. God remains in complete control of any and all results: "My Word that goes out from My mouth: It will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11). As we walk in obedience, His purpose (not ours!) is accomplished.

We must never lose sight of the One who called us to serve. Our worth is in being a Child of God, not in the praises we receive or in what we can accomplish. We must continue to be obedient messengers who proclaim the Good News, teach the truth, and encourage at every opportunity. And when we become discouraged, let's check our focus and always remember...this is His message and His ministry.

Have A Great Day!

John 6:8-11 - Lesson #61

8-18-06

When Philip was tested with where to buy bread for the great multitude which had gathered, he replied; "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient" (John 6:7). Philip "failed" the test in the same manner we often fail today. When we allow the money god to become more real than the One True Almighty God, we tend to see money as the necessary solution to all problems. And when a problem appears too big for our limited god to solve, we conclude there is no solution. But there are more ways we tend to fail the test.

John 6:8-11

"One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, 'There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?' Then Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted."

Andrew identified a young boy with a small amount of food, but his action lacked faith, "What are they among so many?" In Andrew we see our usual second failed step. When our bank account is determined inadequate, we take a quick inventory of all our resources and conclude what we can supply is insufficient. Even though Andrew was not being directly tested, he failed to see the true solution standing before his eyes.

In an act of wonderful grace, Jesus provided the answer. Though faith was lacking and eyes failed to see, Jesus stepped up and revealed Himself in a mighty way. Without rebuking the disciples for their lack of faith, and without concern about the lack of resources, Jesus invited the disciples to join Him in a miraculous act of ministry; "Make the people sit down."

God's invitation most always comes through small steps of obedience. The disciples must have wondered why they were asked to have the people sit, but they obeyed. They must have felt a little foolish as they received their first portion of bread and began to distribute to such a large group, but they obeyed. And as they obediently followed, the disciples found themselves right in the middle of the awesome will of God.

When Jesus gathered the loaves and fish He first gave thanks, "looking up to Heaven" (Luke 9:16), for what had been supplied. Again, we usually fail at this important step. We tend to evaluate the need and then tell God of how He must supply in order to meet the need. But this is a foolish attempt at Spiritual manipulation and not a love driven Spiritual faith. Continual faith in ministry thanks God for what He provides and then trusts Him to accomplish all He desires as we walk in obedience.

Let's renew our commitment to "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). Let's remember we follow the Creator of the Universe, and, with thanksgiving, keep our eyes on the One who supplies ALL our needs.

Have A Great Day!

Wisdom of The World

8-21-06

There are many influences which compete for our attention; many different inputs which seek to shape our view of the world, and, in turn, direct how we make decisions about our life. There is also an enemy who greatly desires to win this competition. The enemy is battling for the hearts of men, women and children; and he knows if he can win the battle of the mind, the heart will remain his.

Many of the battle lines are easy to recognize. For example, the direct assault from various forms of sexual temptation and drugs claim numerous victims every day. But there are many other plans of the enemy which place hidden mine fields along the path and destroy those who are not careful where they step. Perhaps the best disguised and most effective weapon of the enemy is that of worldly wisdom.

Since the Garden of Eden the enemy has propagated a set of values which sound wise and appealing, but which consistently lead down a path of destruction. His "wisdom" attempts to define happiness and success - tells us we must achieve, push, and obtain in order to succeed and be fulfilled. But if we will come into the presence of God, we will see the world's wisdom for what it truly is...foolishness.

1 Corinthians 3:18-19

"Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight."

The values of the world are continually promoted in every type of media and from every possible class of people - even sometimes from those who profess faith in Jesus. But these values are lies! They are weapons of the enemy used to pull us away from God...they are foolishness!! And when we choose to live as a captive to world values, we have chosen to live outside of God's perfect plan; "Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" (James 4:4).

God's plan will always require faith - always require us to be "sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). This often means we must have the faith and courage to stand alone. Though the world may label us a "fool," we must continue (and continue some more) to "trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5).

We are being called to become a fool to the world, but this is not an easy task. We have been well "educated" in the world system, and now must reshape the way we think; "be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). This renewal process will take determined, consistent, and intentional prayer and the study of His Word. Let's refuse to live in a cloud of deception. Let's make an uncompromising commitment to God and break free from the wisdom of the world.

Have A Great Day!

Protection of Truth

8-22-06

In the message "Wisdom of The World" we saw that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight" (1 Corinthians 3:19). But we also saw that the enemy uses the world's wisdom as a very effective weapon. This false wisdom has permeated our society to the point where it's difficult - if not impossible - to avoid being attacked. These attacks can be so subtle we often don't even realize we're hit until we've wandered far from God's path.

Since this is such a powerful and deceptive weapon, we need the ability to recognize the attack and protect against harm. Fortunately, God has provided a sure way for both.

In the financial world, there is always concern about counterfeit. Ever since the first currency, there have been those who make and distribute unauthorized money. The absolute best way to recognize these counterfeits is to know the fine details of the real thing. When the truth is fully known, the counterfeit is easily revealed.

Psalm 40:11

"Do not withhold Your mercy from me, O Lord; may Your love and Your truth always protect me."

God has given an unchanging standard against which all others must be judged. His standard is His Word - and His Word is TRUTH! Jesus taught a message of truth for the entire three years of His earthly ministry. Nearly one hundred times in the gospels Jesus began with, "I tell you the truth."

Jesus even referred to Himself as the complete manifestation of truth; "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). And if properly applied, the truth will never be a burden: "If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

Paul said in the last days people will be deceived and perish, "because they refused to love the truth and so be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:10). Notice that our protection is not simply learning about the truth; rather, it requires a love - a passionate desire to know and apply the truth of His Word. We must allow His truth to become entwined in ALL we do, say, and think.

Let's pray that God would reveal His truth more and more every day. Let's commit to learning His truths and applying them as the absolute standard in our life. The enemy will continue to attack with his weapons of deception, but as we remain in Christ and firmly hold to His Word we can be assured we have the protection of truth.

Have A Great Day!

A Message of Truth

8-23-06

In the message "Protection of Truth" we saw that loving the truth of God is our protection against the deceptive attacks of the enemy. By knowing the truth, we can recognize the lies of "worldly wisdom," and continue along God's path without painful detours into the weeds. But we must be willing to faithfully apply the truth in all areas of our life and share the truth with others at every opportunity.

Prior to the final invasion of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, God spoke through Jeremiah to warn the people of their coming destruction and their need to repent. Needless to say, this was not a popular message and Jeremiah was not a welcomed prophet. But there were other self-proclaimed prophets who provided a much more comfortable message. These prophets made people feel good by telling them what they wanted to hear - telling them they could continue down their same path without fear. But God warned about falling into their seductive trap of false security.

Jeremiah 23:16-17

"Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. They keep saying to those who despise Me, 'The Lord says: You will have peace.' And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts they say, 'No harm will come to you.'"

The ministry of encouragement is a vital part of our Christian walk. We all face valleys and need encouragers to provide a lift. And since we know there are many others who are walking through valleys today, we should encourage in every way possible; "Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today!" (Hebrews 3:13).

However, in our zeal to encourage and build up, we must never compromise by presenting a message which falls short of the absolute truth. We must never present an "all is well" message if all is not well. When God's children wander from His path and plant themselves amongst the weeds, there must be someone willing to "gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance" (2 Timothy 2:25).

Our task as an encourager is not always to make others comfortable or to deliver a pleasing message; we are not called to tell people "what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Timothy 4:3). Rather, our task is to "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). We never help when we make someone comfortable with sin.

The absolute best encouragement we can give is to help someone have a right relationship with their Heavenly Father through a surrendered faith in Jesus Christ. God's truth can and will set us free (John 8:32)! Let's encourage in every way possible; but let's make certain we always encourage with a message of truth!

Have A Great Day!

A Clear Conscience

8-24-06

On one of my many weekend projects, I needed to purchase four small bricks for my backyard. After considering the selection I decided on a nice charcoal black brick which cost just a little more than the standard red brick. The store was busy with several long lines of shoppers intent on completing projects before the end of the day. I chose a line and waited my turn.

The lines moved slow and there seemed to be an impatient tension all around me. When it came my turn to pay, the clerk quickly computed the price and took my money. As I received my change, I felt something was wrong. And as I stepped toward the door, I knew I had been charged a lower price.

My mind knew a mistake had been made, but my feet kept walking out the door and toward my car. I knew I should have revealed the mistake, but I began to justify my inaction: "I don't want to make others wait while the correction is made!" "The mistake is small - little more than the cost of a bar of candy." "The profit from my other purchases during the year will certainly make up for this small loss."

Fortunately, my conscience began to counter my rationalization; and, by the time I reached my car, that small inner voice was screaming at me to correct the error - and correct it NOW! I walked back in the store, waited in another long line, pointed to the error, and paid the extra money. My conscience hasn't always been so sensitive - and I confess, it's not always so sensitive now - but on this day it was and I praise God!

Acts 24:16

"I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man."

God has created us all with a conscience deep within our soul. At a very young age our conscience helps us maneuver the complex path of right and wrong. And when we place our trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin, we are given the Holy Spirit Who ignites our conscience and guides us toward the presence of God and a life of holiness.

But when we ignore the prompting of the Holy Spirit, our conscience slowly becomes burned. The burning usually begins small - a little lie, a small deception - but over time, our conscience can become "seared as with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:2). Then, when needed in a time of great temptation, there is no "inner voice" to keep us from falling. Our conscience is a precious gift, and it's hard to believe I nearly damaged such a gift for the price of a candy bar.

Is our conscience sensitive to the prompting of the Spirit, or has it developed a hard crust. Let's live so that all areas of our life bring Him glory and honor. In ALL we do, let's listen intently, obey completely, and protect God's wonderful gift as we strive to maintain a clear conscience.

Have A Great Day!

John 6:12-15 - Lesson #62
8-25-06

The need was great! But even with such a large multitude of hungry people, "about five thousand men, besides women and children" (Matthew 14:21), Jesus demonstrated an even larger ability to provide. He took the small offering, gave thanks, and everyone received "as much as they wanted" (John 6:11).

John 6:12-15

"So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, 'Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.' Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, 'This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.' Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone."

This was a miracle of grandest proportions. Each person ate until "they were filled." The abundant supply stands in wonderful contrast to the hopeless disbelief of Philip and Andrew. Jesus is never short of resources. No matter what we have to offer, He can supply every need and accomplish all He desires.

Jesus then directed the disciples to gather all that remained. He had supplied in abundance, but Jesus also taught about not being wasteful with what God supplies. Abundance is always for a purpose. With twelve baskets of extra food, the apostles were blessed with meals for their next day of travel.

When the people saw the miracle Jesus performed, they thought He was the Prophet promised by Moses; "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst" (Deuteronomy 18:15). The people saw a miracle worker who, like Moses, could lead them out from under oppressive rule so they desired to forcefully make Jesus their king. They were planning to force Jesus to meet their needs and fulfill their desires, but Jesus perceived their heart; "He knew what was in man" (John 2:25).

If the people would have recognized Jesus as the true King they would have responded with submission and reverence. Jesus is to be honored and worshiped, not manipulated and controlled. But we make this same mistake every time we say: "I will do this, but no more. I will obey part way, with some things, but not all. I will make you king over some of my life, but the rest is mine." When Jesus saw the unbelieving heart of the people, He quietly walked away.

There is only one acceptable way to come to Christ. We must accept Him for who He is, not create Him into someone we desire Him to be. He not just a lord, He is THE LORD. He is not just a king, He is THE KING. Regardless of what we say with our mouth, our actions reflect what we believe in our heart. Let's examine our life and then live consistent with a true belief that He is Savior, Lord, and King.

Have A Great Day!

Give Them Something To Eat

8-28-06

Our world is full of people in deep Spiritual need. Most have never placed their trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin and are literally starving right before our eyes. But even many Brothers and Sisters who love the Lord are desperately hungry to know Him more, or they have been wounded and are in need of long term Spiritual nourishment.

God's Word tells us to have open eyes and a soft heart such that we can recognize the needs and bring them before our Father in prayer; "In everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6). But then we are told to carefully listen for God's leading and fully expect to be put to work.

One afternoon, a crowd of over 5000 people had gathered to hear Jesus teach; "He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing" (Luke 9:11). The disciples saw it was getting late and would soon be time to eat. They recognized the need of the people, came before Jesus, and "presented their request."

Luke 9:12-13

"Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to Him and said, 'Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here.' He replied, 'You give them something to eat.'"

When the disciples approached Jesus, they presented the need...but they also presented their solution. They knew the people were growing hungry, but their solution was to send them elsewhere for food. We often make this same mistake when we limit God by our own vision and understanding. Jesus' solution to this need was to bless the few provisions the disciples could gather and then accomplished His work through their hands; "They all ate and were satisfied" (Luke 9:17).

God never asks us to do something without also providing the necessary tools to accomplish all He desires. We have been empowered by His Spirit and equipped through His Word. Yes, we must continue to pray; but our prayers ought to be with an understanding that God may very well direct US to carry His life-giving food and be a vessel for His healing.

There can be no greater work here on earth than to take part in restoring someone's relationship to our Heavenly Father. Only God can truly heal, but He has invited us to join Him in this awesome work. Let's continue to lift up the many needs to God in prayer, but then let's prepare for His answer - His invitation - which calmly says, "You give them something to eat."

Have A Great Day!

Receive His Perfect Gift 8-29-06

We are often encouraged to share the wonders of God's love through the uncompromising truth of His Word - those around us are in great need! We live in a lost a dying world full of people who desperately need to know God's plan of forgiveness and restoration. But as we share the truth and minister to others, let's remember to make the time to fully receive all our Father has to offer.

When Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for a drink of water, she thought the request was quite odd since Jesus was clearly a Jew, and Jews did not associate with Samaritans; "How can you ask me for a drink?" (John 4:9). Rather than explain His radical views on social interaction, Jesus took the opportunity to introduce the woman to the gift of God.

John 4:10

"Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water.'"

If we only knew! I often imagine a loving Father who has given the greatest gift the world has ever known. We approach and examine the gift; we ask questions and study the gift; we even shake the gift and then proudly display it on our shelf; but we never actually open the gift and receive what's inside. If we only knew! "Every good and perfect gift is from above" (James 1:7). His gifts are perfect; and if we only knew, we would open and receive them with abounding joy!

His gift of living water is still available today. This gift refers to our Salvation by the Spiritual transformation of our heart, but it also refers to His on-going gift of a victorious life of peace and contentment; "Everyone who drinks this water {from the well} will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst" (John 4:13-14). His gift of Salvation is free through faith in Jesus Christ, and peace is assured through a humble submission to His will. But we continually rebel and pump from the wells of this world - we drink polluted lies and continually thirst for more.

Approximately 650 years earlier, God gave the same message to the people of Jerusalem: "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water" (Jeremiah 2:13). If we only knew! We sit beside a Spring overflowing with the best tasting water imaginable, but we turn away and pump sludge into our broken pots.

God has great plans for each of us - and His plans are much bigger and brighter than anything we can accomplish through our own effort. Let's rediscover the gift of living water and put an end to our thirst! Let's return to the Spring and continue our journey in obedience. Let's drink freely and daily receive His perfect gift.

Have A Great Day!

Days of Our Youth 8-30-06

All through the Old Testament, God called the people of Israel to worship Him as the One True God. He spoke through Moses, the priests, and the prophets; but the people continued to turn away. Even after the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem, God continued to call His Children to return to Him - to return with ALL their heart!

During the Babylonian captivity, God told Ezekiel to proclaim His Word to all the people of Israel. Ezekiel gave the people several illustrations of how far they had fallen, and how much sorrow their sin was causing for a loving Father. Through Ezekiel, God said the people of Israel were like a helpless newborn baby who had been thrown into an open field: "Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, 'Live!'" (Ezekiel 16:6).

They had done nothing to deserve His favor, but were chosen to become a great nation, set apart and devoted to God. Without His grace, they would have been as lost as the newborn in the field - but God said "Live!" He picked them up, cleaned them off, loved them, and made them beautiful...but His Children forgot His love and abused His grace.

Ezekiel 16:15-16

"You trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your favors on anyone who passed by and your beauty became his...such things should not happen."

The people of Israel forgot all God had done and gave their love to other gods (Spiritual prostitution). They used the grace of God for their own benefit and forgot their previous condition: "In all your detestable practices and your prostitution you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, kicking about in your blood" (Ezekiel 16:22).

God loves us so much...and it breaks His heart to see how we abuse His gifts. Without the saving grace of Jesus, each of us are as helpless as the newborn baby. Without Christ, we have no hope of survival: "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). We were lost in our sin until God reached down, picked us up, and said "Live!" Thank You Lord!!

Let's remind ourselves of the miracle of Salvation! Though we have done nothing to deserve God's grace, He reaches down and gives us eternal life - cleansing us of our sins and making us beautiful in His sight. We who believe have been born into God's Family. Let's not abuse His gift by forgetting when we were helpless, "naked and bare." Let's give Him ALL our love and always remember the days of our youth.

Have A Great Day!

The Potter's Hand

8-31-06

About 2600 years ago, God taught the prophet Jeremiah what it meant to be a sovereign God. He taught that His plan WOULD be fulfilled - one way or the other. Either His children would submit to His gentle guidance, or He would bring discipline to teach them the need for obedience.

Although God has the ability to directly give us understanding, His usual method is to teach us through His Word and then allow us to see the application and gain wisdom through our experiences. In order to give a clear understanding of His sovereignty, God told Jeremiah to go to the potter's house and wait for His message.

Jeremiah 18:3-6

"So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. Then the Word of the Lord came to me: 'Can I not do with you as this potter does?' declares the Lord. 'Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in My hand.'"

Jeremiah understood that God was the Potter and had total control over the shape of the clay. How foolish it would be for the clay to complain or rebel; "Can the pot say of the potter, 'He knows nothing'?" (Isaiah 29:16). The Potter will continue to mold the clay. If the clay begins to harden in its unfinished state, the Potter loves the clay enough to crush it down, sprinkle it with water and begin anew.

The only way for us to become all that God desires is to yield and remain moldable. We have no ability to shape ourself! The Potter is creating something eternally beautiful - we are being "conformed to the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29). Oh, if we could only trust that His shaping is so much better than anything we could ever create. How prideful to think we can do better!

There may be times when we have rough edges which must be removed. There may also be times when we need to be crushed down so the shaping process can start over. But we must trust the Potter and believe the results will be worth any pain or discomfort; "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

Our Heavenly Father is in complete (and loving) control. Let's daily be filled with His Spirit and commit our lives to His shaping process - a process which undoubtedly will last a lifetime! Let's remain moldable clay and yield to the shaping of the Potter's Hand.

Have A Great Day!