

# Devotionals from God's Daily Word Ministries

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John 6:16-21 - Lesson #63  
9-1-06

In a typical classroom we listen to an instructor, record notes, read textbooks, and work through assignments. At the prescribed time, determined by the instructor, we are given an exam which indicates where we are strong as well as where we need more disciplined study. God's classroom is similar, but the process of examination can be quite different.

The disciples had been instructed and experienced wonderful success in ministry, but Jesus knew they had missed some important truths. Could they apply what they were preaching into their own life? To make His point clear, Jesus gave the disciples an exam when over 5000 people were gathered; "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" (John 6:5). Would they trust and apply their instruction when life presented a real challenge? After Jesus miraculously fed the gathered crowd, He gave the next portion of the exam.

John 6:16-21

"Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, got into the boat, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was already dark, and Jesus had not come to them. Then the sea arose because a great wind was blowing. So when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near the boat; and they were afraid. But He said to them, 'It is I; do not be afraid.' Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going."

The gathered crowd wanted to "take Him by force to make Him king" (John 6:15) so Jesus "made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side" (Matthew 14:22). Jesus desired to protect His disciples from all the talk of making Him king since they were often tempted by thoughts of power and rule. But He also desired to continue the teaching process.

Though these were experienced fishermen, they could not predict the great storm which was soon upon them - but Jesus knew and He saw their struggle; "He saw them straining at rowing" (Mark 6:48). Why were the disciples sent into the storm? It wasn't the result of disobedience, like Jonah when he ran for Tarshish; "But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea" (Jonah 1:4). The disciples were being obedient and yet in a bad storm because their Teacher loved them enough to continue their instruction. In the middle of the storm, and in the midst of their struggles, Jesus showed Himself in a miraculous way and simply said, "It is I; do not be afraid." The Good Shepherd then lovingly guided His flock to "where they were going."

I truly wish we could learn all we need by just reading the book - but we can't! To know Christ means to know Him through our experience, to know how His truths are applied in daily situations. His Word says He can be trusted, but we can't really know this truth until we've been put to the test through our trials. God loves us so much that He uses all possible means to continue our education. Let's trust His method of instruction and learn to rejoice as we pass through our examination of storms.

Have A Great Day!

## What We've Seen and Heard

9-4-06

How will we respond to those who doubt? What should we say to those with uncertainties, or to those who ask, "Is Jesus really the answer?"

We could begin with how the Bible is the true Word of God: "A collection of 66 books written by many different authors, during a 1500 year time period, and all with the same message." Or, we could discuss the Old Testament prophesies which were fulfilled with Jesus. We could show where Micah said the Savior would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) and where Isaiah stated He would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14).

We could point to Zechariah who prophesied that our King would enter Jerusalem "gentle and riding on a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9), how David said He would be crucified; "they have pierced My hands and My feet" (Psalm 22:16), and how Isaiah said He would die for our sin; "He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12).

These are all good truths to share at the appropriate time; but when someone is doubting or searching, it's usually best to follow the example of Jesus. John the Baptist had sent messengers to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Luke 7:19).

Luke 7:21-22

"At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So He replied to the messengers, 'Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard.'"

While it's good to be able to defend our faith, we will never convince anyone to believe by presenting Biblical "facts." The most convincing argument as to the truth of God's Word is to share how we've seen His Word come alive in our own life; how we've seen Jesus calm the seas and rebuke the storms, heal broken lives and answer prayers. We ought to share how we've heard Him call us to test the waters of faith and seen the waters become solid as we stepped; how we've experienced "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). When God's truths become real in our daily life, they cannot be argued against!

If His truths have not yet become absolute and unquestionably real, then I urge you to press VERY close into His presence and allow His light to shine in and through you each and every day. There can be no better preparation for sharing the truth than to live the truth. Let's "prepare" to share the gospel; and when the opportunity arises, let's simply report what we've seen and heard.

Have A Great Day!

## Trusting in His Grace

9-5-06

In the message "What We've Seen and Heard" we were encouraged to press in close to the presence of God and share how His truths have been made real in our life. As we continue to walk with our Heavenly Father and better understand His love, we ought to experience a sense of awe which we can't help but share with others.

The complete story of Jesus Christ - which began before the creation of the world and continues for all eternity - is a love story whose central theme is grace; "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). The moment we believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sin, God looks upon us with love and welcomes us into His Family - this is His gift of Salvation! This means our Salvation is never something we earn or deserve - it is a gift of grace.

Romans 11:6

"And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace."

If we come before our Heavenly Father thinking we can do ANYTHING which makes us deserving of Salvation, then we do not yet understand - we are not yet prepared to receive His gift. God's grace is either complete or it is no longer grace. His grace is extended to all who believe, but true belief means believing His grace is absolutely necessary AND completely sufficient.

If we truly believe, our life will produce fruit and we will do good works; "Faith, if not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:17). But our good works will never save us - Salvation is a gift. If we truly believe, we will desire to obediently follow; "We know that we have come to know Him if we obey His commands" (1 John 2:3). But our obedience will never save us - Salvation is a gift.

If we've never settled the issue of Salvation, then today is the day to "trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). We must come before God with empty hands, acknowledge our sin and need for a Savior, and receive the gift of grace offered through Jesus.

As we then continue our walk with Christ, we learn to love Him with all our heart and strive to present our very best, bringing Him glory and honor in ALL we do. But while we walk, love, and strive, we must remember that our "best" is not what earns His favor. Our "successes" will not make us more worthy, and our "failures" will not cause us to lose His love. His gift is everything! Let's give Him everything in return as we continue to live each moment of this wondrous journey by trusting in His grace.

Have A Great Day!

## Guard Against the Yeast

9-6-06

When God led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, He told them to prepare for a quick departure by making bread without yeast. He gave instructions to remember their departure through the celebration of Passover - also called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. During this celebration there was a seven day period when yeast was not even allowed in the home: "For seven days no yeast is to be found in your houses. And whoever eats anything with yeast in it must be cut off from the community of Israel" (Exodus 12:19).

When God established the various offerings through Moses, yeast became associated with an unworthy sacrifice; "Every grain offering you bring to the Lord must be made without yeast" (Leviticus 2:11).

About 1500 years later, Jesus used the symbolism of yeast to give His disciples an important warning.

Luke 12:1

"Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."

With this choice of words, Jesus warned that hypocrisy has the ability to contaminate our lives - and therefore the offering we present to God. The Pharisees had an outward appearance of godliness, but their hearts had compromised true worship and become contaminated; "On the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness" (Matthew 23:28). Does our heart match what we wear on the outside?

The symbolism of yeast gives another clear warning; "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough" (Galatians 5:9). Every day we are tempted to make compromises with the world - compromises which cause us to behave contrary to our professed beliefs. This is hypocrisy and must be avoided at all cost! Each incident seems so small - like only "a little yeast" - but soon the compromises work through all areas of our life.

The only worthy endeavor during our allotted time on earth is to present ourselves, with complete abandonment, as a living sacrifice to God; "this is your Spiritual (or reasonable) act of worship" (Romans 12:1). Our Heavenly Father is worthy of our very best - a pure and holy offering.

Let's celebrate our release from the slavery of sin by cleaning our home and removing all Spiritual compromise. Let's give our whole heart to God in loving worship and guard against ANYTHING which pulls us away. Let's fight the hypocrisy in our lives and diligently guard against the yeast.

Have A Great Day!

## Spots of a Leopard

9-7-06

In the message "Guard Against The Yeast" we saw how Jesus warned about allowing even a little hypocrisy to enter our life. When we compromise any area of our beliefs, we are in grave danger of allowing the compromise to spread "through the whole batch of dough" (Galatians 5:9).

In the days of Jeremiah, God warned the people of Jerusalem about the destruction which was coming unless they turned from their evil ways. But the people continued in their sin and refused to listen. God gave them many opportunities to repent, but they had become comfortable in their sin and were unwilling - possibly even unable - to change.

Jeremiah 13:22-23

"And if you ask yourself, 'Why has this happened to me?' - it is because of your many sins. Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil."

One of the devastating results of sin is that it causes separation from God; and separation causes the defense against temptation to weaken. Unfortunately, a weakened defense makes it easier to continue in sin...causing further separation. The cycle of sin and separation had continued in Jerusalem until sin was viewed as normal behavior. The "yeast" had been mixed into every part of the dough and their conscience had become "seared as with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:2).

We need to understand this when ministering to those who are lost. People without Jesus have a difficult time recognizing their sin and certainly see no need to "change." Rather than simply pointing out their specific sins, which they consider "normal" anyway, we must share the love of Christ - His purpose and plan of forgiveness - and help lead them to faith in the Savior. Only Jesus can create true change; only His grace can reveal and remove sin.

But we must also understand this dangerous condition in our own life. Is there sin which we are beginning to view as "normal" behavior and allowing to hinder the joy of being in His presence? Is our sin forming "spots" which we now call ordinary and acceptable? Sin causes separation which leads to more sin. This cycle must be recognized and stopped!

Although we may have wandered, all hunger for change is the conviction of the Holy Spirit who is calling us to repentance - calling us to respond today and to keep our conscience from becoming seared. Let's break the cycle of sin and return to a life which glorifies our Heavenly Father in ALL we do. Let's never become so accustomed to sin that we develop the unchangeable spots of a leopard.

Have A Great Day!

John 6:22-26 - Lesson #64  
9-8-06

The great multitude came to see a miracle worker..and they certainly were not disappointed. With their very own eyes, the people saw Jesus take "five barley loaves and two small fish" (John 6:9) and miraculously feed over five thousand people. This sign was so clear that the people believed Jesus was "the Prophet who is to come into the world" (John 6:14) and they planned to "take Him by force and make Him King" (John 6:15). But Jesus sent His disciples to the other side of the sea and went by Himself to the mountain.

John 6:22-26

"On the following day, when the people who were standing on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, except that one which His disciples had entered, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with His disciples, but His disciples had gone away alone - however, other boats came from Tiberias, near the place where they ate bread after the Lord had given thanks - when the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they also got into boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, 'Rabbi, when did You come here?' Jesus answered them and said, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.'"

The people were impressed with what they saw in Jesus. They had seen Him send the disciples away and go by Himself to the mountain. They had tried to keep watch as best they could through the storm of the night, but when morning came He was gone. Assuming He had gone to join His disciples, the king seekers got into boats and sailed to Capernaum. Once they found Him, the people asked, "when did You come here?" Their question also implied, "and how did You get here?"

Jesus didn't say anything about walking on the water or calming the storm but went straight to their heart and the issue of eternal life. Notice this is the same method Jesus used in talking with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. The truth which had to be addressed was that the people came to Jesus with a completely wrong motivation. They came, not because of the sign, but because the result of the sign satisfied a physical need. The purpose of the signs which Jesus performed was always to point to Who He was - the Son of God. The people didn't come seeking to worship, or even to better understand, they came to get and to take. Their idea of a king was a one-way giver of freedom from Roman oppression.

We will see this same message many more times, but let's begin this section with an honest evaluation of our own heart. If we are seeking, ask why. Are we being motivated by what we can get or by what we can give to the One who calls? Are we running to the thrill of miracles or drawing near to the One to whom all miracles point. And if we have already come to Jesus, what is motivating us to continue the fight? Is He truly on the throne or are we still trying to shape Him into a god of our liking. Let's always seek - and always continue - because He is the Son of God, the true King of Kings, and the Giver of life to those who believe.

Have A Great Day!

## With a New Heart 9-11-06

Very few are unaware of the significance of September 11th. Five years ago the world was saturated with images which caused shock, fear, anger, and confusion. And each year we again see the images which, in many ways, changed how we view our world. What does it mean to live in a world where people blow themselves up to glorify their god? But then, what does it mean to live in a world where thousands die of starvation and disease every day, where unborn babies are killed, where men hit their wives and children, and where the definition of marriage is freely changed? Dear Lord, we need Your message of truth!

2 Corinthians 4:18

"So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

Is it possible to look past the images of this world and receive a message from God? His messages are available, but they must not be clouded by what we see and hear, or processed through a filter of fear and anger. We must learn to see with new eyes and hear with new ears. However, God's messages cannot be received, and certainly not understood, unless we first believe; "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing" (1 Corinthians 1:18). Those who have not, by faith, trusted in the sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of sin, cannot begin to understand; their heart is hard and unopened to the truth.

The first message God continues to send is that we live in a fallen world in which life is extremely fragile and short; "a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (James 4:14). God is not trying to depress us with this message; rather, He simply desires our priorities to remain with the eternal King of Kings - not with the temporary, and unsatisfying, gods of this world.

The other message from God is the challenge to speak and live His Word in the face of all kinds of evil and adversity; "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Our actions, and reactions, send a message to those who are watching - and they ARE watching! If we are to declare the glory of God in all we do, then what do others perceive of God's glory as they watch our actions and listen to our words? Is our life being an effective ambassador of Christ?

Two thousand years ago, God demonstrated His love by sending His Son to die for our sins; "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). He did this so that those who believed would be transformed and given the gift of eternal life. Once we understand the love of God and the magnitude of our forgiveness through Jesus, we can begin to follow His command to love and forgive others; "Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13). Without His undeserved forgiveness, we would all spend eternity in the same hell as anyone else who rejects Christ. Let's begin to listen for what is unheard and look for what is unseen. Let's focus on the eternal and respond in ALL situations with a new heart.

Have A Great Day!

## This Last Day

9-12-06

On the evening before He was crucified, Jesus ate one last meal with His disciples. For three years, the disciples had been instructed by Jesus and witnessed His miracles. He had taught them many lessons about the Kingdom of God - and about His upcoming death: "He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock Him, insult Him, spit on Him, flog Him and kill Him" (Luke 18:32).

Now with less than one day to live, Jesus told His closest companions that one of them would soon betray Him; "The hand of him who is going to betray Me is with Mine on the table" (Luke 22:21). Naturally, the disciples were shocked - but their focus soon turned to trivial matters.

Luke 22:23-24

"They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this. Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest."

These men were eating supper with the Creator of the Universe and witnessing the most awesome events in the history of the world. And yet, in this last day, with only a few remaining hours, their concerns drifted to matters of position and status.

It's tempting to criticize these first disciples: "How could they be so self-consumed?" But then, how often do we make this exact same mistake? With our eternal Home just around the corner, and a Savior who is willing to walk every day by our side, how often do we become absorbed in the non-eternal?

Sure, we have real responsibilities and concerns in our daily walk. Our finances or health may look uncertain, and the harsh words of others may offend and cause great pain; but when properly viewed against the backdrop of eternity, each worldly issue must shrink down to the trivial. If we really understood the glory we will one day see and how soon all else will fade away, we would be much less concerned about our "greatness" in the eyes of the world.

With wonderful hindsight we can say the disciples should have known their time with Jesus was short. They should have seen the events unfolding, taken advantage of every precious moment, and worshipped Him with every breath, every heartbeat, every thought, and every word - but they didn't.

And now, with the foresight given through God's Word and the guidance of His Spirit, we face the same challenge! Our Father has called us into a deep and personal relationship with Himself through faith in His Son - and our time is very, very short (much shorter than we realize). What concerns or passions will consume our time and energy? With all we have been given, what will we now do with this last day?

Have A Great Day!

## The Mountain of Faith

9-13-06

When Abraham was over eighty years old, God made him a wonderful promise: "A son coming from your own body will be your heir. Look up at the heavens and count the stars - so shall your offspring be" (Genesis 15:4-5).

Many years went by without any indication that God would fulfill this promise. Finally, when Abraham was one hundred years old (and Sarah, his wife, ninety) God fulfilled His promise through the birth of Isaac. But when Isaac was a young boy, God told Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son.

Genesis 22:2

"Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

We can't even imagine receiving this type of command from God. Abraham loved Isaac; and Isaac also represented the fulfillment of God's promise. But Abraham didn't even question the apparent conflict between God's promise and His command - he simply believed and obeyed. He took Isaac and climbed the mountain, placed him on top of a pile of wood, and "took the knife to slay his son" (Genesis 22:10).

Many people speculate about the turmoil in Abraham's mind during this time, but Scripture gives no indication that Abraham ever seemed anxious or concerned. He believed in God, believed His promises, and his faith never seemed to waiver. As Abraham was about to kill his son, God stopped him and provided a ram as a substitute sacrifice (Genesis 22:13).

God put Abraham through an unimaginable test of faith - but why? The test wasn't for God - He already knew Abraham's faith! The test may have been to strengthen Abraham's faith. God often tests us as a way of refining and drawing us closer to Himself.

But I think the main reason for Abraham being asked to climb the mountain was so we would have a clear picture of what it means to believe. Belief is central to the gospel message, and the picture of Abraham allows us to truly understand what Jesus meant when He said; "whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

God is calling us to believe - calling us to a life of faith where we have such a strong assurance of His presence that He is all we need...all we value and hold dear. Let's give ourselves completely to Him, without ANY reservation - let's truly believe! Let's give Him ALL our heart and be willing to sacrifice ALL for His glory and honor. Let's once and for all climb the mountain of faith.

Have A Great Day!

## Listen as We Climb

9-14-06

In the message "The Mountain of Faith" we were encouraged to believe with a faith secure enough to surrender ALL to our Lord and Savior. We saw an example of this faith in Abraham as he was given a son and then told to surrender him as a burnt offering; "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about" (Genesis 22:2).

Without any debate or even apparent doubt, Abraham set out with Isaac and a bundle of wood and began to obediently climb the mountain of faith. What special quality did Abraham have which allowed him to make such a climb? Only one! He believed God; "Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). Clearly, belief is tied directly to trust and obedience. Abraham believed God had a purpose for giving him such a command and he immediately obeyed.

Many of us are longing for clear direction from God. Although we probably pray that His direction doesn't require the sacrifice of Abraham, we're ready to follow and are in a mode of waiting. Waiting can be very frustrating and sometimes cause us to speed up God's timing. But we must continue to patiently seek the Lord, trust there is a purpose in the wait, continue to grow and mature, and be obedient to the things God has already given us to do. His direction will come - and when it does, we must be prepared to follow.

And yet, there is a mature part of Abraham's climb we often overlook. Perhaps if Isaac had been born ten years earlier, Abraham would not have been mature enough to make such a climb. You see, Abraham had learned to ALWAYS keep his eyes on the Lord - always listen for His leading - even once his direction appeared clear.

Genesis 22: 9-11

"He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, 'Abraham! Abraham!' 'Here I am,' he replied."

What would have happened if Abraham had become so focused on "the mission" that he failed to listen for the voice of the Lord? Abraham was being obedient to the call of God; but right at the point of absolute obedience, God changed direction; "Do not lay a hand on the boy" (Genesis 22:12).

The call of God is not a one time event - it's an ongoing, moment by moment relationship of love. We are never sent on a mission away from the presence of the Lord. We are called to follow, making the journey hand in hand, and step by step. Let's continue to grow ever closer to our Heavenly Father. Let's trust Him more, love Him more, and always, always, always, listen as we climb.

Have A Great Day!

John 6:27-29 - Lesson #65  
9-15-06

After witnessing Jesus miraculously feed over five thousand, many followed Him across the sea to Capernaum. But when they came to Jesus, He accused them of coming simply to fill their stomachs; "you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled" (John 6:26). The people had seen the miracle but had completely missed the meaning. The sign pointed to Jesus but all they could see was a free lunch. Jesus then continued to lead them in truth.

John 6:27-29

"Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.' Then they said to Him, 'What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.'"

Those who approached Jesus that day had an initial focus of physical satisfaction. They had a need and Jesus had proved He could deliver. But Jesus saw their motivation and revealed the folly of their priorities by contrasting food which perishes with food which endures. This is the same message delivered by Isaiah 700 years earlier; "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good" (Isaiah 55:2). The food which endures is that which leads to everlasting life. But notice that Jesus applied the word "labor" to both types of food.

Everlasting life is a true gift from God, "not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:9). And yet Jesus spoke here of labor. Elsewhere He said; "Strive to enter through the narrow gate" (Luke 13:24), and also; "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). Yes, salvation is a free gift, but our call is always to labor, strive, and seek Him with all your heart. The result is a gift from the One who has the seal of God - the One who is authenticated, authorized and appointed by God.

The message of a gift was lost on those who were gathered. Though they appeared to understand something about everlasting life, their questions were immediately directed toward self-effort; "What shall we do?" They were looking for a list - a formula - which would result in God's approval. They were wanting to be told of the "works" which were pleasing to God, but Jesus said there was only one "work." He identified the one and only work of God as belief - absolutely necessary, completely sufficient.

We must continually prioritize our labor. What is it we really value? Does our time and effort (and worry) tend to be spent on that which will perish? Jesus told the woman at the well that if she would only ask, then "He would have given you living water" (John 4:10). And to this group in Capernaum He said to labor for food which endures, the food which is Himself, the "bread of life" (6:35). All else will soon perish! So let's begin His work today. Let's labor for the precious gift of everlasting life by believing in the One sent by God.

Have A Great Day!

## Faith To Move Mountains

9-18-06

In the message "The Mountain of Faith" we saw the faith of Abraham as God told him to climb the mountain and sacrifice Isaac. But, more importantly, we saw this as a picture of what it means to truly believe. Jesus said, "whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16), but true belief clearly implies a willingness to obediently follow.

The gift of eternal life is given to those who have faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin. This precious gift is never linked to a specific amount of faith; rather, the only requirement of the gospel is that our faith be genuine. In fact, Jesus stated that a small amount of faith can accomplish more than we can imagine.

Matthew 17:20

"If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

This is amazing! Jesus used the example of a mustard seed because it was the smallest seed known. A few chapters later, He made a similar statement; "If you have faith and do not doubt...you can say to this mountain, 'Go throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done" (Matthew 21:21). If we are a child of God then we have already been given sufficient faith by Jesus, "the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). There is therefore NO obstacle which cannot be cast aside!

Of course, genuine faith also implies an alignment with the will of God. Jesus even said, "He can do only what He sees His Father doing" (John 5:19). This is why we don't see physical mountains moving around today - it's not in the will of God. However, it's most definitely in God's will that we move all mountains which threaten to block our path toward Him or hinder His plan for our life.

If we really believe, we ought to be living our life according to His truth and the faith we have been given! Though we may face mountains in our job, relationships, finances, health, kids, or parents; though we may face temptations or addictions which appear impossible to conquer; though we may battle a low self esteem which says we can't, we must believe the Word of God is true! "With God ALL things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). Though we may not understand, we must believe, in faith, that God is infinitely greater than the bounds of our understanding. We are not walking alone and NO problem is beyond His ability to direct.

If we desire to live the full life God intends - the life that honors Him with every move and even every breath - then God's Word must become our foundation. Whatever problems we face, we must fall on our knees with humble submission to His will and seek His face in prayer. Then we must rise up and step forward without doubt, and, in His strength, believe we have been given the faith to move mountains.

Have A Great Day!

## In Spite of Our Chains

9-19-06

In the message "Faith to Move Mountains" we saw that, though our faith may appear small, all genuine believers in Jesus Christ have the faith to move any and all mountains which stand between us and a close relationship with our Heavenly Father. HOWEVER...Not all trials represent mountains which must be moved! Many things we view as obstacles are perfectly aligned with God's plan.

Our Christian walk never promises freedom from trouble. In fact, Jesus promised us just the opposite; "In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33a). Fortunately, Jesus immediately followed these words with a message of hope; "But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33b). Though trials may come and remain much longer than we'd like, we can still be set free by abiding in The One who has overcome.

The Apostle Paul had many trials during his ministry: "Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea" (2 Corinthians 11:24-25). But Paul was able to keep his trials in proper perspective by focusing on what was eternally relevant; "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

Toward the end of his ministry, Paul was arrested for the "offense" of preaching the gospel. While awaiting trial in Rome, Paul spent two years under the guard of a Roman soldier and wrote a wonderful letter of encouragement to the Philippians: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). Though he was confined, Paul allowed himself to be used by God to encourage many others toward an increase in their faith.

Philippians 1:14

"Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly."

Every time we experience a trial, the world watches to see the substance of our faith. Often, there is no better way to minister to others than to simply praise God in the middle of our own trials. The best way to show that God is real is by making Him real in our own life.

Let's take a new look at our trials. Some are truly mountains which must be moved; but others are simply the chains we must joyfully endure for the sake of the gospel. Let's turn what the enemy meant for harm into something which glorifies God. Let's encourage others to draw nearer to a loving Father as we praise Him with all our heart...in spite of our chains.

Have A Great Day!

## Strain Toward the Vine

9-20-06

Our life in these mortal bodies will always fall short of God's standard. From the moment sin entered the world, we've been unable to satisfy God's requirement of perfection. But, knowing our weakness, God gave His Son as a sacrifice to perfect those who believe; "By one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy" (Hebrews 10:14). Faith in the sacrifice of Jesus makes us perfect forever - this is the gracious gift of Salvation; "it is by grace you have been saved, through faith" (Ephesians 2:8).

The grace of God makes us perfect the moment we are saved; but, for the rest of our days on this earth, we are in the process of "being made holy." This is why Paul, who freely writes about the gift of grace, can also exhort us to a life free of sin; "Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires" (Romans 6:12). Paul understood that, though we have become "perfect forever," we have also been called to a high standard of holiness. He therefore refers to his life after Salvation as a race to be won; "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me" (Philippians 3:12-14).

The picture of a well-conditioned athlete straining toward the finish line can be a wonderful motivator. However, when we press and strain toward the wrong goal - or with our own strength - we will soon become fatigued and discouraged. We are in a race, but we must allow Jesus to establish the goal as well as the route to be run. The goal of a Christian life must always be to produce fruit that glorifies God; "This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit" (John 15:8). And the route of fruit production must ALWAYS be through the vine of Christ.

John 15:4-5

"No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing."

We are called to produce fruit by living a life of holiness and bringing glory and honor to God in all we do. However, fruit can only grow if we remain intimately attached to the vine - a branch cannot produce anything by itself! In our own strength we cannot produce holiness or ANYTHING esteemed by God. But when we allow the life of the vine to flow through our veins, we WILL produce a bounty of fruit.

Let's attach firmly to the vine of Jesus Christ and allow Him to flow through every area of our life. Let's live each day in the holy presence of God and produce baskets of fruit for His glory and honor. Let's run to win the race as we press and strain toward the vine.

Have A Great Day!

## Secure in His Presence

9-21-06

Jehoiakim was king of Judah just prior to the first Babylonian invasion in 605 B.C.. He had become comfortable in the security of the palace, and an alliance with the Egyptians made him feel even more protected. But Jehoiakim led the people of Judah further away from God; "he did evil in the eyes of the Lord, just as his fathers had done" (2 Kings 23:37).

God sent the prophet Jeremiah to warn Jehoiakim and the people of Judah that disaster would come if they did not repent; "If you do not listen to Me and follow My law..., then I will make this city an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth" (Jeremiah 26:4,6). But with his every need and desire fulfilled - and with all his fears removed - Jehoiakim did not see a reason to listen to God.

Jeremiah 22:21

"I warned you when you felt secure, but you said, 'I will not listen!' This has been your way from your youth; you have not obeyed."

We spend the majority of our lives building security in our job, finances, and relationships. But security within the world system is extremely shallow and deceptive; "Do not store up for yourselves treasures {security} on earth, where moth and rust destroy, where thieves break in and steal" (Matthew 6:19). We ought to be thankful for every one of our earthly blessings, but we should NEVER receive our "security" from the world. Our complete dependence must always remain on our Heavenly Father, and our eyes and ears continually open to His leading.

Our daily walk is made one slow step at a time as we "trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). Usually, we are allowed to see only the next few steps; "Your Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light for my path" (Psalm 119:105). But our true security, peace and comfort, comes from simply knowing we're on His path, not from feeling we control the direction or pace of the journey.

This security begins with faith in Jesus Christ and builds on a pure love which flows from the innermost part of our heart. Even activities such as church attendance, Bible study, or work in various ministries mean nothing without a faith based love; and these well-intended actions become a false security when they replace the need to abide in the presence of God or daily seek His direction.

Let's not allow our lives to develop a sense of security which shuts out the need for God and the absolute hunger for His presence. Our walk of faith will always require stepping into the unknown where all we have is what He provides - and a loving trust is confident that His provision is enough! Let's lean on Him, love Him, and draw ever closer. Let's seek true security by only being secure in His presence.

Have A Great Day!

John 6:30-34 - Lesson #66  
9-22-06

After feeding the 5000, Jesus exhorted those who followed Him to labor "for the food which endures to everlasting life" (John 6:27). He then explained the work of God was to "believe in Him whom He sent" (John 6:29). This was a bold statement, and the Jews who were gathered understood the meaning. Jesus was claiming to be the greater Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15), God's anointed One (Psalm 2), the Christ. But for this claim to be believed, they would require proof.

John 6:30-34

"Therefore they said to Him, 'What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat."' Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' Then they said to Him, 'Lord, give us this bread always.'"

It seems odd that those who just the day before had witnessed Jesus multiply the bread and fish would now ask for a sign. The miracle had certainly convinced some; "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world" (John 6:14). But those who followed Jesus across the sea saw Him only as someone who could help their physical needs. The miracle with the bread and fish was good, but surely the Christ would perform a miracle greater than Moses. Jesus had "only" multiplied earthly bread, Moses brought down bread from heaven - referring to the manna supplied to the nation of Israel during the wandering years in the desert.

Once again Jesus took the opportunity to teach about true life. NO message is more important. The best this world can offer is nothing without the true life of which Jesus spoke; "what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Matthew 16:26). Jesus reminded them it wasn't Moses who supplied the bread in the desert. The bread was a gift from God, but even this gift of physical bread given to a nation year after year cannot compare to the gift of true bread sent from God to give life to the world.

Jesus specifically said the bread of God is "He who comes down from heaven." But again, His message was misunderstood. Perhaps with a slight hunger pain in their stomach, the gathered Jews said "give us this bread." Their response was nearly identical to that of the woman at the well; "give me this water" (John 4:15). Both allowed physical concerns to block Spiritual truth. Both sought only the lesser blessing.

Let's seek His best! "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign" (Matthew 12:39). These are strong words, but true faith never flows from a process of "see and believe," rather, it is based on the promise that as we believe we will see; "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" (John 11:40). The world can never produce true life. When we believe, we will finally see the better way of truth which was fully revealed when the bread of life came down from Heaven.

Have A Great Day!

## Misplaced Trust

9-25-06

In the message "Secure In His Presence" we were encouraged to guard against anything which takes away from our complete dependence on our Heavenly Father. We saw how worldly security can sometimes cause us to close our eyes and ears to God's leading. Becoming secure in the world is to also place our trust in the things of the world. David made this mistake and it cost him dearly.

God described David as "a man after My own heart" (Acts 13:22). David clearly saw God working in his life. When he went to fight Goliath with only stones and a sling, he knew to trust in the strength offered by God; "All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's" (1 Samuel 17:47). God continued to protect David through his trials with Saul and later led him through many military victories as the king of Israel. But toward the end of his reign, David began to trust the world's definition of power and might.

1 Chronicles 21:1-2

"Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel. So David said to Joab and the commanders of the troops, 'Go and count the Israelites. Then report back to me so that I may know how many there are.'"

God allowed Satan to tempt David because there was still deep rooted pride in David that needed to be revealed. There was nothing inherently wrong with counting the people - after all, when God led the nation of Israel out of Egypt, He told Moses; "Take a census of the whole Israelite community" (Numbers 1:2). But David had become very "self" reliant and had placed his trust in his own strength and abilities. He became focused on his resources - the number of men who were able to fight - rather than keeping his eyes and ears on the true Commander of ALL battles.

David recognized and confessed his sin: "I have sinned greatly by doing this. Now, I beg You, take away the guilt" (1 Chronicles 21:8). Though David's sin was forgiven, God still enforced severe consequences; "So the Lord sent a plague on Israel, and seventy thousand men of Israel fell dead" (1 Chronicles 21:14). As the leader of God's chosen people, David was expected to set a clear example of complete trust.

God wants and expects the total devotion of our heart. Devotion will always mean love and worship; but it also must include our sustained and unwavering trust. Our Heavenly Father establishes our path and provides all the necessary strength to achieve the victory He desires. He simply asks that we trust only in Him and continue to follow where He leads. Let's give Him ALL the glory and honor as we keep our eyes forever focused on Christ and guard against the sin of misplaced trust.

Have A Great Day!

## Tools of The Teacher

9-26-06

In the days of the prophet Jeremiah, God's chosen people had turned away to worship other gods. But God longed for His children to return and worship Him as the One True God. The Israelites had been warned for many years and now God used a foreign king as His tool for discipline and instruction.

Jeremiah 27:6

"Now I will hand all your countries over to My servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; I will make even the wild animals subject to him."

God reminded the people that He alone was almighty and in control of world events. But He also revealed their sinful pride as He required them to yield to His discipline in order to survive; "Bow your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and you will live" (Jeremiah 27:12). Many chose to die rather than to trust God and submit to His instruction.

Nebuchadnezzar did not even acknowledge God at this point in his life - and yet, God called him "My servant." It was God's plan to use this non-believing foreigner to teach His children some very important (and painful) lessons. God's Hand of discipline is firm, but His Hand is always directed with a loving purpose. Pride was keeping His children away, and it needed to be removed by any tool available.

Being adopted into God's family through the gift of Salvation is a one time event. Through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sin, we receive His grace and become "a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). However, learning to truly live for God and become "conformed to the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29), is an on-going process which will last all the rest of our days.

There is so much our Heavenly Father desires for us to understand - so many lessons He wants us to learn - and yet, all the lessons seem nearly identical. He desires a continual and intimate fellowship; He wants us to learn to trust Him and love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30).

As we open our life to God's teaching, we must allow Him to instruct us using the tools of His choice. His lessons are often taught using the most unlikely messengers and through the worst of circumstances; but His lessons always contain a lasting sweetness.

No matter what we face today, let's look for the lesson God is teaching. Circumstances in our work, home, or even place of worship may often become hot with friction; but these sources of abrasion may very well be the tools God is using to mold us and draw us closer to His side...because He loves us and desires for us to learn to trust and love Him more. Let's praise Him for His continued loving instruction. Let's embrace the shaping process and be thankful for ALL the tools of The Teacher.

Have A Great Day!

## Return to Give Thanks 9-27-06

One day when Jesus was traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem, ten men with leprosy approached Him and called out; "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" (Luke 17:13). Jesus didn't immediately heal the lepers; rather, He gave them a simple instruction; "Go, show yourselves to the priests" (Luke 17:14).

A leper would only present himself to a priest if he believed the leprosy was gone. The priests had the authority to declare a diseased person ceremonially clean and able to return home (Leviticus 14). Therefore, the lepers demonstrated great faith when they followed Jesus' command; "And as they went, they were cleansed" (Luke 17:14). Notice that the lepers had to take action before they were healed, their action was a demonstration of their faith.

Though all ten lepers had been cleansed of their terrible disease, only one returned to give thanks; "He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked Him" (Luke 17:16). Jesus responded with a very convicting question.

Luke 17:17

"Jesus asked, 'Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?'"

I wonder if we really understand the degree to which we have been healed and made clean; "God made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgression" (Ephesians 2:5). We were DEAD, and He made us alive with Christ - that's serious healing!! Our Heavenly Father reached down in love and provided a way for complete restoration when we didn't even have the ability to cry out for help; "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8) - that's serious love!!

His Hand guided us toward healing through His Son and His Hand continues to heal in countless ways on our daily walk. Every time relationships are restored, His hand has healed; when conflicts are resolved, His hand has healed; and when He lovingly welcomes us back after we have wandered from His presence, His hand has healed.

But do we return to thank Him? Or are we as the other nine lepers who go on our way and forget the One to whom we owe our very lives.

The one leper who returned threw himself at Jesus' feet. If we knew how deathly ill we are without Christ and how completely He has healed our soul, we would not only throw ourselves at His feet, but we would remain and refuse to ever leave. Let's live each day in the presence of God and continually come before Him with hearts overflowing with thanksgiving and praise. Let's remember our divine healing and ALWAYS be the one who will return to give thanks.

Have A Great Day!

## Arise And Walk

9-28-06

To grow as a Christian means to become closer and develop a more intimate relationship with God. This relationship begins when we are born into His family - when we ask Him to forgive our sins through faith in Jesus and begin what is intended to be an eternal communion of love. He desires for us to trust Him in ALL things and pray to Him on all occasions; "In everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6).

Jesus promised that our prayers will be heard and answered; "Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete" (John 16:24). But as we lift up our requests, we can sometimes become confused by God's response. We often perceive His answers to be slow in arriving, or we're disappointed with His reply; we even begin to doubt if God even hears our prayers.

But we must remember that we have entered into an eternal relationship with the Sovereign Creator of the Universe! Underlying all our prayers must be the firm belief that "in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him" (Romans 8:28). God always has a plan, and His plan is very, very good! We must trust that His answer to our prayers will meet our true need (and fulfill our deepest desire) much better than we could ever hope or imagine.

A short time after Jesus was crucified, Peter and John were confronted by a crippled man sitting beside the Temple gate begging for money.

Acts 3:6

"Then Peter said, 'Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.'"

Until that day, the crippled man had never walked a single step. In his limited view of the world, the only hope he had for a better life was to be given a little money by those passing by. His request was limited by what he could see and understand - limited by his faith.

Our loving Father always hears our prayers - and He always answers. His answer to prayer is either yes, no, or wait...and sometimes He answers with, "Here my child, I have something much better for you."

God's view of our needs (and His view of the entire world) is much higher and grander than our own. We generally see our need as the solution to some short term problem, but our true need is always to grow by drawing closer and loving Him more. Let's take our eyes off the crutches we think will "fix" our problem and look instead to the One who is calling, to the One who patiently says, "Trust Me and come into My presence as you arise and walk!"

Have A Great Day!

John 6:35-40 - Lesson #67  
9-29-06

When Jesus spoke of "the food which endures to everlasting life" (John 6:27), those who were gathered requested a sign similar to the manna given to the Israelites in the desert. But with His characteristic focus on the eternal, Jesus turned the conversation to the true bread and the Giver of true life.

John 6:35-40

"And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.'"

Jesus previously stated the meaning of true bread; "the bread of God is He who comes down from Heaven and gives life to the world" (John 6:33). But when His listeners did not understand, Jesus spoke direct with the first of His "I am" statements. Jesus also declared, "I am the light" (8:12), "the door" (10:7), "the good shepherd" (10:11), "the resurrection and life" (11:25), "the way, the truth and the life" (14:6), and "the true vine" (15:1). Each of these declarations fit into the overall message that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life" (John 20:31).

He then further explained the bread of life by saying those who come and believe will NEVER hunger or thirst. Jesus said that through belief we will be Spiritually satisfied for all eternity. The end of this passage makes this even more clear by using the words "see," "believe," and "have everlasting life." The state of never hungering or thirsting IS eternal life - which begins the moment we believe. We may need to learn how to walk closer and trust more, but He is ALL we ever need.

The necessity of belief is further stressed by revealing the lack of belief in those who were listening. This is important because without attempting to identify belief, the need for belief loses its meaning. From this passage we can see that listening to Jesus, or following Him across the sea, or even believing His miracles does not constitute belief. True belief recognizes who He is and His ability to fill our Spiritual void.

Jesus then says that those who the Father gives will come, and those who come will remain. No one chooses God without God first choosing and making a way for us to come - Jesus was "sent" by the Father. And when we come, He welcomes us in and never lets us go; "I should lose nothing." His motivation is that He has come to do the will of the Father and "raise him up at the last day." He is offering to fill every hunger and thirst. Let's be fully satisfied in Him, knowing that as we come and believe, He will never let us go.

Have A Great Day!