

Website Devotions

March 1, 2010

Repentance

Joel 2:12-19

So rend your heart, and not your garments, return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm.

This verse speaks to everyone of course, I mean it is from THE Bible, but maybe a self reflection can really portray what this verse MEANS to you and me... "A Call to Repentance" talks of God's call for us to stop shielding our convictions by a veneer of ritualistic habits, but rather dig deep into our hearts and souls where real change and repentance can occur. Okay... let it sink in, when I start to think about this, a hard stone seems to settle in the bottom of my stomach. It seems to point out what I find myself doing all too much. There are countless situations where I act my repentance out, do my "Christian" duties, but in the realm of my own thoughts and actions I find my heart (figuratively of course) less affected by God's grace, and thus return to my old ways. This is exactly what God is trying to point out. He wants us to put less emphasis on the rituals of repentance and rather focus on the ramifications of our actions and work deep within our souls to change. We cannot expect ourselves to change if we don't take the time to fully reflect and obtain a change of heart.

YES WE CAN! No, but seriously we should at least try.

***Prayer:* Father, please help me see that my actions and superficial thoughts are not tricking you at all. In fact, the only one I'm tricking is myself. Help me gain strength to overcome my pride and be an example for others to come to you. Thanks, you're the best! Amen.**

Tim Darling

March 2, 2010

Holy Communion 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For as often as you eat of this bread and drink from this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

The Lord's Supper, or Communion, is a common Sunday occurrence. We have all stood and listened and replied, at the appropriate times. Then we have stood in line, eaten the bread, drank the wine, and returned to our seats. So what does it mean? Is it just part of the service? Or is it supposed to be something more? Jesus died after this final supper with his closest friends. He did not die peacefully in his sleep, or in a tragic accident; he was persecuted, put on trial, found guilty, and horrifically executed. This all happened so that every single mistake that we make throughout our lives will be forgiven, as long as we truly ask for that forgiveness. That last meal Jesus shared with his friends was His new promise to us that we would always be forgiven, even though he would no longer be with us.

Every time we partake in this weekly tradition, we should take a moment to realize what Jesus gave, so that we may be forgiven every day. He did not just give up His friends, His country, or His freedom; He gave up His life, as He was tortured to death on the Cross. Through this he gave us hope, that our lives may be fuller and richer through Him and the Father. As we take the morsel of bread in our mouths and drink from the blessed cup, we should remember the Last Supper Jesus shared with His disciples was the last one He shared with those he cherished most. So we should treat it in the same way, as something to be cherished.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your ultimate sacrifice. As we partake in Your supper, may we remember your love and forgiveness. Amen.

Amanda Meyers

March 3, 2010

New Birth

John 3:1-15

Jesus answered, "Unless one is born of the water and the Spirit; he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

Sometimes serving others isn't exactly what we expect it to be. Often, when we do community service we expect to feel better about ourselves, and we anticipate thanks from the people we have served. When we do a favor for an acquaintance, many times we expect something back in return. Though we may have good intentions, we rarely do good deeds solely for the person being served.

However, Jesus shows us how to be true servants. Because he was called Teacher and Lord, few probably expected Him to humble Himself so much as to wash the feet of others. However, His actions showed that everyone, no matter what his or her place in life, should be a servant. And did Jesus want something for Himself in return? No. All He wanted was for His disciples to wash one another's feet. He expected that, in return for His service, they would live out His example and serve others.

Prayer: Lord, please help us to humble ourselves to serve You and others selflessly. Help us to show Your love to others through our service. Amen.

Haley VanErem

March 4, 2010

Dust

Genesis 2:8-19

Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them.

In man's first home, God provided Adam and Eve with fresh water, good food growing all around, beauty, occupation, and companionship. Today, outside of Eden, He gives us the same things: bodily nourishment, aesthetic enjoyment, callings as

humans and as Christians on earth, and each other for support and friendship. None of these things can grant us eternal life, however; that comes only through God.

While we should be thankful for all we've been given here on earth, we must be careful not to rely on the gifts rather than the One who gives them. Our assurance can rest in Him, and we will remain unshaken when our possessions and conventions and even our bodies eventually pass away. Are the things that matter most to you now the same things that will matter most after life on earth is over? Is your confidence in things that will eventually return to dust or in God for eternity? When we trust in Him first, we can enjoy even more fully the wonderful "dust" that He gives us during this earthly life.

Prayer: Lord, thank You that You will always endure. Help us to be able to look beyond the temporary, placing our confidence in You. Amen.

Loni Amundson

March 5, 2010

Lament

Matthew 23:37-39

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!

Lament! That isn't a word we use very often. I suppose that could be a good thing. Then again we see from scripture that lament is not only a possible and permissible response to a situation by disciples, it can be downright appropriate. Here today we have a lament from Jesus. The leaders of Jerusalem have rejected God's maternal care and guidance. Jesus' response is not one of anger and fury that seeks to punish. Jesus' response is one of hurt and sadness that seeks to redeem. This is Lent. This is a season to lament our sin and our rejection of God's care. Yet it is not a season of gloom. It is also a season to recall that

God reaches out to us to restore us and make us whole once more.

Prayer: Redeeming God, like a mother hen you would gather us into the safety of your wings. When we stray and turn from you, gather us back into the love that enables us to emerge from those wings and serve you. Amen.

Pastor Gary N McCluskey

March 6, 2010 "You did it to me" Matthew 25:31-40

Then, He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of least of these, you did not do it to Me.

I often think about times where I have served others where as much as the satisfaction of doing the service feels great, hearing praises from others about my service felt even better. I know I have been guilty of this in the past. What good does it do to serve if no one can see me do it? What good does it do that I do this single act of service with no direct benefit to anyone else? This passage of Matthew 25:31-40 reminds us that even the smallest bit of service, is still service to God. In a nutshell, serving others is serving him. We may not think that giving our leftover meals to someone is serving God or the time when I gave a hot chocolate to someone on a chilly morning was service to God but this passage reminds us that it is. "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for the one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me". This passage reminds us to serve selflessly; even to those who you may think don't even deserve it.

Prayer: Dear God, please encourage me to serve selflessly and to remind me that serving others is serving you. Because I am

able to give to others, I should with my whole heart. Thank you for always reminding me to serve, even to the least of my brothers, by this example in Matthew 25. Amen.

Christa Steiner

March 7, 2010 "Christ's Role" Matthew 20:24-28

Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.

Today we live in a culture, like many before us, in which competition and status are important. We want to excel in school, our careers, athletics, music, politics...the list goes on. People often want to make an impact and know all the "right people." In the time of Christ, human nature was no different--the twelve disciples wanted status and power just like anyone today might. In the verses prior to this passage, the mother of James and John has asked Jesus if her sons may sit at his left and right hands in the next life and he has declined, saying it is not for him to decide. The remaining ten apostles are upset, but for selfish reasons. They don't want James and John to be honored any more than they are, and Jesus responds with wise words that penetrate to the heart of the issue: the kingdom of God is not like earthly government. Serve others, and put them before yourself.

Easy on paper, but difficult to practice. Jesus sets a supreme example by humbling himself and serving us through his self-sacrifice, while simultaneously reminding us of our feelings towards those who lord their authority over us. While we will never be perfectly selfless, this passage encourages us to consider both Christ and our fellow men and women as we strive towards living a more generous life.

Prayer: Heavenly father, we spend our days in a world where people work towards status and recognition for self-serving ends. Help us, O God, to put others before ourselves, and help those in power to see the needs of all people and keep them in the forefront of their hearts. Amen.

Elise Deringer Wendte

March 8, 2010 "Words of eternal life" John 6:56-68

He who eats my flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him." If you haven't already been desensitized to this concept by regularly participating in Holy Communion, Jesus' declaration is quite barbaric! Is he really suggesting cannibalism? No wonder some of the disciples couldn't handle it—they probably concluded that Jesus was, at best, crazy, or at worst, blasphemous. Simon Peter and some of the other disciples, though, gave Jesus' words a second and deeper look. They understood that in a very organic, tangible way, Jesus was describing the relationship between human beings, himself, and God. None of us can come to the Father without first participating in all that the Son has to offer. How many other words of Jesus seem confusing or repulsive at first glance? Do we dismiss Jesus' words as too hard to understand or too uncomfortable to accept? On the other hand, do Jesus' words seem commonplace and easy to accept because we've heard them at church so often? Like Simon Peter, may we read and hear the words of Jesus at more than face value during our Lenten journey and throughout the year.

Prayer: During this season of Lent, help me to think deeply about the words of Jesus, the living Word. Help me to live out those words in my everyday life. Amen.

Aiko Yamada

March 9, 2010 "God is our refuge" Psalm 46

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in the trouble.

All of us have had times where it feels as if the earth moves under us and the mountains are falling into the sea. We fight battles all the time in daily life: losing a job, fighting with a friend or worrying about the economy. In a battle, a fortress has two purposes. It is the place you can run to for protection, when everything seems to be against you, when you feel you are so tired of fighting you can't keep going. But once you are there, a fortress is also the place that gives you the strength to keep fighting, when the enemy is at the gates. God is our refuge, our fortress, where we can find comfort and help. God is also our strength, to be behind us as we fight our battles in life.

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, help us to remember that you are always behind us, our strength and our refuge in times of trouble. Amen.

Kristin Tollefson

March 10, 2010 "Remembrance" Luke 22:19-20

This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.

Did you notice that Luke reverses the order of blessing the cup and bread? Actually were the entire text here you would see that Luke alone includes two cups; one before the bread and one at the meal's conclusion. In Passover meals four cups of wine are used. Jesus is taking an ancient Jewish religious meal and connecting it to himself. But we see why in the last verse of our text today.

Jesus does this *for us*. The cup, like the life of Jesus, is poured out for us. We are to remember Jesus. We are to remember Jesus in prayer, in worship, in our discipleship, and as we gather around Jesus' table every Sunday morning. We are to remember Jesus not because Jesus' ego needs remembering but so that we can remember what God has done for us in Jesus. And so we can recall that our discipleship is to take us forth from that table and tell others what God has done in Jesus so that they too can remember. Our faith, our prayer, our service; we do these things in joyful remembrance of Jesus.

Prayer: Loving God, you pour out yourself into our world. May we who eat and drink at your table receive strength to pour ourselves out into our world. May we who eat and drink at your table enable others to remember Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Gary N McCluskey

March 11, 2010 "The power of God" 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

But to those who are called both Jews and Greek, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

For those that have ever doubted the marvel or intelligence of God, this passage speaks to you. There are two specific populations mentioned: the Jews and the Greeks. Normally these two groups are divided in terms of their beliefs, but in this scripture they are united by their inability to understand Christ's crucifixion. Despite the passage of time, a Messiah sacrificing his life, bleeding his pure blood, and dying a criminal death for the sake of His people, these are all things that humanity has a difficult time grasping. Regardless, God wants us to understand that even the best we have to offer is not enough. The 14-year-old in college or the past scientists like Einstein that have shone

light on miraculous findings could not even fathom what God knows. Likewise, even God at his weakest could not even compare to the strongest man on earth. To hold these truths in our minds and understand them requires a lot of faith and expectance. In the modern world there are a few more divisions within different belief systems to say the least, but the message is the same. Our belief in Christ's crucifixion unites us. Knowing that our God is stronger and wiser beyond our comprehension should give us hope and faith that he will take care of us: that he will be with us despite whatever adversity the world throws at us. Most importantly, that there is an answer, an end of the tunnel regardless of however endless it seems.

Prayer: God we thank you for your strength that comforts us and your wisdom that guides us. Please help us to understand your sacrifice for us and truly appreciate it. Amen.

Megan Kesler

March 12, 2010 "In weakness" 2 Corinthians 12:7b-10

My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.

Just the other day I watched a powerful movie called "The Pursuit of Happiness." This movie depicted the real life trials and tribulations of a man named Chris Gardner. I feel that this movie exemplifies this Bible verse in that every little thing that this man did for his son and for the betterment of their futures showed God's grace.

Chris worked hard all the time; against insurmountable odds. He not only taught his son life lessons but he sacrificed his time, money, body, and soul for the betterment of his son when he could have walked away. There is a scene where though he's in an

internship and has only 8 dollars or so in his wallet, his boss asks if he can borrow five dollars for a cab because he forgot his wallet upstairs. He didn't know that Chris was homeless. He didn't know that Chris only had a few bucks but Chris handed over almost his entire life's savings. I don't know Chris' faith or if he prayed to God. What I do know is that the Lord watches over all His children in good times or bad.

Toward the end of the movie Chris is hired as a stock broker and his five dollars is returned. We learn that he was a very smart man and is now a millionaire. He had always been proud of his smarts and perhaps that is why he suffered- so that he was humbled, to open his eyes to his Maker's grace and not to his own doings. It is only by God's abundant grace that his life got better. It is only by God's grace that our lives have goodness and the pursuit of happiness.

This seems to me how our Lord works. You put in the time and effort, live through His trials and tribulations and He not only gives you back what you lost or gave up but increases it as He sees fit only through His Grace. May this be the grace and love that we each receive, in this life or the next!

Prayer: Thank you Lord for blessing us as your children and watching over us in the darkness so that one day we may see your light! Amen.

Darryl Green

March 13, 2010 "Remember Jesus Christ" 2 Timothy 2:8-13

Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel.

This passage is a letter from Paul to Timothy. He tells him to always remember Jesus Christ. Paul is suffering to the point of being "chained" like a criminal. Even though he is chained, "God's

word is not changed." Everything he does is for everyone to find salvation in Christ, and that frees him. If we die with Jesus, then we have given ourselves up for him and we'll live with Jesus. If we endure hardships, we will reign with Jesus. If we disown Jesus, he will disown us, but if we ask for forgiveness and remain faithful, God will never disown us.

Prayer: God, give us the strength to endure hardships. Give us the strength to die with Jesus and help us see your light in the darkest times. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Brian Schneider

March 14, 2010 "Looking to Jesus" Hebrews 12:1-2

Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Sometimes I feel like my life is moving at a ninety mile an hour pace. Between school, work, spending time with my family and friends, managing my finances, and trying to eat healthy and getting enough sleep, I can hardly keep up. Facebook, television and online video games present constant distractions in my already excessively busy schedule. I find myself struggling so hard to control my life that I am just barely hanging onto my sanity. Something I have come to realize is that the more I struggle to control everything, the more out of control things seem to get. It's times like these that my focus slips. I look away from Christ, and I begin to forget the things that are truly important to me. I don't call my family as much, I oversleep and miss church, and my grades start to drop.

When my focus is on Jesus, all of those other things - money, stress from work and school, lack of sleep - seem to fade away.

I don't have to worry about trying to control them because I can ask God for help. When I set my focus on Christ as my first priority, everything else falls into place. I don't have to worry about everything, because I can take comfort in knowing that God is in control.

Prayer: Lord, during the season of Lent this year, help me to remember that you are the one who is in control of my life. Please help me to leave behind all of the things that are distracting me, and focus on you. Amen.

Maggie Sherod

March 15, 2010 "Christ strengthens me"

Philippians 4:8-13

It can be so difficult in life sometimes. We try to be good and to do the right thing. It often seems that we are all alone in this endeavor. Personally for me, I have recently been having this struggle. I have served in a Christian organization

for the past three years and I have tried to make change for the better. Everything I have tried has been shot down and ridiculed. Sometimes it feels like Nazi Germany and I am facing corruption all by myself. I try to remember that God is with me and I am doing good things in his name.

Christ is my strength. Christ is the one who gives us all strength, and gives us the strength to face the everyday challenges of life. We can stand up for what is right, what is true, what is honorable, what is just, and what is pure, and know that we are not alone. Especially in today's hard times, we do feel the struggles and pressures of everyday life. Often it seems like there is no solution or hope. Christ is by our side, he is our hope and our strength. With him on

our side we cannot fail.

Lord, thank you for being our strength and our rock. Thank you for showing us things that are good and pleasing to you and please let us be that rock for someone else who may be struggling. Amen.

Vicki Collins

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March 16, 2010 "Mercy Remembered" Luke 1:46-55

And His mercy is upon those who fear Him from generation to generation.

Every day we are blessed by our Lord's mercy. He takes care of us in so many ways that we often forget or overlook them. It is important that we take time in our busy days to step back and give thanks, as Mary did. She took the time to reflect on all the good and amazing things God did for her, her family, and her people now, and in the past. She then used herself, her own words, and her actions to thank and praise God. What better way to repay Him? Many times we take the gifts and blessings our Lord has bestowed upon us and we throw them away, ignore them, or simply forget about them. Imagine how much that must hurt. Each one of us has been ignored and forgotten at some point in our lives and know, personally, how deeply the hurt can penetrate. Why would we want to do that to our Lord?

Our Lord wishes nothing but love from us, and this is so simple. Mary understood this, and loved so deeply. Love is simple, and complete. Within it is the thanksgiving and gratitude that our Lord longs for. If it is so simple, why is it so hard to remember? In fact, it really is quite easy. All we have to do is stop for just a tiny moment, enough to catch our breath, and look around. Everything around us came from Him. Should we not be grateful? He gave His love and mercy to our lives and our world. All we need to do is say thank you and love Him.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the love and mercy you show us every day. Without it, we would not be here. Amen.

Amanda Meyers

March 17, 2010 "Prodigal son remembers"

Luke 15:11-24

This passage reminds me that God does not expect us to be perfect. In fact he expects us to stumble and fall quite frequently. He even expects us to drift away from him once and a while. God is always with us. He is with us when we feel most distant from him. He is with us when we make mistakes and offers us compassion and forgiveness for the mistakes that we make.

I think the wonderful thing about compassion is it doesn't just come from God. We can offer each other compassion and live out our faith through our compassion with others. Sometimes you can do everything right and still end up on the bottom. Our compassion for another person can make their world a better place.

Dear Lord, thank you for always forgiving us when we make mistakes and offering us compassion. Please help us to offer compassion to others and make their world a better place. Amen.

Samantha Vancel

13

March 18, 2010 "The Lord provides" 1 Kings 19:4-8

Then as Elijah lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, "Arise and eat."

Elijah is afraid and on the run. He feels so sorry for himself that he walks out into the Negev desert alone and asks God to let him die there. We in Phoenix know the desert well enough to know

that it wouldn't take much for Elijah's wish to come true. Have you ever felt this kind of despair? Maybe the journey you are on now seems more than you can bear.

Fortunately, God answers this prayer of desperation with what Elijah **needs**, not what he asks for. Yes, God provides food and water, but also reassurance, help, and a new perspective. God does not magically change Elijah's circumstances or let him off the hook. Instead, God strengthens him for the journey and the work that remains to be done. There's nothing wrong with the struggle; in fact, some time in the desert might be just what we need. Elijah receives exactly what he needs for his journey, even though it takes him even further into the desert. At the end of his journey, he meets God.

Lent is an opportunity to detach ourselves from our self-centered, comfortable lives and journey into the desert a little. Everything we need along the way will be provided as we travel toward God.

Prayer: Dear God, I want to meet you. Provide what I need. Use my struggles to strengthen me for my journey toward you. Amen.

Kim Savage

March 19, 2010 "Teach me your paths" Psalm 25:1-5

Show me your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths.

In this Psalm, we pray to the Lord to guide us on His paths and strengthen our spirit through tough times. Each day we are faced with challenges that threaten to bring us down, but with the help of God we can persevere. When we ask God to not let us be put to shame and to not let our enemies exult over us, we are asking Him to help us endure life's hardships so that we do not turn away

from God's paths. It is all too easy to forsake God and blame Him for the terrible things in this world and our lives, but through this Psalm we ask God to give us the strength to not turn our backs. The hardest thing to do when life is not going as well as we would wish is to continue to praise God and ask for His guidance. We pray for the Lord to not only show us the way, but to lead and teach us, so that we do not stray from His side. There are many distractions in our daily lives, and often we cannot see where we should go or how we should live, and so we trust in the Lord to guide our hearts to where we belong. For as we live our lives, we do so for the Lord; every second of every day.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we lift up our hearts to You for strength in our times of need. Shine Your light upon our lives so that we may see the paths you lay before us, and lead us according to Your will. Amen.

Barry Lumpkin

March 20, 2010 "Let your light shine" Matthew 5:14-16

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Let your light shine is hard to do in these tough times we face. It is hard to show what it is like to be Christian when the whole world seems like it is in shambles. One must not forget that we can show what it is like to be Christian even in these hard times. Shine the light of God onto others for they will in turn shine the light of God onto others.

Now in this time of Lent, some have given up something to try to feel how Jesus felt, which is good to do but I feel that one can always give something away instead of doing without. Not like just giving money away, but like giving one's time or energy. This passage came out and said to go out and spread God's/Jesus'

love, and grace and hope so the whole world can see. So God's people should go and share the light and may that light shine bright.

Prayers: Dear Lord, thank you so much for giving us the gift of your light. Please be with those that are in the dark and let us find them and give them light. Amen.

Colton Grimmer

March 21, 2010 "Witnesses"

Acts 3:1-6

Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

There are times when it seems we are so wrapped up in the day-to-day business of work and deadlines that life seems to focus on making it to the weekend or to the summer vacation. It can be easy to forget that in our lives of stress and worry there is also wonder and amazement at all of God's gifts. Peter's words to the crippled man remind us that not only are gifts from God around us but are also in us. We are called to share our gifts with others. We often fail to think of us as doing God's work daily. We hear of the dramatic gestures - healing a crippled man or inspiring people with words - and we can lose sight of the importance of the small steps. The simple acts that radiate compassion and forgiveness, healing and understanding. Visiting someone who is ill or calling an old friend, smiling at a stranger or greeting our neighbor. 'Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you'. Maybe we don't feel we can heal people but what we have is no less a gift from God and no less important.

Prayer: Loving Creator, help us to find and use the gifts you have given us to benefit those around us. Help us to see the wonder and amazement in our lives. Amen.

Beth Wootten

March 22, 2010 "In his steps" 1 Peter 2:21-25

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.

It seems that nobody wants to be a role model these days. Remember when professional basketball player Charles Barkley infamously told that world that "I am not a role model?" Some people are afraid of messing up, some don't care, and some simply don't want to be held accountable for their actions. Are you a role model? According to this passage, we all are. Verse 21 clearly states that we have been called, through Christ's suffering and death, to follow in his steps. How do we do this? The apostle Peter uses imagery of sheep and a shepherd to direct us to follow the one true shepherd- Jesus Christ. We are to follow His example of faith, hope, and love; a responsibility bestowed upon us all when God sacrificed His son on our behalf.

Prayer: Dear God, it's not always easy following in your steps. Help us to keep our eyes on you and live lives worthy of your calling. Amen.

Jill Rode

March 23, 2010 "Grace trains us" Titus 2:11-14

Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

When I think of the nature of God and Jesus, the thing I love the most is the amount of grace and forgiveness we receive. I'm pretty sure I've never read this passage before, but I really like it; it really emphasizes how good we have it, how salvation is available for everyone, no matter who we are or what we have done - a new, perfect life is available for us all.

When I also read this passage, I see that there is still some work for us to do. God is training us, He's showing us how to turn away from a life of sin. We can't expect to suddenly live a life without worldly passions and impiety; we have to work at it. God and Jesus provide the training, the example, on how to live such a life, a life full of His grace. Hopefully we can all take on this training to truly be a people He can be proud of, energetic in goodness, and on fire to show this grace to others.

Prayer: Dear God, please train us how best to live a life full of the grace and salvation you have given freely to everyone and take on a God-filled, God-honoring life. Help us live this life to the best of our ability every day, and through our good actions, bring others closer to you. Amen.

Matt Collins

March 24, 2010 "Proclaiming God's power" 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

It is difficult to envision the Apostle Paul as a weak, fearful, speech impaired inelegant proclaimer of God's Word. Yet, this is how he described himself in a letter to the Church at Corinth. Paul was an eloquent preacher; his writings alone reveal a depth of wisdom and understanding along with an ability to communicate clearly. He tells us that he did not rely on them and was "resolved to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." His

"weakness and fear with much trembling" sprung out of his understanding of the responsibility of proclaiming the message, and his inability to proclaim it effectively in his own knowledge and skill. Faith does not rise out of wise, eloquent, persuasive speeches. Faith comes out of the heart and mind that have been gripped by the Spirit.

Such an attitude of ministry is not for Paul alone. This must be the attitude and philosophy of all of us. Our proclaiming, whether preaching or witnessing, spoken or through our actions, must be a "demonstration of the Spirit's power so that their faith might not rest upon men's wisdom, but upon God's power."

Prayer: Lord, let my words and actions demonstrate your Spirit and power, so that my developing faith will rest not in my wisdom but in yours. Amen.

Jeanne Sims

March 25, 2010 "Imitators of God" Ephesians 4:25-5:2

Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children.

I love that in Ephesians 4:25-5:2, it equates getting angry with "giving the devil a chance," because that's really what it is. Every feeling of anger, spite, hatred, etc. you feel toward someone else is honest-to-goodness Satan trying to distract you from Christ's love. At the same time, those bad feelings are sometimes inevitable, as we are imperfect earthen vessels, but I think part of being a Christian is being able to acknowledge we are not perfect instead of getting angry or frustrated about it. Getting upset about occasionally faltering in God's eyes is a fool's errand - none of us can be as perfect as God, but we certainly try, and part of Christ's love is being able to forgive others and yourself for sins. I always felt you cannot truly understand Christ's love until you learn to love yourself. I also love the command to "stop

all your dirty talk." As imperfect earthen vessels, badmouthing others is a part of human nature. But again, just because we will never be as perfect as God or Jesus Christ does not mean we can't strive to be like them. It is very easy to fall into the trap of talking negatively about someone behind their back -- Lord knows I fall into that trap more often than not, especially when I'm around others who are doing the same thing -- but we all have the power within us to set a good example by not succumbing to "dirty talk." Heck, you can even say GOOD things about someone behind their back, or even better, to their face! And if you have a legitimate concern or frustration toward someone, tell them to their face -- I think that is a sign of true friendship and can be a sign of Christ's tough love.

Prayer: Lord, I pray that we will remember these rules and know that despite the fact that we can never be as perfect as You, it doesn't mean we shouldn't try. Let our hearts be good soil and help us keep the devil from planting his seeds there before Yours. I love you and I lift my voice up high forever and ever. Amen.

Todd Hoover

March 26, 2010 "God's word enlightens" Psalm 119:101-105

Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light to my path.

A few summers ago, while on vacation, my family took a tour of Jewel Cave National Monument in South Dakota. The tour was billed as "historical"; while most cave tours are well lit and follow asphalt or concrete paths, this tour was conducted by candlelight lanterns and followed a natural entrance. After we had gone about a mile or so into the cave, our tour guide had us sit down and extinguish all the lanterns. The darkness was absolute. I held my fingers to my eyes saw nothing. So complete is the darkness,

our tour guide told us, that if you continue to sit with your eyes open, your mind will begin to fabricate shadow images so that you can "see". After a minute or two, our tour guide struck a single match. The light from that one match illuminated the entire room in which we were seated, and the brightness grew as he lit each lantern. It was entirely the difference between day and night. As the Psalmist says, God's word is a lamp that illuminates our path. Often times, the darkness may seem to envelop us and cause us to stumble, but the light of His Word pierces the darkest corners, if we turn to it. The Word gives us guidance and comfort, and it shows us the way of our salvation. And like the match in the cavern, the light cast from God's Word grows as it is read, understood, and shared with others. How awesome it is of our God to give us such a gift.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the light of Your Word. As we study it, we pray that you would shine your light into our lives and guide us in Your truth, and help us to share that truth with others. We thank You especially for the gift of your Son, Jesus, the Word made Flesh, in whose name we pray, Amen.

Eric Lenhardt

March 27, 2010 "Christ: faithful witness" Revelation 1:4-6

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

I believe this passage to be an invitation or "revelation" to the peoples of Asia that God and Jesus is their God too. I do think that the people thought of Asia as a mysterious and exotic place. If God could be the God of Asia then he must also be the God of

every other human. It is also interesting that the Jews and the Gentiles are not even mentioned. He is the God of all humanity. John, when describing God, basically lists off the qualifications and accomplishments of God. For someone familiar with Jesus' works this would be fine, but I wonder if the people of Asia are familiar with these miracles and the series of events that led to Jesus' sacrifice. John does but put forth strong words for the belief in God though.

Prayer: Lord, may all those with different backgrounds and different histories realize that they are one people with your love always watching over them. We are thankful for your loving hand in our lives. Amen.

James Arama

March 28, 2010 "Preach Christ" 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness.

Although most of us are aware of God's strength and power in comparison to our own, in times of trouble we often forget that God's true strength and power lies in His ability to set it aside for the good of his people. Particularly in the generations of past biblical times, Christians were used to relying on faith rather than miracles. However, there still lies within each of us a desire to see signs of God working among us in obvious ways. By the same token, when interpreting Scripture, we often look to God as an invincible being who walks in the light, and look at Christ in the same way. In seeing God this way, we are able to easily place Him above ourselves, to see Him in a completely different way than that of the average person.

However, it is always important to remember that Christ was made man and that his struggles in life were similar to our own. Even in God's wisdom, Christ endured pain and suffering as man, and our observance of Scripture must always keep that in mind. We must remember that Christ's suffering, particularly his crucifixion, does not make him weak; rather, it shows the strength and power of God in all His forms. Our search for "miraculous signs" and "wisdom" can be found even in what appears to us as God's weakest moments, and we must always remember these as moments of strength and power, especially in comparison to our own strengths and weaknesses.

Prayer: Lord, please continue to guide us in all your ways of wisdom, from miraculous gestures to your own image crucified. Your strength and power even in your weakest moments are a guiding light to us even in our strongest times. Amen.

Catherine Vale

March 29, 2010 "Words of eternal life" John 6:56-68

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.

Life can be hard and often believing is hard. It is hard to believe that God is always there when we are struggling with the loss of a job, the loss of a loved one, or when we are just plain lost.

However, we need only look around us to find examples of life that come through faith. Farmers plant their seeds in the belief that they will grow to be good crops, parents raise their children with the hope that they will do something good with their lives, and Christ carried that cross with the faith that what he was doing was for the good of mankind.

Whenever we are challenged in our belief, we can turn to this passage. There is a place of knowledge and comfort to go to and

that is God's word through Christ. Without faith in Christ, we would falter. We need to not only accept but believe that Christ died for our sins and so became our way to eternal life, our salvation.

Prayer: Oh heavenly father, you have the words of eternal life, grant us the strength to have faith in your life giving word. Help us to know that even in difficult times, we have hope for salvation through your son Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Rebecca Wong

March 30, 2010 "Come to me for rest" Matthew 11:25-30

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

This passage of scripture I truly find refreshing. Here Jesus is saying come to me with your sins, troubles and worries because I will help you carry them so that you can get some sleep. Wow! What an amazing gift Jesus is offering us here. He is saying that if you take up my load, then I will carry yours.

I imagine this like packing up a suitcase full of every sin I ever committed (that bag would be way too heavy for me to carry.) Jesus comes and says here, "take my bag", which is easy and very light. Then he reaches over and picks up my bag of sins and says, "don't worry about carrying your suitcase of sins."

Prayer: Dear heavenly father, thank you for giving me rest from my sins. May I always come to you with everything and never doubt your never-ending love. Amen.

Theresa Pace

March 31, 2010 "I am with you always" Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus said, "All authority is given to Me in heaven and on earth."

As everyone knows, life can be difficult at times. There are certainly days that can be more trying than others. Reading this passage always provides me comfort because I am reminded that God is always with me and will be there to help me through those rough passages in my life. This passage also talks about going out into the world to share the good news of God's love and Jesus' teachings. I believe we do this more through word and actions by loving one another, sharing our gifts, being kind, helping those less fortunate, etc. However it is not always easy to do these things. It's not easy to love everyone and to be kind to those people we like. This passage also reminds me that God is with us when we are sharing his love and good news with the world, which isn't always the easiest thing to do.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please help to share the teachings of your Son and your love to all people through our words and examples. Give us the comfort of knowing you are always with us. Amen.

Samantha Vancel