

Rock Solid Ministries'

Growing Closer

Daily Devotional



And that Rock was Christ. - 1 Cor. 10:4

Rock Solid Ministries (RSM) is pleased to bring this labor of love to God's Church. These devotionals, based on our reading program card, will take you through the entire New Testament in a year.

Each day's devotional thought is based on a verse from the day's scripture and written by one of the RSM family. In addition, audio recordings of these devotions may be available on the media portion of our website. These audio recordings were painstakingly crafted in hotel rooms, homes, and church offices across North America. (For more information, on how these recordings may currently be obtained, please contact our office.)

While it is our joy to bring you this book free of financial charge, there is one payment we'd like to receive from you. Would you fulfill your "debt of love" and pray for us as you read each day? We covet your prayers for our inspiration, integrity, safety, and impact as we work among Christ's congregations.

Be blessed, Church of God. We love you.

~ Tom, Beth, Kristin, Greg, Lori, and Truli ~
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Beth makes use of the NASB throughout, unless otherwise noted.

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January 1

The Family

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 1

VERSE FOR TODAY: “The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” (Matthew 1:1)

Genealogy is important in our lives. It tells us who we are, where we came from, and how we fit in. It was very important to the nation of Israel to know where Jesus came from. He had to come from the line of Abraham, Isaac, and David; He could not be the Messiah if He did not fulfill this requirement.

As Christians, our “bloodline” in Christ is special. When we accept Jesus as our Savior and Lord we are adopted into the Family of God, we become His children, and our brothers and sisters are as “numerous as the sands on the seashore”. The history of our physical family (good or bad) cannot change the fact that we now have royal blood flowing through our veins. Not only do we have great family gatherings in this world, but we are also promised the greatest family reunion ever known in the world to come!

Let us live like God’s children, following the example of Jesus to be kind, gentle, and forgiving - never forgetting that we are children of the Creator of the Universe.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God today to help you remember that He is your Father and, as His child, you have a place in His Family.

- Beth

January 2

Uncertainty

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 2

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee.” (Matthew 2:22)

The second day of a new year, wow, what’s ahead? We can’t even imagine. Lot of good I hope - certainly some bad as well. Life is uncertain, isn’t it? You feel it sometimes, and so do I. Joseph and Mary *really* felt it! First, running from Herod and now dealing with Herod’s son!

Joseph and Mary had a great advantage. They knew that God was leading the way, and that He would take care of them. We have that advantage too! As Christians, we

may not know what tomorrow (or this new year) holds, but we do know Who holds tomorrow in His hands!

Jesus said there would be trouble in our future. That's a fact you cannot change though you worry day and night! I know you would like to be "warned in a dream" of impending danger as Joseph was, but you better not count on it. Instead, start each day by reading God's Word and trusting Him, through His written directions, to guide you in the uncertain days ahead.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to plant deep in your heart a desire to start every day with Him this year.

- Tom

January 3

Arguing with God

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 3:1-4:11

VERSE FOR TODAY: "But John tried to deter him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'" (Matthew 3:14)

Wait. What? John was arguing with Jesus? Are you kidding me? We know John was a bold preacher, but it seems a bit strange!

I realize that John and Jesus were cousins. They probably had many childhood spats. As little boys in the yard, I'm sure they heard the familiar, "Boys! Play nice!" I understand John's reaction. I'm sure he felt unworthy, unqualified - embarrassed even. But really? He argued with Jesus over something as life-changing as this? The gall.

Now the big question: Have I argued with God? Ouch! You bet I have. Maybe I haven't argued out loud, in a formal prayer, to His face (so to speak), but my actions have argued with His will over and over. I have made choices that have gone against what I know is His will. Yeah, that's arguing.

Look ahead to verse fifteen, it says, "Then John consented." After closing his own mouth, after listening to what Jesus had to say, he consented. I am trying to learn that progression in my life. I need to: quit talking, listen to Jesus, submit my life.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to remind you to quit talking your way through things, and to remind you to listen to Him. Then prayerfully submit to Him.

- Lori

January 4

Step into the Light

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 4:12-25

VERSE FOR TODAY: “the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned. From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” (Matthew 4:16-17)

Surely, it seemed the load lightened. What hope and joy this new rabbi must have brought as He walked the shores of Galilee, calling His first disciples. For people living a day-to-day, never-ending, monotonous existence, it must have seemed that they were breathing their first breaths of real life. Dawn had come to a dark, shadowy world.

Yet, just as Jesus would ask the invalid at the pool (John 5:2ff) if he *wanted* to be healed, so Jesus must have asked if people *wanted* to be spiritually healed. Did they really *want* hope? For His message was not one of immediate freedom, but of repentance.

The truth is: there are some who prefer the darkness. Their discomfort with the status quo has not yet reached a level which motivates them to sacrifice their personal kingdom. Jesus surely brings the light, but it is *our personal responsibility* to step into it.

Are you willing to lay aside what you’ve had the ability to provide to find what Jesus wants to give you? Will you step into the light?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask the Father today if there are yet parts and places of your life that need to be illuminated through repentance.

- Greg

January 5

Shine Brightly!

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5:1-26

VERSE FOR TODAY: “In this way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

Stop for a moment and think of a great spiritual man or woman in your life. Do you have their image in your mind? Think about this spiritual giant. Do you think of a person that gossips, appears angry, or shows little concern for others? Of course not! This person is highly approachable, radiating warmth! Their life points you to Jesus. He or

she is a great example of someone bearing the fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-26)

These spiritual traits did not come easily - it takes effort! We learn to seek peace, through Christ, in the midst of personal distress. We learn to love and show kindness and gentleness rather than hate and anger. We choose to be self-controlled rather than reactive, and we choose faith over fear!

We must choose to shine for Jesus in every moment of every day! Do your actions or reactions point others to Christ?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you see others through His eyes and shine for Him in all your interactions!

- Kristin

January 6

Loving Like Jesus

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5:27- 48

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the righteous and the unrighteous.” (Matthew 5:44-45)

When Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, He gave instruction on how to live as Christians. He was aware that He would have enemies and that those listening would observe how He lived and they, along with His disciples, would judge Him if He did not live by His own words. Knowing all of this, He still taught that we must love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.

Not always easy is it? Okay, it’s almost *never* easy, but it can be done! Jesus did live His words. While dying on the cross to save His friends, He was also dying to save His enemies *and* praying for them.

Jesus loves people so much that even though they may not want Him, He still provided a way for them to be saved and live with Him forever by giving His own blood on the cross of Calvary. How much do you love your enemies, or your friends for that matter? Tell them about Jesus today.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: “Father let your Son shine through me to my friends *and* enemies. Please help me to love the people of this world just as you do.”

- Beth

January 7

Thanks, Grandpa!

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 6:1-24

VERSE FOR TODAY: “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” (Matthew 6:24)

Just a few hours after my baptism I asked my Grandfather (who had baptized me), “What do I do now?” His answer might surprise you.

“You have a job; you get a paid; tithe.”

I will forever be grateful for that response! At seventeen years of age, money meant a lot to me, probably too much. Grandpa knew that I needed to get my eyes off money and me and invest myself totally in God. If I continued to live unchanged in the area of my finances, I would continue to be unchanged in my relationship to God.

In over forty years as a Christian, I have failed many times. I have asked forgiveness for my sins more times than I could possibly remember. However, I have never failed to give at least a tithe of my income back to my Lord’s Kingdom work. In doing so, I am always reminded who comes first in my life.

Thanks to my Grandpa (Evangelist Fred D. Huckelbury), I know whom I serve!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask yourself who or what is first in your life, then ask God to teach you how to know every day that it is He Whom you serve.

- Tom

January 8

Do Good!

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 6:25-7:14

VERSE FOR TODAY: “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 7:12)

I have quoted this verse to my children more times than I can remember. Most always, my goal was to get them to stop squabbling. What I was implying was this: “Don’t do that to him. You wouldn’t want him to do that to you.” However, is that what it says?

Jesus makes this statement with a positive spin. He is telling us to do good to others. Isn't that what we would want for ourselves? If you read the previous verses, He talks about giving good gifts to others, just as God gives good gifts to those who ask. Sometimes I think we tend to be proud of ourselves for refraining from doing harm, when what is really commanded is to do good!

We are God's kids. He has good things in store for us. Instead of telling us, "Don't do this or that", He sets the example for us by showing us compassionate and kind love. He points us in the direction of good things to come. Shouldn't we follow that example? People need to see God's love in action.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today praying about how you can show God's love through your actions. Pray for conviction when you settle for just refraining from doing harm.

- Lori

January 9

You Promise?

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 7:15-29

VERSE FOR TODAY: "And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand." (Matthew 7:26)

My kids and I always enjoyed teasing one another. It was all in good-natured fun, and we never teased in a cruel way. But, admittedly, there were times my children questioned what I said. They would look at their mother to see if her face would give an indication of the truthfulness of my words. I remember my little brother, sometimes saying to my father, "You promise?"

As a Christian, I hear a lot about the promises of God. In fact, there is an old children's song that says:

*"Every promise in the book is mine -
Every chapter, every verse, every line!
All are blessings of His love divine!
Every promise in the book is mine!"*

Besides being contextually inaccurate (I'll save that thought for another day), I'm not sure we'd see every promise a blessing of God's love. In our reading today, we are made a promise. We have no trouble believing the promises God has made for good things, but somehow we doubt that God would make good on this one.

God promises that His Word does us no good unless we obey it!

Read it; study it; know it; memorize it – all wonderful! But unless you do it, you're life will still fail.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to reveal to you commands you are not obeying.

- Greg

January 10

The Faith of the Centurion

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 8:1-17

VERSE FOR TODAY: “The centurion replied, ‘Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed.’”
(Matthew 8:8)

The centurion showed a remarkable amount of faith in this interaction with Jesus. He was unwavering in his belief – so much so that the Lord comments: “Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith”. What a compliment to receive from our Savior!

We know that even the smallest amount of faith can accomplish large tasks, but when faced with an obstacle in our life, we often turn to our own resources first. I know I am quick to call a friend for assistance or to immediately begin reviewing my finances to see if the problem can easily be resolved.

However, we should first turn to God. He should be the friend we call in times of trouble. His love for us is greater than the love of any earthly confidant. Our faith should be like that of the centurion – knowing that our help comes from the Lord. God is so much bigger than the problems we face – trust Him to supply your needs.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Consider the faith that the centurion showed in Jesus. Ask God to deepen your faith in all areas of your life.

- Kristin

January 11

No Home

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 8:18-34

VERSE FOR TODAY: Jesus said to him, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” (Matthew 8:20)

Consider this statement by Jesus. It sounds like He was homeless, but was He? He was there when the world was created; He owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Psalm 50:10) – okay, He owns everything. Yet, when He walked on this earth, His name did not appear on deed or doorpost. He did not even own a pillow! He was born into the flesh in a stable, grew up the son of a carpenter, and died in front of a mocking crowd with thieves by His side.

Jesus was preparing His disciples for the cost of following Him. We have to be willing to leave everything behind when we claim Jesus as Lord. Are you ready to give up your property to follow Jesus? Are you ready to be homeless (if need be) to follow His call? Would you move away from all you know to do His will?

When we truly follow Jesus, we must be willing to follow Him whenever and wherever He leads. Are you ready to answer His call?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for God’s leading and be willing to follow whether it costs you your livelihood or even your life.

- Beth

January 12

“Follow Me”

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 9:1-17

VERSE FOR TODAY: “As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, ‘Follow me’. And he rose and followed him.” (Matthew 9:9)

“Follow Me”.

Obedying that command from Jesus used to be a lot easier in the United States of America. When a person decided to follow Jesus, folks in the community gathered around to congratulate him or her. Many times the congratulatory crowd included non-Christians as well. Even the atheist knew that this new convert would be a better neighbor because of their decision.

Times have changed. Converts to Christianity may now face persecution from their worldly neighbors and friends, as well as discouragement from within the Church. Older “Christians” tell them not to get “too serious” about this newfound way of life.

“It’s good that you made this decision, but remember, you still have to live in this world and make a living. You wouldn’t want people to think you were out of your mind!”

Parents tell their children not to even think about becoming a preacher or missionary because they want them to do something “useful” that will also provide them with plenty of money.

Jesus said, “Follow Me”.

If you said, “I will”, you need to remember Matthew (with his high-paying job) who “rose and followed Him” and do the same – today!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God where He wants you to follow Him today, and then do it.

- Tom

January 13

I’m a Sheep

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 9:18-38

VERSE FOR TODAY: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (Matthew 9:36)

Being a city girl, I didn’t know a lot about sheep. I had to do a little research. Having done so, I think it’s pretty funny that Jesus compares us to sheep all the time. Sheep are not the most intelligent animals on the planet. They have a real need for a shepherd because they are just...dumb. If left to themselves, they tend to wander in circles, never going anywhere. They will graze on the same area until there is nothing left to nourish them. They will drink any old water they come to, even if it is contaminated and nasty. They are nervous creatures. When they’re scared, they don’t digest their food properly. Sound like anybody you know?

I wander in circles. I dwell on things until I am starving for sustenance. I invite things into my life even if they are contaminated and nasty. I worry. I get scared. I bet you do too.

Good news! Jesus has compassion on us. He has not left us without a shepherd. He came to be the Great Shepherd for us to follow. He knows our tendencies, and he calls us to follow Him. He will lead us out of the same old barren fields. Take time to read Psalm 23.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today thanking God that He is our Shepherd.

- Lori

January 14

Your Most Prestigious Pulpit

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 10:1-23

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in your synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles.” (Matthew 10:17-18)

Our travels with RSM take us to some wonderful, and often historic, places. There are a few congregations that we visit that were started by the founder of the Restoration Movement, Alexander Campbell. One church even still uses his pulpit from the very early 1800’s. We feel a great sense of history and kindred when we preach there. Yet, if the most important pulpit is that to which Jesus appoints us, there is little glory in our preaching from these lofty places of men.

Jesus made clear to his disciples that the purpose for their persecution was to give Jesus a voice. By the hand of unbelievers, the twelve of them (and subsequent followers) would go to far more locales than the one physical body of Jesus.

No one enjoys persecution. Most of the time, we try at all costs to avoid it. Yet, at the same time, we would all hope to do something great for our Lord. It could very well be that, like Jesus’ first disciples, your persecutions may be intended as the platforms by which you preach your best sermons!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray today to recognize the unique opportunities God is providing, or may provide in the future, for you to be a witness of Jesus.

- Greg

January 15

Jesus Loves Me This I Know

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 10:24-11:1

VERSE FOR TODAY: “So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” (Matthew 10:31)

I once had a friend explain to me that they didn’t believe they should bother God with their little problems- only the big stuff was worthy of God’s attention. That logic is flawed! First off, God already knows our issues...it isn’t about the issues, it is about building our relationship. He wants us to come before Him with all of our praises and problems. Nothing is too big for God, and nothing is too small for God.

The more we actively go to God with the small stuff, the more we will turn to Him with the big issues...when we really need His help and guidance in our decision making. We must not lose sight of our value. God cares for us very much...more than we can fathom, beyond a worldly measure. Look for His blessings, and you will find His direction in your life.

You are worth more than many sparrows...remind yourself of this every day! God knows the number of hairs on your head. This section of scripture cannot be emphasized enough. As a child of God, you are loved, you have been bought, and you have significance.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Be thankful for the immeasurable love that God has for you. Take some time to list out the ways you have seen Him directing your life journey.

- Kristin

January 16

“Are You Weary, Are You Heavy-Hearted?”

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 11:2-30

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Come unto Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

This verse is one I memorized as a young girl. As a Jr. High student in a Christian School, I was not considerably tired but I *was* heavy-laden.

We all have burdens to bear; there is not a person around us that is in a bubble where no problems exist. Some problems are easier to handle than others, but many of our burdens are from circumstances we cannot control. Many times in my life I have given my burdens to God only to take them back again. This was always a bad decision! While I cannot control the world around me, I *can* control the way I face it.

My “Jr. High” burdens that seemed insurmountable have since faded far into my past. Jesus carried me to the top when all my strength was gone. But there are days even now when I find myself “heavy-laden”. After all these years, I still cling to these words of Jesus and hope you will too. Since Jesus is ready to bear our burdens and give us rest, let’s be sure to rely on Him.

Remember the words to the old Hymn “*Tell It to Jesus*”! “Are you weary, are you heavy-hearted? Tell it to Jesus, tell it to Jesus!”

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Just now, why not do that. Give your burdens to Jesus in prayer and be sure not to take them back.

- Beth

January 17

Sacred Cows and You

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 12:1-21

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.” (Matthew 12:14)

The Disciples were plucking heads of grain and eating them on the Sabbath, and if that wasn't bad enough, Jesus healed a man's withered hand! It's true! The Pharisees were right there and saw it all happen and they were *not* happy!

When Jesus explained to them that David had done something very similar in his day, and that they would not allow one of their own animals to suffer on the Sabbath, He was saying, in essence, that they knew the words of the Law but did not understand the heart of the Law. They could pluck, eat, and help the hurting on the Sabbath as well, but they wanted no part of it! Jesus was making hamburger using their sacred cows.

How many times have you missed a blessing that was right in front of you because you were worried about your sacred cow – a tradition that's been changed, a piece of church furniture that was moved, a new carpet (not the color you wanted) in the church auditorium. Souls are being saved, lives are being changed, the hungry fed, and the hurting healed - and you're missing it all – because of a sacred cow!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to rid you of any “sacred cows” in your life. Then, invite your friends over for a Bar-B-Q!

- Tom

January 18

It's a Heart Issue

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 12:22-45

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.” (Matthew 12:34b-35)

Careless words.

So many careless words have flown out of my mouth without a thought crossing my mind. I have hurt feelings and crushed spirits by words spoken carelessly. I have condemned. I have judged. I have torn down. According to Jesus, these words are an indication of what is in my heart. Oh my! What will I say when I am asked to give an account?

When a person has a physical heart problem, they need to do something to fix it. They can't just wish it would go away. There is action that needs to take place – a change. That might be in the form of diet, exercise, medication, surgery, or prayer. But something needs to happen.

When we become aware that we have a spiritual heart problem, it's no different. We should swing into action. We have to allow the Holy Spirit to change us in order for our symptoms to go away. The action taken may not be comfortable. As a matter of fact, I'm pretty sure it will be painful. Are we willing to do that?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time praying about the condition of your heart. If you have a heart problem, ask for healing to occur by whatever means necessary.

- *Lori*

January 19

Mr. Jones

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 12:46-13:23

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed,...” (Matthew 13:15a)

I generally liked my World History teacher Mr. Jones, but he had a peculiar habit. After his lecture, he would have the class do some reading and writing concerning the lesson. If a student raised his hand to ask a question, Mr. Jones would gladly come to his desk to assist. Mr. Jones would then remove his reading glasses as he bent over to hear the question (glasses off – eyes open). After hearing the question, he would stand erect, put his glasses on, and close his eyes (glasses on – eyes shut). My best friend and I would always look at one another curiously. It seemed odd. It almost seemed his glasses were more of a stage prop than actual instruments.

Metaphorically speaking, the religious folks of Jesus' day often did the same. They diligently wore their glasses. They took great care to scour every jot and tittle of the law and prophets. But Jesus would've said their eyes might as well have been closed even while they wore their glasses. Like many would-be Christians today, their spiritual disciplines were more stage-props than tools to build a relationship with Jesus.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: As you read your Bible this week, begin each time with a prayer to our Father for you to really see Jesus and truly hear the message of the scriptures.

- *Greg*

January 20

Know Your Enemy

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 13:24-46

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away.” (Matthew 13:25)

While everyone was sleeping...that was the time the enemy chose to sow the weeds. Had he tried to sow them in the daylight, he would have been caught and stopped. His mission would have failed. If you read the rest of the parable, the servants were perplexed... “Who did this? What should we do to fix it?” The enemy was successful in bringing confusion.

Likewise, our enemy will not attack us when we are at our strongest...he is clever. He searches for the point of least resistance. He looks for the one that has wandered away from the group, the one that is tired or hungry. He uses our flesh patterns against us (anger, laziness, lust, etc.). He will attack when you have the least amount of strength to fight.

Be prepared and recognize that you, as a believer in Christ, are a target. Guard your thoughts; surround yourself in the fellowship of believers. Have an accountability partner or two in whom you can confide. In doing so, you will be better prepared to stand firm against whatever warfare that is coming your way.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Where have you allowed sin a foothold in your life? Is there a flesh pattern that continues? Acknowledge it before the Lord, ask for His forgiveness, and leave it behind.

- *Kristin*

January 21

Offended by Jesus

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 13:47-14:12

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household.’” (Matthew 13:57)

Jesus had returned to Nazareth and was teaching in the Synagogue. These are the people He grew up with - friends, relatives, and neighbors. They were amazed at what He said and could not seem to believe that their Jesus, the one they had known as a boy, was

teaching with such authority. They found it hard to accept the changes in Him. You can almost hear “Who does He think He is anyway? We know Him, He’s just Jesus, Mary’s boy, and His brothers and sisters, we know them”. They were offended that this carpenter’s son was trying to teach them about God.

People have always found it difficult to believe that Jesus is Who He says He is. The world finds it hard to believe that He is the Christ the one and only Son of God. People are often offended when coming face to face with the truth of Jesus.

Who is Jesus? He is the Lamb of God, the Prince of Peace, the Messiah, the Anointed One, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and our Savior if we accept Him for who He is.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: As you pray, consider the time or times in your life that you have taken offense at Jesus and take a moment to ask for His forgiveness.

- Beth

January 22

Twelve Baskets

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 14:13-36

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over.” (Matthew 14:20)

The disciples told Jesus He needed to send the crowds away so they could buy food in the nearby villages. Jesus said his disciples should feed them. But they knew there were only five loaves of bread and two fish. Why, that wasn’t even enough to feed twelve hungry disciples and their Master, much less five thousand men and their families!

But they were obedient, and everyone was fed. Afterwards, twelve baskets full of leftovers were collected. Did you ever wonder why twelve? Just a thought – was Jesus using this as a teachable moment for His disciples? “Hey guys, you thought there was not enough food to share amongst yourselves, but look, you each have your own personal basket full! Now, how did that happen?”

The disciples needed to learn that if they would take care of the Kingdom work, God would take care of them. We need to learn that lesson as well. Sometimes we get so busy making sure we have everything we need to do God’s work, that we have no time left to actually *do* His work. Don’t spend so much time raising support for a mission that you never get on the mission field.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you trust Him to provide your daily needs so you can focus your attention on what He has called you to do.

- Tom

January 23

Worthiness

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 15:1-28

VERSE FOR TODAY: “The woman came and knelt before him. ‘Lord, help me!’ she said. He replied, ‘It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.’” (Matthew 15:25-26)

At first glance, doesn’t the statement Jesus makes to this woman seem cruel? After all, she has come to ask for help, to beg for Jesus’ healing power for her demon possessed daughter. Obviously, she has heard enough about Him to believe. But then He seems to insult her for it.

In order to comprehend what really happened here, you must understand the Jews of Jesus’ day and how they thought. They commonly referred to Gentiles as “dogs” because they considered it just as likely that a dog would receive blessing from God as a Gentile. Jesus, however, uses this reference to show this Canaanite woman how differently He felt.

Read verse twenty-seven. Oh, the humility with which this woman responds. I can almost see her drop her head and lower her voice to a whisper as she answers, “Yes, Lord.” She identifies herself with the dogs. She knows she is unworthy of God’s blessing. Yet, she begs for just a “crumb”.

Jesus chooses that moment to grant her request, to compliment her on her great faith, and to reveal His mindset! Because of her faith and humility, she is worthy!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend time today thanking God for his acceptance and salvation.

- Lori

So That the Crowd Wondered

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 15:29-16:12

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And great crowds came to Him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at His feet, and He healed them, so that the crowd wondered...” (Matthew 15:30-31a)

A production put on by Southeast Christian Church of Louisville, Kentucky, showed our verse for today. Even though I knew it to be a production, still there was something moving about it. When I think about what it must have been like...surely they did “wonder”!

I have not had as many incredible encounters with Jesus over forty-six years as these people may have witnessed in one day. Still, I have seen the obvious hand of Jesus do marvelous things. And I wondered - for a while. Somehow, though, the memories fade. The feelings subside. Life resumes, and things can look hopeless again.

It happened even to the disciples – right here in our reading today.

Having witnessed these and many, many other miracles, Jesus – for the second time at least, mind you – decides He wants to feed a large crowd who’d gathered to hear Him. The disciples have the audacity to ask, “Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?” (15:33)

“Really, guys?”

I wrote in my notes, “Really, Greg?”

Yep. Really.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to remind you today of all the things He has done in your life. Today, in prayer, reclaim the wonder of Jesus.

- Greg

January 25

The World Behind Me

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 16:13-27

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.’” (Matthew 16:23)

In the verses prior to this one, Jesus had predicted His death. Peter, being a good and caring friend, pulls Jesus aside to say, “Never, Lord,” and “This shall never happen to you!” Peter’s loyalty and friendship came to the forefront, and he immediately wanted to protect Jesus from suffering.

Jesus quickly points out (very effectively) that Peter does not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men. He is not thinking from a spiritual perspective, but a worldly one.

We need Christian friends that will be honest with us, thinking from a Godly perspective - not someone that will worry about our emotional “suffering”. We need those that will hold us to the fire, recognizing our sin pattern, and stand with us as we repent and seek forgiveness. Hopefully, you have someone that will continue to stand guard with you to fight against future attacks.

Don’t allow those who love you to protect your emotions – ask them to hold you accountable. Jesus wisely realized that Peter’s words were a stumbling block and called him on it. They then moved forward.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for friends that stood with you through the spiritual battles in your life.

-Kristin

January 26

Mount of Transfiguration

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 17:1-23

VERSE FOR TODAY: “While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, ‘This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him!’ When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified.” (Matthew 17:5-6)

Can you imagine just how awesome this moment was to Peter, James, and John? What did Elijah, Moses, and Jesus speak about? Could the disciples hear and understand the conversation? What was the purpose of this meeting? Was it for them or for Jesus?

To have heard God say, “This is My Beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him” - that must have been wonderful and terrifying at the same time. What a powerful moment when God spoke, letting Jesus know He loved Him as He approached the end of His Ministry on earth, and letting Peter, James, and John know that this was His Son.

This was a time the disciples would never forget – a treasured memory that would help them through Jesus’ arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. It would also give them strength and determination during the persecution they would face as they started their own ministries.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: As you pray, remember to acknowledge Who Jesus is and thank Him for His redeeming work in your life.

- Beth

January 27

The Eyes of a Child

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 17:24-18:20

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:4)

Lots of folks are on a power trip today. Everybody wants recognition and prestige. Even after becoming a Christian, they hunger for power and position. They want to be Jesus’ “right hand man”, a mover and shaker for the church! Does this describe you? I hope not. It’s lonely at the top, you know.

Jesus doesn’t want power brokers on His right and on His left; He desires children on His knee. Why? Children love Him for Who He is; they are eager to listen and want nothing more than to please. Besides, all power, might, and authority already belong to Him. (Ephesians 1:15-23)

Sometimes, as Christians, we think we’ve “made it” when we become the preacher or an elder in a large church; the chairman of a major Christian project; a position where everybody knows our name and everybody seems to want our advice. Not likely. It’s a better possibility that we can say we’ve “made it” when we learn to sit on Jesus’ lap, ask His advice, give up our power broker attitude, and once again learn to see Jesus through the eyes of a child. It’s okay, really; try it.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to let you sit on His lap and listen to Him today.

- Tom

January 28

Generous Forgiveness

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 18:21-19:12

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’” (Matthew 18:21-22)

Are there times when you just really feel proud of yourself? I’m talking about self-righteous, boy-have-I-gone-and-out-done-myself-this-time kind of pride. I think we get a glimpse of that kind of attitude in the verse for today.

Rabbis in Jesus day taught forgiveness – sort of. They taught that you should forgive someone three times. When Peter poses his question to Jesus, I get the impression that he thinks he is going above and beyond the call of duty by offering to forgive his brother up to seven times. I mean, after all, that is over twice what the rabbis taught and expected. Jesus gently bursts his bubble. I don’t know if Jesus shook his head a little when he answered, but I’m sure he felt like it. “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

What? Now Jesus, how in the world am I supposed to keep track of forgiving someone that many times. Bingo! That’s precisely the point. You aren’t. When someone sincerely asks for forgiveness, give it. After all, isn’t that what Jesus has done for you?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today thanking God for his generous forgiveness. Pray for the same generous forgiveness to flow from your heart to others.

- Lori

January 29

If You Would Be Perfect

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 19:13-30

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Jesus said to him, ‘If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’” (Matthew 19:21)

Could I sell *all* my possessions (see Mark's telling of it in Mark 10:17-30) in order to give it all away? Preachers have made us feel better by saying, "Now, this is not a command for everyone. This is what Jesus asked this particular man to do."

That makes me feel better because the chances of Jesus actually physically speaking those words to me are probably slim to none, and if I ever felt the slightest twinge of that notion, something or someone would surely chase it from my mind. This, most likely, just isn't something I need to worry about. It's just a sad story about someone else.

Yet, could I suggest this? Luke, by excluding the word "all", puts a different light on this idea.

"...sell what you possess..."

Perhaps one key to following Jesus is not possessing *anything*. Not that we have no earthly title to anything, but we understand that nothing available to us for our daily use is *our* possession. Maybe real disciples of Jesus understand it is He who has title to all man's goods?

In this sense, maybe I should relieve myself of all I "possess"...

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Have a talk with the Father about the stuff in your house or garage. How much do you "possess" versus "have stewardship over"?

- Greg

January 30

Latecomers

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 20:1-28

**VERSE FOR TODAY: "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat."
(Matthew 20:12)**

Chick was in his eighties when I first met him in the shade of his carport on a warm spring afternoon in the Ouachita Mountains of Arkansas. Chick had never seen the need for Jesus or the church. His wife and two of his long-time friends had requested that I just "happen by" his house one afternoon where I would find him sitting under the carport.

While out on a "causal stroll" I found Chick, just as I had been told, enjoying the afternoon in a comfortable lawn chair. I introduced myself and was invited to "sit a

spell”. We made small talk for a short time, and then He graciously accepted my offer to stop by again and “share a few things from the Bible”.

A few days later I dropped by with my Bible in hand. Chick was bothered by the knowledge of his sin and need for redemption, but not ready to give his life to Christ. However, on a stormy night just a few weeks after our visit, I had the privilege of baptizing Chick into Christ (Romans 6:1-7) with his wife and two friends as witnesses. Two week later I preached his funeral service using today’s Scripture reading as my text.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for His grace that is offered to all regardless of their place in life.

- Tom

January 31

Caught Up in a Moment

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 20:29-21:22

VERSE FOR TODAY: “The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna to the Highest!’” (Matthew 21:9)

Wow, can you picture this moment? Jesus had healed the sick, raised the dead, and given sight to the blind. The crowd was understandably excited. They were lining the road with their coats and branches from trees, shouting as He came riding into town, “Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” They were caught up in a moment in time.

The people recognized that Jesus was a prophet and they wanted to make Him King, but they did not recognize that He was God’s Son. They loved that He taught and healed, but they didn’t understand who He really was, and in a very short time, they would turn against Him.

There are a lot of people and religions that accept Jesus as a prophet, as well as a good teacher and man, but they do not recognize Him as the Son of God, born in the flesh to save the world. However, to be accepted and forgiven by God, we must acknowledge Jesus as the one and only Son of the one and only God. (John 14:6)

Ask yourself, “Do I really believe that Jesus is the Christ, or am I just caught up in a moment?”

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for His Son, Jesus.

- Beth

February 1

Good Intentions

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 21:23-46

VERSE FOR TODAY: “What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go.” (Matthew 21:28-30)

“The road to Hell is paved with good intentions”.

Don’t know where I heard that, but I know I did – very early in life. It’s a saying that you just don’t forget. Now that I’m much older, I realize that it has its foundation in Scripture - the very passage printed above. Makes you think, doesn’t it?

Years ago, in a church where I served as preacher, a professional man and his wife came forward in the services and publicly committed their lives to full-time vocational ministry. They planned to leave their careers behind and depart for Bible College the very next year, but they didn’t. I left for a ministry in another state shortly after their decision, so I never knew first-hand why they had a change of heart. The reason really doesn’t matter. I just can’t ever seem to read this passage without thinking about these wonderful couple and their good intentions.

Are you living a life of good intentions? Think it’s time to do something about it?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to remind you of the promises you’ve made to Him so you can bring them to fruition.

- Tom

February 2

Wedding Clothes

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 22:1-33

VERSE FOR TODAY: “‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness....’” (Matthew 22:12-13a)

Speaking from a woman’s point of view, deciding what to wear to a wedding is a no-win situation. I’m always afraid I will be too dressy, or too casual, or wear the wrong color or even have on the same dress as someone else.

In the verse for today, the man had no such dilemma. It was customary for wedding hosts to provide appropriate clothing for his guests. If a guest refused to wear the clothes, it was an insult!

We aren't told why the man didn't wear the clothes. We can speculate about it, but all I know is that when it's my turn to go to the Great Wedding hosted by God, I want to be prepared. I want to be adorned in the finest the Host has to offer. I wouldn't want to be cast out before the Bridegroom comes because I would not accept the gift offered to me! What a shame!

Galatians 3:27 says when you are baptized you have "clothed yourself with Christ". You have been invited; you have been given the wedding clothes. If you haven't already made the decision to "clothe yourself", please consider it. You wouldn't want to miss the best wedding celebration ever, would you?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray about your willingness to clothe yourself with Christ.

- Lori

February 3

Tag Team

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 22:34-23:12

VERSE FOR TODAY: "But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together." (Matthew 22:34)

Have you noticed that people who generally, even sometimes violently, disagree with one another will join forces against the Lord's Church? As political parties join with people groups for whom they have no real concern or as pious unbelievers rally with the sexually immoral, they do so to stand against He whom they feel is their biggest enemy – the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Caught time after time arguing over the words of Jesus, this time the Pharisees and Sadducees decide they must act together. Surely they can trip Jesus up if they think this through. But once again the words of the Apostle who gave up trying to "kick against the goads" ring true, "...the foolishness of God is wiser than men..." (1 Corinthians 1:25) Jesus astounds them with a great answer (Matthew 22:41-45) and they can say no more.

"...no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask Him any more questions."
(Matthew 22:46, italics added)

Today, when you watch the news and all seems lost, remember: the Church member serves the Maker. His wisdom is higher than all, and He alone will reign. Live life trusting that God will keep His promise to care for His own.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to give you peace and confidence in His wisdom and strength today.

- Greg

February 4

A Warning to Leaders

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 23:13-39

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.” (Matthew 23:27-28)

Today’s reading from the book of Matthew can send a chill down the spine of any teacher, leader, or minister. Jesus called out the Pharisees throughout this section. Those that should have been setting the example and being above reproach, in many cases acted as though they were the exception to the rule. Earlier in the passage, Jesus refers to these religious leaders as “sons of hell”!

In whatever way you choose to serve (Sunday School or small group teachers, worship team member, minister, elder, deacon, etc.), remain on high alert and maintain the highest of principles. As a leader, you are automatically a bigger target for our enemy. Think of the glee he receives when we stumble or fall – even more so when our sin is found out and made public. Guard your thoughts and words with the upmost integrity. Choose to be an example in all your interactions.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to show you where you need to improve your example to others, and ask for His help.

- Kristin

February 5

Knowing the Word

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 24:1-28

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ.’ and will mislead many.’” (Matthew 24:4-5)

We are each individually responsible for knowing God’s Word so that we will not be misled. God requires that every one of us study and know Him so that when others try to lead us away from the Gospel of Jesus, we will know and stand for what we believe.

I was raised knowing how to study the Bible. I was taught that I needed to know to whom a passage was written, always read it in context, and understand why it was written. This knowledge has helped me many times in my life to better understand why I believe what I do. There have always been people who take a Bible verse out of context and build a belief system totally contrary to God’s Word. Second Timothy 2:15 tells us we must accurately handle the word of truth.

When I became a Christian at the age of 11, my Aunt Susan told me I should read the Bible every day - even if it was just a couple of verses. What a great example she was for me as she opened her own Bible to read every night.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to direct you as you read and study His Word every day.

- Beth

February 6

“Sit Right Back and You’ll Hear a Tale . . .”

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 24:29-51

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” (Matthew 24:35)

How many songs (Christian or secular) can you quote in their entirety? How about “one-liners” or full scenes from favorite movies or television shows? Probably more than you can count!

Most people of my generation can quote the theme songs to *Gilligan’s Island*, *The Brady Bunch*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, and more. Our children were raised watching old movies (many of them musicals), and even though our youngest is now in his 30’s, any

one of us can start a song or a line from a scene and the others can finish it! Your family may be the same.

May I ask, how many Bible verses or passages can you quote? How about “one-liners” or full scenes from favorite Bible stories? If someone were to begin telling one of Jesus’ parables and stop in the middle, could you finish the story word-for-word?

Here’s the problem. Because “Heaven and earth will pass away”, that means *Gilligan’s Island*, *The Brady Bunch*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *The Music Man*, and *Singing in the Rain* are all going to pass away as well, but God’s Word will not!

Instead of telling the tail of “seven stranded castaways”, we need to tell the story of Jesus. It’s time to memorize the Word!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you devote more time to knowing His Word.

- Tom

February 7

Be Ready

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 25:1-30

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.” (Matthew 25:10)

“Are you ready?” I would call.

“Yes,” she would answer, “I just need to...”

I looked up the word “ready” in the dictionary. It is defined as “completely prepared or in fit condition for immediate action”. I think my teenage daughter’s answer to my question should have been, “Not quite!” I mean, in all actuality, she was not ready!

When reading the parable of the ten virgins, sometimes I feel sorry for the girls who had to go out looking for oil in the middle of the night. I understand they should have been ready. I realize it was their own fault they missed the party. But still... I have dreamed up excuses for them.

“They were young. Maybe they didn’t realize how much oil it would take.”

“It wasn’t really their fault. After all, they didn’t know the exact time the bridegroom would come.”

What about us? Are we ready for the Bridegroom to come? We learn some hard lessons from this parable. When our Bridegroom comes, there won't be time to make last minute preparations. We won't be able to borrow someone else's salvation. If we aren't ready, we aren't ready. It will be too late. We will be left behind. Shut out. Denied.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to reveal to you today any preparations that need to be made in your life.

- Lori

February 8

Plain Talk

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 25:31-26:13

VERSE FOR TODAY: “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.” (Matthew 26:2)

Many times it seems the disciples miss what Jesus is saying. He is speaking in parables and they don't get it. Jesus' information is incomplete, or He makes veiled references, and the disciples don't understand. And, then, sometimes...

Here in verse 2 Jesus speaks very plainly telling the disciples *what* will happen, and *when* it will happen. But, evidently, it's like He never said it. When the arrest in the garden comes, when the trial ensues, on the long walk to Golgotha, as the cross is raised – the disciples seemed shocked, if present at all.

How often we ask God to speak plainly, and He does. He speaks plainly from His word about how we ought live in a world and a life that is coming to a close. He speaks plainly about how we begin, maintain, and finish an earthly relationship with Him. He speaks plainly about the work and responsibility of His Church. He speaks plainly about the need to evangelize. He speaks plainly about what is sin. And yet...

We argue over veiled references. We argue over parables. And because the plain talk is sometimes too disturbing to our ears, we ignore it. And usually the plain talk is most important.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: What has God spoken plainly to you about? Take time to repent of ignoring what God has plainly said.

- Greg

February 9

Game of Futures

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 26:14-46

VERSE FOR TODAY: “What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?’ And they paid him thirty pieces of silver.” (Matthew 26:15)

Judas played a game of futures. Thirty pieces of silver was the price he'd take in exchange for his loyalty to the Savior. In Judas' eyes, Jesus' time was up. It was time to get whatever he might before Jesus was worth nothing.

Earlier in the Bible, thirty pieces of silver was the “lordly price” (as Zechariah sarcastically calls it) he received for his services as a shepherd. In one of God's Old Testament “parable plays”, God told Zechariah to become shepherd of some sheep destined for slaughter. (Zechariah 11:4-14) Who pays a shepherd much for keeping sheep that are destined for death? There's no future in that.

Today, the world would have you take a small price for your faith – for your Savior.

“What value can there be in an archaic book written thousands of years ago?”

“Why miss out on the ‘here and now’ for an uncertain future?”

The unbeliever has the attitude of Zechariah's people, and they quote the philosophy of the hopeless, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” (1 Corinthians 15:32b) As believers, let *us* be ever-mindful of the words of the Psalmist, that the things of God are “more to be desired...than gold.” (Psalm 19:10)

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for eyes that see the eternal value of faith, godliness, and a relationship with Jesus.

- Greg

February 10

When The Rooster Crows

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 26:47-27:2

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, ‘Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times’. And he went out and wept bitterly.” (Matthew 26:75)

Amazing what Peter did, isn't it? Jesus had just told Him that he would deny Him three times – and then he did! Christians today behave the same way. In the Word, we are constantly told what to do or what *not* to do and the consequences either way. Yet we listen to ourselves rather than Jesus and, to our dismay, “the rooster crows”.

I cannot help but think that this was the absolute lowest point of Peter's life. When he realized what he had done, he went out and wept bitterly, repenting of his sin. To repent means to feel sorrow, regret, or contrition. It also means to turn from sin and dedicate oneself to the amendment of one's life. Peter really did amend his life! He was ready to die for Christ, and eventually he did just that.

Something we can learn from Peter, we are going to make bad choices; we aren't always going to listen to Jesus. Our poor decisions will one day bring us to tears, and when they do we have only one thing left – repentance. When you hear the rooster crow, turn back to Jesus and give Him all you have to your very last breath.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Repent if you need to – then live the day for Jesus!

- Beth

February 11

Really?

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 27:3-10

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, ‘It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money.’” (Matthew 27:6)

Really? Now they were worried about what was lawful? They'd spent so much time trying to trap Jesus with His own words, to arrest Him anyway they could, and soon they would see Him tried in a “kangaroo court” and crucified. And *now* they were concerned about what was lawful!

Sad, don't you think, how Christians sometimes “strain at gnats and swallow camels”? (Matthew 23:24) A mother turns a blind eye to her son's fornication when his girlfriend moves in with him, but then lectures him sternly when he misses Sunday services telling him how important it is that he be in the church house and around the Lord's Table every Sunday. A church member is upset when the communion service is moved from the middle of the Sunday worship hour to the end, but only because they like to leave as the invitation song begins so they can get a good seat at their favorite restaurant. Really?

What bothers us most says a lot about where we are spiritually. Maybe it's time we quit swallowing so many camels – really.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to show you today and everyday what is most important to Him.

- Tom

February 12

How Will You Answer?

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 27:11-32

VERSE FOR TODAY: “What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?”
(Matthew 27:22a)

Don't you get the impression that Pilate is absolutely bewildered when he asks this question? We are told he asked Jesus for a response to his accusations. Jesus gave none. He knew Jesus was being set up. His wife warned him about it. When the crowd chose to have a criminal released in place of Jesus, he asks, “Why? What crime has he committed?” Jesus was innocent and he knew it!

Now comes the hard part. What does he do with Jesus? Does he go with the wishes of the crowd and have him crucified? Or does he go with his gut feeling and declare Jesus innocent and release him?

“What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?”

Pilate took the easy way out. He washed his hands of the whole mess, passed the buck, and let someone else decide.

What will you do with Him? Will you listen to the world, ignore what you know to be true, or let someone else decide? I pray not. When you acknowledge who Jesus is, there is a stand that needs to be made. It may not be the popular decision. It may cost you everything. Are you willing to do that, come what may?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray today about your commitment to “Jesus who is called Christ.” Pray for clear understanding of who He is and how you can stand firm in that truth.

- Lori

February 13

A Lot of Gall

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 27:33-66

VERSE FOR TODAY: “they offered Him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when He tasted it, He would not drink it.” (Matthew 27:34)

Gall – literally in Greek, poison – mixed with wine was a Roman concoction given to crucifixion victims to speed dying and relieve suffering. I’m not at all sure that being poisoned as well as beaten and suffocated on a cross is that much of a relief, but I am sure many a criminal was deceived into believing the drink would ease his path.

Such is the bitterness of all sin. Though we feel the guilt of it, though we understand its toxicity to our lives, we are deceived into believing that it will ease our way. But Jesus would not have it. Jesus knew there was no short-cut to redemption. He’d not be poisoned. He would take on the full bitterness of our sin by rejecting the bitter poison offered to Him.

In Acts 8, Peter describes the lives of so many Christians when he tells the recent convert Simon, “...you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” (v. 23) Will we, after Jesus suffered so, continue to be bound and full of sin’s bitterness by partaking of the temptations offered us? To do so would take a lot of gall.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God what sins you have been harboring in your belief that it will make life easier. What sins are slowly poisoning you and dulling you to your Christian experience?

- Greg

February 14

The Great Commission

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 28

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

Here it is. The segment of scripture with Jesus giving a directive that sums up exactly what is expected of us, both individually and corporately.

On a corporate level, we have created programs: small group strategies, Vacation Bible School, camps, a steady stream of teen and children events – all with the hope of drawing the lost into our doors. And when these events stick to the original evangelical purpose, they are a wonderful addition.

On a personal level - are you asking open-ended questions that steer conversations to salvation and/or spiritual growth? Are we stepping up as leaders and discipling others one-on-one, and in Sunday School, and small group settings?

Many people are nervous that someone will ask them a question they don't know how to answer when it comes to salvation or having a closer walk with the Lord. To help with the former, RSM has created a few free items to help walk someone through the steps of salvation. Check your church brochure station for free stickers (sticks to the cover of most Bibles) and foldable handouts that are very easy to use. If out, contact our office, and we will send some right away.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: How are you fulfilling this directive from Christ on a personal level?

- *Kristin*

February 15

The Messenger

SCRIPTURE: Mark 1:1-28

VERSE FOR TODAY: “As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘Behold I send My messenger ahead of You, Who will prepare Your way; The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.’” (Mark 1:2-3)

John was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophesy quoted in today's verse. It was his calling. I wonder if he ever said, “Nope, not going to do this, someone else will have to go live in the wilderness, eat honey and locusts, and dress in camel's hair.” I wonder if John ever thought about sitting down to a nice meal of meat and potatoes in “normal” clothing with no concerns but climbing into his comfortable bed and waking up refreshed in the morning.

After John baptized Jesus the heavens opened, the Dove descended on Jesus and God proclaimed, “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11). What an amazing, exciting, and satisfying moment it must have been for John to hear God's words proclaimed and to know that he had done his job well. He had been proclaiming the Messiah, and now He was here!

You are God's messenger as well. Proclaim Jesus, and someday you will hear His voice too as He says to you, "Well done." (Matthew 25:21)

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray that God will use you today and every day to proclaim Jesus to a world that so desperately needs Him.

- Beth

February 16

Looking for Jesus

SCRIPTURE: Mark 1:29-2:12

VERSE FOR TODAY: "And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, 'Everyone is looking for you.'" (Mark 1:36-37)

This whole world is looking for Jesus; most folks just don't realize they are looking for Him.

Look in the faces of the masses, and you will find tired people, men and women who are struggling with every inch of their existence. You see people who desperately need hope. People who look for Jesus are tired of being condemned by sin, tired of facing insecurity, tired of man-devised doctrines and theories, tired of living a worldly life, tired of having no peace, tired of trusting their own righteousness, and tired of desiring something the world just cannot give.

Tired people need rest. We can find rest for our bodies in idleness. We can find rest for our minds in thoughtlessness. But we can find rest for our souls only in Christ Jesus.

Why do so many people spend their lives looking for answers in bookstores, on television, or with doctors and medicines, when the answer to rest and peace is Jesus? "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Tell God what is making you so tired, and then ask for peace and rest that only He can give.

- Tom

February 17

Stubborn Hearts

SCRIPTURE: Mark 2:13-3:6

VERSE FOR TODAY: “He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, and said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand,’ He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.” (Mark 3:5)

The Pharisees were sneaky guys. It seems they were always on the prowl, trying to find a way to trap Jesus or accuse Him of wrong-doing. After reading today’s scripture, can’t you just see them lurking behind pillars, peering from around corners, whispering and pointing? They were determined to find something, anything to use against Jesus.

Because Jesus knew they were watching, He asked them a direct question about healing on the Sabbath. They refused to answer. Typical, I suppose.

I find it interesting that scripture says that Jesus looked at them in anger and was upset at their “stubborn hearts”. It was their stubbornness and pride that made them act the way they did. They were jealous of Jesus and His power, His miracles, and His followers. They were too proud to admit they weren’t as spiritual as they were thought to have been. But what really takes the cake is that they were too stubborn to admit it and fix their attitude. That made Jesus angry.

Uh-oh. I’m pretty stubborn. Maybe I have some fixing to do myself.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today praying over your own stubbornness, pride, and jealousy. Ask God to show you how to release those attitudes and live a life that pleases Him.

- Lori

February 18

Called to Be Disciples and Apostles

SCRIPTURE: Mark 3:7-30

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those whom He desired, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve (whom He also named apostles) so that they might be with Him and He might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.” (Mark 3:13-15)

Did you notice that Mark tells us here not only what Jesus did but also why He did it? Many, many people were following Jesus around, but He called twelve specific men to be his disciples. Disciples followed Rabbis everywhere. The Rabbi basically had no private life; his disciples were his constant companions and students.

Then Jesus also named them apostles. Apostles are those who are sent. Specifically, Jesus sent them to preach and cast out demons. They were to vocally share the good news of the Kingdom and chase the forces of darkness from the lives of those who would receive the news.

While these men ended up having the “office” of Apostle in the Church, we too are disciples and apostles in a bit of the same way. We’ve been called apart from the crowd, invited to follow the Rabbi, and sent to take truth to those who will hear.

Why is it that you follow Jesus? Are you following for the purpose Jesus called you?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to open your eyes to see where Jesus is leading you today and open your mouth to speak to those who would hear.

- Greg

February 19

“My Friends, Are You Listening?”

SCRIPTURE: MARK 3:31-4:25

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And He was saying, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear.’” (Mark 4:9)

“Did you hear me? Are you even listening?”

I wonder how many times I have uttered those words to my children. They heard my voice, but not my message. It seems that the people of Jesus’ day had the same problem; they heard the words and understood the language, but were not getting the message. Essentially, Jesus was saying, “Don’t just hear My voice; listen to My message”.

The more things change, the more they stay the same; it seems we’re still not getting the Message. We read the Word of God, and it confronts our sin, our opinions, and our way of life. But then we decide that it probably doesn’t mean what it says. If understanding God’s message means changing our lives, we would rather just hear the pretty words.

Tom and I used to listen to a preacher on the radio years ago that was fond of saying (several times in every program), “My friends, are you listening?” This is a good question for all of us. I know we hear Him, but are we really listening and applying His Word to our lives?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to open your ears so that you will hear and understand His will for you.

- Beth

February 20

Missionaries

SCRIPTURE: Mark 4:26-5:20

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And He did not let him, but He said to him, ‘Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you.’” (Mark 5:19)

Jesus had just released this man from the bondage of demon-possession. He wanted to go with Him to travel and learn more, but Jesus had something else in mind. He wanted the man to be a missionary, to tell his people what the Lord had done for him.

Years ago in one of our early ministries we had a lovely couple – the Newberrys. We baptized more than ninety people in this small western community. At every baptism Bill and Alma were there to help the new Christian out of the baptistery. Bill always said, as he helped the new brother or sister out of the water, “You know what you did to become a Christian; now go tell someone else.” Many of the new converts did just that, and what a blessing it was to all concerned! These baby Christians became missionaries immediately.

Many people feel inadequate to share the Gospel with others, but it’s nothing more than sharing Good News about Jesus. We only need to share our story, how Jesus came into our lives and changed us. This is something you can do!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you tell someone your story. Ask Him to open the door and make you a Missionary today.

- Beth

February 21

Desperate

SCRIPTURE: Mark 5:21-43

VERSE FOR TODAY: “She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. For she said, ‘If I touch even his garments, I will be made well.’” (Mark 5:27-28)

She was so sick and had been for twelve years! The doctors weren't helping her. In fact, she was getting worse. She had heard about Jesus. She knew of His love and His healing power. She was desperate to get to Him. Even if she could just touch His clothing, she knew He would heal her. So she fought her way through the crowd not caring what anyone would think or say.

When we finally get desperate for Jesus, we'll do anything to get close to Him. Desperate people don't care what anyone thinks and don't care what anyone says. They will go where no one else will go; they won't let anything stop them; and they will do desperate things. How desperate are you for Jesus in your life?

There's a contemporary Christian song that says, “I'm desperate for You, Jesus.” Thing is, most folks who are singing that song in America are singing it in a nicely heated or cooled church building. Are you really desperate to know Jesus? How far would you go just to touch the hem of His garment?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to instill in you a desperate desire to live close to Him.

- Tom

February 22

I'm Not Who You Think I Am

SCRIPTURE: Mark 6:1-29

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.’” (Mark 6:4)

When Jesus began teaching in Nazareth, all He found was rejection. People were “astonished”; they didn't believe that a carpenter's son was capable of having such wisdom. They were blinded by their own prejudices from seeing the mighty works Jesus meant to accomplish.

The people with whom we grow up tend to know how we have behaved. Our relatives or friends see us not only at our best, but also at our worst. We too can be blinded by what we think we know about a person. But, with true repentance, a person is not defined by their childhood or past. God has given each and every one of us a purpose and a gift of grace. (Romans 12:6a)

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10)

When we judge someone by their childhood or past mistakes, we fail to see the good works they can do. We might also keep them from doing them.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you see people the way He created them, as His masterpiece.

- Truli

February 23

It's All About...

SCRIPTURE: Mark 6:30-56

VERSE FOR TODAY: “but when they saw Him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, for they all saw Him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.’ And He got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded.” (Mark 6:49-51)

I find noteworthy in this passage what is *not* here! In Mark’s gospel, Peter and his stroll upon the waves is not mentioned. In fact, in the gospels, Jesus’ walking on the water is only mentioned in three, and Peter’s perilous jaunt is mentioned only in one!

Yet, when the story is told in church, I’m not sure I’ve ever heard it *without* Peter’s walk mentioned. We are quick to draw an allegory about keeping our eyes on Jesus, etc. All that may be well and good, but I think it points out a problem we have in our theology. It is man-centered. But the story of the Bible is not about the creation, but the Creator.

I heard twice this week, once from a preacher and once from a teacher in the same church, “What is our ultimate goal?” We were to respond, “HEAVEN!” Really? I thought our ultimate goal was to glorify God. Mark turns our attention here not to who we are but to whom Jesus is.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God if your life reflects more of Him or you.

- Greg

February 24

A Heart Check-up

SCRIPTURE: Mark 7:1-23

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ by going into him, Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him ‘unclean.’”
(Mark 7:14)

The Pharisees were more concerned with “following the rules” rather than making sure their hearts were pure. When questioned about eating with “unclean hands”, Jesus took the opportunity to point out the importance of the latter.

Verse 21 catalogs a list of “heart issues”: evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly”.

That is quite a laundry list. Several of the items are pretty simple to fall into and have no one know the nature of your heart – envy, greed, evil thoughts? Quite possibly, no one (except you and God) may know that you struggle with these heart issues. You may be able to clean up pretty nice for church and say all the right things...but you know the ugly side. The side that you cover up or edit when around church friends or other believers.

Are you in need of repentance in a few of these categories? You know the darkest corners of your mind – and God already knows your struggles. Search those spaces and confess them to the Lord today.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: After confessing and repenting of your heart issues, ask the Lord to assist you holding each thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

-Kristin

February 25

Obedience

SCRIPTURE: Mark 7:24-8:10

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And He gave them orders not to tell anyone; but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it. They were utterly

astonished, saying, ‘He has done all things well; He makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.’” (Mark 7:36-37)

Jesus healed a deaf mute, and then told them to keep it to themselves; like *that* was going to happen! He didn’t explain why He wanted them not to tell; He just told them to keep quiet. They behaved like a bunch of Jr. High students; they just had to tell! In fact, verse 36 says that “the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it.”

Are you like these people? When Jesus says to go one way, do you go the other? Do you question why it is important to Jesus? Do you come up with a plan that is “better” than His? Do you even pay attention to the instructions He has laid out in His Word?

It is never a good thing to disobey. I don’t understand all God’s ways, but this one thing I know, He does! God always has a reason for what He tells us to do, and it is *always* for our own good.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to show you through His Word how you can be obedient today.

- Beth

February 26

Take Up Your Cross

SCRIPTURE: Mark 8:11-9:1

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?’” (Mark 8:34-36)

Everyone seems to be pursuing gold rather than God.

“What can I buy next?”

“What do my friends have that I have yet to obtain?”

“How can I get a better paying job so I can get more stuff?”

“How many credit cards can I charge to the max before I have to start paying?”

What does this way of thinking get us? Some shiny new things today that will be dull and in need of replacement tomorrow *and* an insatiable appetite for even more stuff.

Our houses are full, but our hearts are empty. We are exchanging our souls for our stuff. Jesus called on us to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Him. When we pick up our cross every day, we are reminded of the One who denied Himself and hung on a cross for our sake. It's hard to put gold ahead of God while we're thinking about the cross of Christ.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to remind you to start every morning by taking up your cross for Him.

- Tom

February 27

Prepared in Prayer

SCRIPTURE: Mark 9:2-29

VERSE FOR TODAY: "After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, 'Why couldn't we drive it out?' He replied, 'This kind can come out only by prayer.'" (Mark 9:28-29)

Obviously, the disciples were having a bit of trouble here. They were out there, trying to do God's work. As the people heard about the great miracles of Jesus, quite a crowd gathered 'round the eager workers of God's will. It wasn't long before the disciples had an opportunity to bring healing. But their attempt to drive out an evil spirit, remained only an attempt. Jesus came and helped them out, saving the day - not to mention the boy's life.

What is the lesson? "This kind can only come out by prayer."

Scripture doesn't tell us that Jesus stopped to pray before he cast the spirit out of the boy. He may have, but it doesn't tell us that. What scripture does reveal is the many times that Jesus slipped off to pray. In the midst of the busyness, He prayed. When He was exhausted, he prayed. When He needed strength and comfort, when He was tempted, when He was discouraged, He prayed. He was prepared for any trial, circumstance, task or test, because He consistently spent time in prayer.

How prepared in prayer are you? Are you ready for any task or trial because of your time in prayer?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend time today in God's presence. Ask Him to prepare you for the day's tasks.

- Lori

February 28

From the Beginning of Creation

SCRIPTURE: Mark 9:30-10:12

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Mark 9:7-9)

The man came asking what was lawful. Jesus asked him what was right.

It was because of man’s chaotic sinfulness that legal remedies had to be given. But Jesus points the Pharisee to Genesis 1 for God’s intentions. And God’s intentions are right and best.

The law of the land may say otherwise – present or future – but what is right is that marriage be between:

- People bound by tender devotion *before God*, not legal contract.
- One man and one woman by birth - not of the same sex, a “new” sex, or of (need we say) another species.
- A man and a woman who will become one for life, understanding that any other future relationship is adulterous.

We find such things hard to accept when we may be guilty of such sins ourselves. Or, many times if someone we love has sinned or is living in a sinful state we will make excuse. This does not mean forgiveness is not an option, nor that we should not continue to love those who’ve committed such sin. But God’s Word is always the final authority. It has been from the beginning of creation.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for faithfulness in your relationships and boldness to stand for God’s best. Repent where necessary.

- Greg

March 1

Filthy Rich

SCRIPTURE: Mark 10:13-31

VERSE FOR TODAY: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God.” (Mark 10:25)

We like the words of Jesus here. They give us a smug sense of satisfaction. Who has not, at least in some point, felt oppressed by “the rich”.

But can I make a few honest observations:

- First, while there are certainly cases of “the rich” oppressing “the poor”, usually, it’s a case of “sour grapes”.
- Because, second, if we were honest, while we talk about those “greedy people”, most of us would like to live like those whom we call rich live or have what those whom we call rich have.
- Third, unless we are hermits, we all, in every walk of life, benefit from someone or a group of people who had or has more than we.
- And fourth, and maybe most humbling, you and I *are* “the rich” to somebody.

So, let’s get over ourselves and get down to brass tacks. While it is true that the more we have, the more burdensome it can be in many ways, Jesus didn’t have in mind a particular tax bracket. He had in mind a particular heart. It surely is hard for those who value the physical over the spiritual to leave their physical kingdom for a spiritual one. One dollar is all it takes to be “rich” if you value that one dollar over Kingdom living.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to give you a heart that always values the spiritual over the physical.

- Greg

March 2

About His Will

SCRIPTURE: Mark 10:35-52

VERSE FOR TODAY: “James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, ‘Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of you.’” (Mark 10:35)

Sounds a lot like us sometimes, doesn’t it? We want what we want, and we want it now! Yet, when we step back and observe James and John, we see the arrogance of this request. “Lord we think we know how this should be done; we know just how it should be, and we want You to do it our way”. Somehow we get so comfortable with Jesus that we feel we have a right to ask Him for special favors, to tell God just how things are and the best way to run the world.

James and John wanted to be honored by sitting on the right and left of Jesus. Just like them we often want things God has not prepared for us. We do not understand God’s plan, and so we rush in and act like we could do things better. It is hard to wait upon the Lord, isn’t it? But we need to remember that He is our Creator, and He knows

what we need, when we need it, and how we need to receive it. It's not about our will, but His.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Talk to God about the times you have put your will above His. Ask for His forgiveness, and then seek His will through His Word.

- Beth

March 3

Fruitful?

SCRIPTURE: Mark 11:1-26

VERSE FOR TODAY: "And he said to it, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.' And his disciples heard it." (Mark 11:14)

Jesus was hungry and wanted to eat some figs, but the tree had produced none. Therefore, He cursed it and said that no one would ever eat of its fruit. Then we read what happened the very next day: "As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots." (Mark 11:20, ESV) I honestly don't think this was as much about a hungry Savior as it was about a wise Rabbi who wanted to get in all the teaching He could in the little time He had left.

Jesus was once again emphasizing the importance of fruit-bearing. He is disappointed when a fruit tree bears no fruit because He created it to bear fruit. If it doesn't bear fruit, it might just as well wither. The same is true of Christians. We were made by God to bear fruit and if we don't, we disappoint our Creator. "A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, you will recognize them by their fruits." (Matthew 7:18-20)

If Jesus came looking for fruit from your spiritual tree today, would He find it?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to lead you to a fruitful life of service in Him.

- Tom

March 4

He is the Foundation

SCRIPTURE: Mark 11:27-12:17

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Haven’t you read this scripture: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone, the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.’” (Mark 12:10-11)

As is almost always the case, Jesus used His walk through the temple courts as an opportunity to teach. He used his surroundings and the tricky questions from the chief priests and teachers to reveal an awesome truth. He was the foundation of all that was to come.

Jesus had just finished telling a parable about a landowner’s son being rejected by wicked tenants. He then identified Himself as the “stone the builders rejected”. Hmm. I wonder whom the wicked tenants represent. The Pharisees had most certainly rejected Jesus. He knew it; they knew it; everybody knew it! However, God’s plan didn’t hang on their acceptance of Jesus. He was building a new “building” called the Church. Jesus would become the Cornerstone - the foundation.

The word cornerstone is defined as: “the first stone set in the construction of a masonry foundation, important since all other stones will be set in reference to this stone, thus determining the position of the entire structure.” Isn’t that exactly what Jesus is? He is our reference point that determines the entire structure of our lives.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today praying about your acceptance of Jesus as the authority in your life, and pray about your willingness to make Him the cornerstone of everything you do.

- Lori

March 5

Wrong Focus

SCRIPTURE: Mark 12:18-37

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Jesus said to them, ‘Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.’” (Mark 12:24-25)

Having already squelched the Pharisees argument concerning divorce with an admonition to remain faithful to God's intended plan, the Sadducees now use a marriage scenario to try and trap Jesus. To their understanding, believing in the resurrection creates a certain problem concerning the Mosaic law of Levirate marriage. After all, whose wife will she then be "in heaven"?

Jesus dispels their foolishness by showing they do not understand the purpose of marriage. The helpmeet relationship is an earthly one created only to prepare us for eternity – not be a part of eternity.

But He says their misunderstanding is only a symptom. Their focus is wrong. Because they can't (or won't) clearly see God, they don't believe in the resurrection. And because they can't clearly see God, they can't accurately understand His word. Because they can't understand His word, they focus on trying to tear down what God is doing rather than join Him.

So we might ask ourselves: where is our focus today? Is it on accepting and understanding what God says? Or are we spending our time trying to reason away what God has said?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for a heart that is open to God's work and wisdom today.
- Greg

March 6

All In

SCRIPTURE: Mark 12:38-13:13

VERSE FOR TODAY: "They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on." (Mark 12:44)

I find it interesting that Jesus sat and watched people as they put their offerings into the temple treasury. I can almost picture the poor widow inching toward the treasury box, hoping that no one would notice her. Did she wait until the people around her were looking the other way? Did she hurry to slip her offering into the box? Was she embarrassed by the small amount she was giving? I doubt she grasped the vastness of her gift. I'm sure she was aware that it was all she had to live on, but did she understand that by giving absolutely everything to God, she was relying on Him to sustain her?

What about you? What is it that you tend to look to for sustenance? It very well might be money, but think even beyond that. Where do you see your worth? Is it in a job? A title? A talent? A relationship?

As Jesus watches, waiting for you to “put in all you have”, what will He see you slip into the box? What are you willing to part with, even though you might see it as your only form of sustenance or worth? Be willing to give it to Jesus.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today praying about where you see your worth. Pray for the willingness to give “all you have to live on” to Him.

- *Lori*

March 7

Coming Again

SCRIPTURE: Mark 13:14-37

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.” (Mark 13:31-32)

This scripture is talking about the return of Christ when He comes to gather the Children of God home to heaven. Wow, what a great day! We look forward to the day when we get to see Jesus. Finally, we will see what we could have only imagined.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but Jesus’ words will be with us always. We can rest on the fact that scripture will be fulfilled. The Bible, which we have studied, memorized, and relied upon in our times of joy and distress, will transfer with us to our new home. The men and women we read about in God’s Great Book will be there. I really look forward to meeting them.

No one knows when the trumpet will sound. This passage makes it plain only God knows when - not the angels, not even Jesus. As much as we can study and read the signs of the times, we must remember that only God is in control of that last moment when time become eternity.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Take time to thank God for His eternal Word. Also, spend a few moments of joy thinking about how wonderful Heaven will be.

- *Beth*

March 8

Doing What You Can

SCRIPTURE: Mark 14:1-21

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But Jesus said, ‘Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial.’” (Mark 14:6-8)

Have you ever looked on at a project someone in the church has taken on and thought: “I could do that so much better *and* at less expense”? You were astounded as the person in charge stepped back and smiled with satisfaction at a job “not-so-well-done”. You shook your head in disbelief that anyone could be pleased with an expensive foul-up like this!

This would be a good time to remember that you are “looking on” not “taking on” the project. Perhaps you even turned it down for any number of reasons. The person who is in charge is probably doing the very best they can, and they are pleased with the results because they know they are doing “a beautiful thing” for Jesus.

Remember, we don’t have to be beautiful, perfect, or even talented to serve Jesus, just available to do what we can when He has something that needs to be done.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you be available to do what He needs done and to rejoice with others who do the same.

- Tom

March 9

The One Who Denied Jesus

SCRIPTURE: Mark 14:22-52

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But Peter insisted emphatically, ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.’ And all the others said the same. Then everyone deserted him and fled.” (Mark 14:31, 50)

Somehow Peter ended up with the reputation of The One Who Denied Jesus. Maybe it was because he was the one with the big mouth. Maybe it was because he was bold in his actions; that made him an easy target when he failed. Maybe it was because he did it out loud – three times! But when I read today’s scripture, do you know what

jumped out at me? When Peter promised that he would not disown Jesus, it says, “And all the others said the same.”

Skip ahead to verse fifty. What happened? “Then everyone deserted him and fled.” It wasn’t just Peter. It was every single one of the disciples. Not one of them stayed behind to defend Him.

That’s denial.

How many times has my mouth proclaimed that I would never deny my Lord, only to have my actions prove me a liar? I am quick to judge Peter, but when I think about it, I have to include myself in “all the others”. I have deserted Him when He wanted me to stand up for Him. I have fled from the presence of my Lord when things got scary or hard. I am The One Who Denied Jesus.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend time today praying about your faithfulness to Jesus.

- Lori

March 10

What to Say

SCRIPTURE: Mark 14:53-72

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But He remained silent and made no answer.” (Mark 14:61a)

I find it only logical that Jesus made no response when offered the opportunity to speak to the charges made against Him. Which charge was He to answer? There were several; where was He to begin? On top of that, the testimonies concerning the charges did not agree. In a very real way, His own enemies – had this been a real trial – to that point in the trial, were His best defense. But this was no real trial. The minds of the leaders were made up, and the plan was made. All the rest was formality regardless of how chaotic or contradicting the testimonies were. The only thing Jesus spoke was truth that answered a direct question.

Jesus gives us a good example of responding to untruth told about you. Lies from several sources can never be perfectly harmonized. How will you respond to all the different ways the tale is told? In the end, the way you live your life should be your only argument. Those who want to believe the worst about you will; the rest will look at the character of your life. When asked a direct question, always speak truth – if it is your place and inclination to do so. Otherwise, live a life that makes negative falsehoods hard to believe.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for peace in your life in the way you deal with those who may have negativity toward you.

- Greg

March 11

Thank You

SCRIPTURE: Mark 15

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, ‘Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!’ So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, ‘He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.’ Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.” (Mark 15:29-32)

“Lord, this is Tom. I’ve not always been a disciple, as you well know, and as a follower I’ve not always been the best. You know my failings, You know my faults, and You know my sins. I can’t take back what was said to You on the day You were crucified, I can’t apologize for the ones who beat and humiliated You, and I can’t say I would not have been one of the mocking crowd on that terrible day had I been there.”

“This is what I *can* do. I can tell you I’m sorry You had to go through that for me. I’m sorry I’m such a selfish, self-centered person, and You had to reach so far down in the muck and mire to get me out. But I’m also grateful that You loved me enough to give everything you had to save my soul and give me a chance to *really* live! I love you Lord.”

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Speak your heart to Jesus.

- Tom

March 12

Disappointing Jesus

SCRIPTURE: Mark 16

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table; and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen.” (Mark 16:14)

As many times as I have read this passage, verse 14 never stood out to me until today. Jesus was disappointed with His disciples! I've never really thought about Him being disappointed. I thought that He was so patient with them, knowing they were mere men and did not understand. Yet, here He is, quite obviously upset with them, and He lets them know it.

They suffered from lack of faith, but "being human" was no excuse. I'm sure Jesus feels let down when we don't trust Him. Perhaps He feels it even more so when we excuse ourselves by saying, "Well, I'm only human". News flash: He knows we are human – He died for us!

I don't want to disappoint Jesus, and I don't think you do either. "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." (Hebrews 11:6) Let's determine to take His hand and move forward today fully trusting Him.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to give you the strength to trust Him for every step you take today.

- Beth

March 13

Speechless

SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:1-25

VERSE FOR TODAY: "But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.'" (Luke 1:13)

Have you ever been speechless because you found that God had answered your prayers? It was probably for the same reason that Zechariah found himself speechless: "And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." (Luke 1:20)

I find that a great many Christians don't believe, I mean *really* believe, that God will answer their prayers. They do pray, but they look at it as more of a spiritual duty or church ritual than an actual Christian action that will bring about results - a sad commentary on the Church of our day.

But Jesus said, "And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith." (Matthew 21:22) There are some prerequisites to this happening; don't be anxious and thank God when you bring forth your petitions (Philippians 4:6), right living with God (James 5:16; 1 Peter 3:12), and be sure your motives are pure (James 4:2-3).

Make sure you are “joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer” (Romans 12:12) so that God won’t find you speechless when He answers!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to direct you into a deeper, more faithful prayer life.

- Tom

March 14

Nothing is Impossible

SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:26-56

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For nothing will be impossible with God.” (Luke 1:37)

Through the birth of Jesus, Mary had shown her faithfulness in God. At that time, she was a young, unmarried, virgin girl who was just told news of something inconceivable (pun intended). Yet, despite any feelings of fear and confusion she might have had, she was still willing to do the Lord’s work. (v. 38) God’s omnipotence is proven when the angel told Mary of how her cousin, Elizabeth, was also pregnant. Elizabeth herself was a woman who was called barren. Mary’s role in the birth of Jesus shows that, just as the angel had said, nothing is impossible with God.

We may often doubt God’s ability to use us. We may feel inadequate or unworthy. We may feel like Moses who told God he was unable to speak eloquently. But God’s reply is, “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach what you shall speak.” (Exodus 4:11-12)

We often forget we serve a God who is capable of anything and everything - a God who gives us everything we need to live a godly life. (2 Peter 1:3) We have the power of a God that is greater than we could even imagine. “Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us....” (Ephesians 3:20) There is nothing that can hinder God from using you to accomplish His purpose.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you trust in Him so that you may be able to accomplish His purpose.

- Truli

March 15

A New Hope

SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:57-80

VERSE FOR TODAY: “and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, ‘What then will this child be?’ For the hand of the Lord was with him.” (Luke 1:66)

What a day of celebration it was! Miracle upon miracle and, then, Zechariah, after praising someone else’s child (Joseph and Mary’s), goes on to bless John. What a prayer he prayed: that this baby might grow to be one who prepares the way for the Lord into the lives of those who need light and salvation!

As a young preacher, I really wanted to “make a difference” - not so much for my own name’s sake (though there probably was a bit of pride involved), but for Christ’s sake and the redemption of His world. But over the years, it became apparent to me that I should just do what God’s given me to do and prepare the next generation for how they could be used by God. I began to look at my children as people who might be able to do what I could not. If carefully instructed and formed, they could fly to heights I’d never known. Is that what those at John’s circumcision felt as they proclaimed, “What then will this child be?” Can we prepare our children to bring new hope for the world?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray Zechariah’s prayer (vv. 76-79) over your own children today. If you don’t have children, pray it for a child you know.

- Greg

March 16

Give Me a Revelation

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:1-20

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.” (Luke 2:17)

The words of a popular Christian song say, “Give me a revelation...”. Have you ever wished God would reveal Himself to you? I mean, in a really fantastic, undeniable way? Have you ever wanted to know exactly what God was “up to” in your life, your child’s life, or the world at large?

I think, all too often, God has revealed His plan and His will, and we did nothing. The Bible is sixty-six books of His plan and will. Yet, how much of it have you really

lived-out? In addition, how much of it have you joyfully shared with others? Maybe God would make more things plain to you and I if we first used the information we already have. Why waste it on us if we won't use it?

Some might wonder why God would give the earth-shaking information about the birth of the Savior into the world to a group of smelly sheep-herders. God knew they'd be faithful with the information! They went and "made known" what they knew for themselves. Consider today that maybe God reveals Himself and His plans most to those who will hear, see, and share!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to point out truth that you have thus far ignored and how He wants you to respond to it.

- Greg

March 17

Lost and Found

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:21-52

VERSE FOR TODAY: "When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him." (Luke 2:45)

Their twelve-year-old was lost in the city. Can you imagine the fear and panic Joseph and Mary must have felt? They had started back home and traveled all day when they discovered that Jesus was not with them. They didn't have a cell phone and even if they did, whom would they call in Jerusalem for help? I cannot imagine what feelings of panic, loss, and anxiety the next three days brought upon this loving couple! What parent has not lost their child (if only temporarily) in a store? It is a frightful experience!

But who was lost? Jesus was not lost. Joseph and Mary found Him just where He was supposed to be. He was in the Temple doing what His Father sent Him to do. What a joyful time that must have been; their Son was found!

Often when a person becomes a Christian they exclaim, "I found Jesus!" when in fact, Jesus was never lost – they were. If you are struggling to find Jesus today, it would be good to remember that He is right where He is supposed to be. "Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us." (Romans 8:34)

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God that Jesus is not lost and you have been found!

- Beth

March 18

Fruitful Repentance

SCRIPTURE: Luke 3:1-22

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.” (Luke 3:8)

Are you bearing the fruits of repentance in your life? You might answer, “Well, I’ve been baptized” or “I’m a member of the Church”. But that’s not what I asked. Millions of people have been baptized and have their names on a church roster, and that is absolutely the only difference between them and the ungodly sinner who makes a snide remark whenever he sees a Christian bow his or her head in prayer.

Repentance means to turn around, to change the way you are living, to put God and Christian living first. You may have changed the way you spend most Sunday mornings, but have you changed your way of living? To bear the fruits of repentance means that the whole world can see a change in you and that you are living differently than the non-repentant sinner.

This passage of Scripture gives a stiff warning to those who do not bear the good fruits of repentance. “Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Luke 3:9)

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you bear fruits in keeping with your repentance in every aspect of your life.

- Tom

March 19

“God Has Given”

SCRIPTURE: Luke 3:23-38

VERSE FOR TODAY: “the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David,” (Luke 3:31)

Ok. I know what you’re thinking. What in the world can we learn from this verse? I must admit, when I sat down with this passage, I thought the same thing. Where do I start? What is there to learn? Is there any application here? Because there is only genealogy, I decided to look at the people named. What can I learn from them?

One name popped out at me - Nathan. I have a son named Nathan. One of the reasons we decided to name him that is because of its meaning- “gift of God” or “God has given”. Our Nathan has certainly been a gift.

I find it very interesting that the Nathan listed here is the third son of David. If you remember, Nathan is also the name of the prophet God sent to rebuke David for his sin with Bathsheba. Could it be that David considered the prophet and his wise words so much a “gift of God” that he named his son after him? Maybe. Perhaps David wanted a daily reminder what God had given him.

Have you ever been called out by a loving friend, or maybe through the Word of God itself? If so, and you have heeded the rebuke, it is surely a “gift of God”.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today thanking God for the gift of correction that comes into our lives.

- Lori

March 20

The Shell Game

SCRIPTURE: Luke 4:1-30

VERSE FOR TODAY: “If you then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” (Luke 4:7)

Do you struggle with sin? Obviously you do. We all do. And why?

We may get fooled out of ignorance. But the usual reason we even consider anything we know is remotely contradictory to the Word of God is because of a benefit it promises. We desperately want to believe that crime *does* pay.

“Say this – you’ll feel better!”

“Take this – you’ll find joy!”

“Drink this – you’ll forget!”

“Look at this – you’ll be enlightened!”

“Eat this – you’ll be satisfied!”

Promise after promise (lie after lie) – they go on and on. But from whom do they come?

Jesus understood that the one *making* the promises to him had no power to *fulfill* the promises. What the devil offers are but hollow attempts to short cut around what our loving Father would gladly give through obedience to Him. They are empty distractions from the fullness God wants to provide. The promises are deceitful, for the devil owns nothing. He can manipulate, but he can never give. He's a master carnival barker running a massive shell game.

What temptation do you most often succumb to? What is it that is promised? Has the devil ever actually made good on it? God is the giver. Don't be fooled.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: As you visit with God today, ask Him to point out the emptiness of the things the devil offers and promises.

- Greg

March 21

Anchored

SCRIPTURE: Luke 4:31-5:11

VERSE FOR TODAY: "And Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.' And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him." (Mark 5:10b-11)

I have a tiepin that forms a cross on the top and an anchor on the bottom. It's a reminder that my life is anchored in the cross of Christ. Many times, usually in a worship setting, someone has pointed to the pin and asked, "Are you a fisherman?"

My answer is always, "I'm a fisher of men".

Simon Peter and his companions had just netted what was probably the largest catch of their lives. They had to be ecstatic! Just thinking about the money they would make and the admiration from other fishermen had to be exciting. But then Jesus said, "from now on you will be catching men". Amazingly they didn't ask Jesus for an opportunity to sell their fish or even to show them off. They left their boats where they landed, along with the fish and everything they had ever known or worked for, "and followed Him". Their anchor was now in Jesus.

As Christians, we cannot count on our social standing and possessions to keep us grounded. When we cast our net with Jesus, we must anchor in Him and Him alone.

Question: If Jesus called you to leave everything today so that you could be a better "fisher of men", would you do it?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to secure your anchor.

- Tom

March 22

Take Time to Pray

SCRIPTURE: Luke 5:12-26

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.” (Luke 5:16)

There are times in our lives that busy-ness can take over and rob us of our peace. Often the things that make us busy are not really *that* important, they just need to be done. We sacrifice our time with God - prayer time, devotions *and* worship - for these less-than-important tasks. I know how easy that is; I’m a mother and grandmother, and I’m also married to a preacher. Sometimes it seems that the phone will never stop ringing, and there is no place where one can hide from a text!

Jesus was also very busy. This passage talks about Him healing a leper and a paralytic as well as dealing with the crowds and the critics.

Jesus knew He needed time with the Father. When He would “slip away into the wilderness and pray”, He not only revived Himself spiritually and physically, but taught his disciples, and us, a great lesson. We all need to seek out times of refreshment. Because when we take time to be with our Heavenly Father, listening and praying, then we will be able to make wise choices about what things *are* the most important.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you make wise choices in the busy-ness of your life.

- Beth

March 23

Leave and Cleave

SCRIPTURE: Luke 5:27-6:11

VERSE FOR TODAY: “After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.” (Luke 5:27-28)

Many years ago in a pre-marriage counseling situation I advised a young couple not to get married. She was so tied to her mother that I knew she would never “leave and

cleave” as we often phrase it. I told them that if they did go ahead and get married they needed to move at least three hundred miles away so that they would have to learn to live with and rely on one another. I was so sure that this marriage would not last I refused to perform the ceremony. My Associate Minister did the honors. In less than a year they were divorced.

I’ve observed that this is also true when we are invited to follow Jesus. If we insist on hanging on to just a few remnants of our past life, we will always be tempted to go back and spend time with them. However, if we “leave and cleave” we have nothing left to go back to and our new life with Christ is “full-speed ahead”.

What are you tied to in your old way of living that is slowing down your progress in Christ?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to cut the strings that tie you to a past life that was leading you to death and then “cleave” to Him with all your might.

- Tom

March 24

Big Blessings

SCRIPTURE: Luke 6:12-38

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” (Luke 6:38)

I remember the day my daughter turned three years old. As she chose a gift to open, she would look to me and say, “Let’s see what’s in, Momma!” She repeated that same phrase and excitement with each gift she opened. It was so fun to watch! I love giving things to my kids. If you have ever been a parent, you know what I mean.

We’ve all said, “It’s better to give than to receive,” right? I know giving to others – grace, forgiveness, compassion – is the right thing to do. It’s a command, even here in this verse, to give. I love that! It’s exciting to be the giver!

But the receiving part - that sounds pretty good too. I think this verse paints a great picture of how God wants to bless us when we bless others. I can just see our Heavenly Father getting ready to pour out a blessing into our lives. He takes joy in pressing that blessing down a little tighter, shaking it down level so that a little more can fit. He loves us so, doesn’t He?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today thanking God for the blessings He has poured into your life. Then, pray that you can be a tool through which blessings can flow into other people's lives.

- Lori

March 25

I Want to Be Like Jesus

SCRIPTURE: Luke 6:39-7:10

VERSE FOR TODAY: "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" (Luke 6:40-41)

If a disciple is like his teacher, it should be very easy to see why many church buildings have lots of people who are not like Jesus. Too many times we have become like the Pharisees. Rather than letting the Holy Spirit do His own work to transform people into His likeness, we have manipulated people into conforming to our own. Hence, rather than becoming like Jesus, many have become fainter, lesser copies of our own imperfect selves. We strain the gnats and search for the specks in other people's lives that offend us and allow them to retain the large, beam-like faults that we excuse in our own lives.

No more clearly is this seen than with our own children. One has rightly said, "What one generation permits in moderation, the next generation uses to excess."

While we all should be disciples and have disciples, we must always remember that they and we are only under-shepherds to the Great Shepherd.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to point out to you the things you are permitting in your own life that will surely show up in the lives of your children and disciples.

- Greg

March 26

A Life Declaration

SCRIPTURE: Luke 7:11-35

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Yet wisdom is justified by all her children." (Luke 7:35)

Some people to whom John preached realized their rebellion and stubbornness against God. They believed they'd been wrong about life and that God was right. That led to a decision to take their life in a new direction – a direction obedient to God. That decision is called repentance, and they marked their decision and entered a new life in immersion.

However, the Pharisees, Jesus said, were like fickle children. One minute wanting and promoting one behavior – the next minute another. These are the people who, in the name of freedom, condemn and call God's rules and expectations for their own life unfair and unjust, but then turn and bind everyone to their own arbitrary standards and lifestyles.

Bob Dylan sang, "You're gonna have to serve somebody!" Follow the laws of God, follow the laws of culture, follow the laws of the "religious", or even follow yourself. Who do you think will be proved right?

Jesus said, "...wisdom is justified by all her children." That is, in the end, the life surrendered to God's purposes (vv. 29-30) will justify what God has said and asked of us. As the Apostle Paul said, "Let God be true, and every human being a liar."

Have you made the declaration of repentance and baptism that the wise people did in this passage? Have you "declared God just"? This is the declaration of the children of wisdom – the children of God.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to remind you in every choice to declare Him just.

- Greg

March 27

The Woman and the Pharisee

SCRIPTURE: Luke 7:36-8:3

VERSE FOR TODAY: "And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with perfume. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner.'" (Luke 7:37-39)

Am I more like the woman washing Jesus' feet or the judgmental Pharisee? It's easy to get so caught up in the way things appear that we are more like the Pharisee than the woman. We forget to put Jesus in our "worship equation". The Pharisee was focused on the woman; the woman was focused on Jesus.

Today I want so much to be like this woman, thankful and praising Jesus through my tears for saving me from a life of sin and an eternity without Him.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Just now, take your eyes off everything and everyone else while you focus all your attention on Jesus and thank God for His redeeming love.

- Beth

March 28

The Family of Jesus

SCRIPTURE: Luke 8:4-21

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But he answered them, ‘My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.’” (Luke 8:21)

Lots of mega churches aren't there? Hundreds of thousands of people attend them every week, as do dozens of folks in each small rural church that you pass along a country road. Ask any of the people attending one of these churches if they are a part of the family of Jesus and I dare say that most of them would respond in the affirmative. Why? Because they go to church, don't they? They listen to the preacher, don't they? Many of them will even point to the Bible in their hand as “proof” of their place on the family tree.

But Jesus did not say you were part of His family if you sit in a pew, listen to a sermon, partake of the Lord's Supper, carry God's Word in a beautifully bound leather holder, or even if you read God's Word every day (all of which will do you no harm). He said, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.”

James warns us, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” (James 1:22, ESV) He knew what Jesus was talking about!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to show you how to make application in your life with what you read in His Word. Do it now; do it daily.

- Tom

March 29

Dismissing Jesus

SCRIPTURE: Luke 8:22-39

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.” (Luke 8:37)

There are so many things in this passage that absolutely blow my mind. Here are a few of them:

1. The demon possessed man falls at Jesus feet when he sees him.
2. He begs Jesus not to torture him. (Obviously, he knows Jesus’ power.)
3. The demon could not be held with chains, but Jesus controlled him with words.
4. His name was Legion. Wow! I wonder how many demons were there.
5. Jesus “gave them permission”.
6. When the people saw the man dressed and visiting with Jesus, they were afraid. (Really? That scared them more than knowing he was demon possessed?)

But the one that really stops me in my tracks is the verse for today. They were scared. They asked Jesus to leave. He did. Oh my goodness! Couldn’t they see the power, the authority, the love, and the compassion that Jesus had just displayed? Of course they could, and they didn’t quite know what to do with it; so they dismissed him.

Oh, how many times have we seen the authority of God working in our lives, only to allow it to paralyze us with fear?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend time today inviting God back into your life. Thank Him for the authority He displays.

- Lori

March 30

Outed

SCRIPTURE: Luke 8:40-9:6

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched Him, and how she had been immediately healed.” (Luke 8:47)

A popular, seemingly important rabbi is moving through a sea of people on a mission to save the life of a little girl. This lady just knows there is no way Jesus would have time for her or even notice that she is there. But rumor has it that if you can just touch even the fringe of His garment you can be healed. (Matthew 14:36) So, in desperation, she reaches out.

What happened next shocks her. Not the healing – she believed she could be healed - but the Master’s attention. He has noticed her. She has touched Him. Knowing her uncleanness, she wishes to remain hidden – to just melt back into the crowd. Now will she have to deal with the embarrassment and shame of her brokenness yet again? Not knowing what will happen, when Jesus stops and takes inventory of the crowd, she comes forward.

She does what all of us who’ve found Jesus are called to do: acknowledge our brokenness without Jesus and proclaim the healing we’ve found in Him. Unashamed and overjoyed that the Creator and Savior the universe has taken note of even us.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: If you are struggling today to believe God notices you, tell Him. Come forward from the crowd today in prayer.

- Greg

March 31

Where Is Your Cross?

SCRIPTURE: Luke 9:7-27

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And he said to all, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.’” (Luke 9:23-24)

Where is your cross? I’m not talking about the one that hangs around your neck or dangles from your charm bracelet; you don’t have to be a Christian to wear one of those. No, I’m talking about the one Jesus told you to take up daily. Where is *that* Cross?

Where is your cross? Have you even thought about it today? Taking up your cross daily will make you uncomfortable; it will remind you of your sins and shortcomings, of your need to walk uprightly before your God, and to live your faith before all men. It will remind you that your hope, your life, and your redemption are all found in the blood of Jesus.

Where is your cross? Reach under your bed or go into your closet and find it now. That’s right; bring it out into the open so you can see it clearly. Do this every day - never forgetting that your sins nailed the God of the Universe to its rugged surface. Now, hold it high so others can see where their hope comes from.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to remind you to take up your cross as you begin every new day.

- Tom

April 1

Sibling Rivalry

SCRIPTURE: Luke 9:28-50

VERSE FOR TODAY: “An argument started among them as to which of them might be the greatest.” (Luke 9:46)

How many times have you witnessed a child telling his or her sibling that they are the “favored” one with Mom or Dad? Tom and his elder brother do this all the time. It’s a running joke with them, but among these disciples it did not seem to be good-natured jesting. They were serious!

It is natural to want to prove that we are the best, but jealousy and sibling rivalry in the Body of Christ will cause us to take our eyes off Jesus and possibly destroy the good work that God is doing in our community.

The lesson here is that if you want to be the greatest you must be the least. We all need to accept our place in His Family. Jesus is saying that we must serve Him wherever we are and in whatever position He places us.

Just as Tom and his brother realize that they each hold a special place in their family, we must all realize that each of us have a special place in God’s family as well. You are a child of God! Don’t let sibling rivalry get in your way of serving Jesus.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you be satisfied with your place in the family.

- Beth

April 2

Involvement Vs. Surrender

SCRIPTURE: Luke 9:51-10:16

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Yet another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.’ Jesus said to him, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.’” (Luke 9:61-62)

One said, "I'll follow you wherever you go". Jesus replied that He did not have a home or a place to lay His head. Jesus said to another, "Follow me," but that one wanted to go to his Dad's funeral first. Then the third one said, "I will follow you Lord, but let me first . . .". Here we have three good examples of people who wanted to get involved but didn't want to surrender.

Week after week in our revival travels, we see a lot of people involved in the work of the local church but very few who have surrendered to Jesus. Surrendering to Jesus involves much more than stepping forward on Sunday and shaking the preacher's hand. Jesus isn't looking for members; He's looking for martyrs - people who are willing to sacrifice and suffer, people more interested in preaching than pillows, and dying with Him than living with zombies.

Surrender involves giving up our bodies for His service and our minds for His transformation. (Romans 12:1-2) Here's the question for today, "Am I totally surrendered to Jesus, or just involved in the work of the church?"

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to accept the surrender of your body and mind for His Kingdom work today.

- Tom

April 3

Unique Opportunities

SCRIPTURE: Luke 10:17-37

VERSE FOR TODAY: "For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it." (Luke 10:24)

The disciples had that unique opportunity. They saw Jesus with their own eyes! They hung out with Him, traveled with Him, laughed with Him, and learned from Him. I'm certain there were also times of sorrow, pain, and shedding tears with Him. He was not only their teacher but also their friend. What a blessed bunch of guys!

Now consider our unique opportunity to know Christ. He is our friend too. Oh, we may not see Him with our own physical eyes, but we have all that we need (and more) to really know Him. Peter put it this way:

"His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." (2 Peter 1:3)

We can communicate with Him through prayer and the complete, inspired Word of God. We have the freedom to serve Christ openly – an opportunity many around the world

long for. We have resources that even a few years ago would have been thought impossible. What a blessed bunch of people we are!

Surely, the ease with which we have been able to follow Christ has made us prone to take our opportunity for granted. Let it never be so.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today thanking God for your unique opportunity.

- Lori

April 4

Focus

SCRIPTURE: Luke 10:38-11:13

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But the Lord answered her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary....’” (Luke 10:41-42a)

“I feel like I’m being pulled in a thousand directions!”

Have you ever said that?

This week I have been particularly busy. I’ve had family functions to attend as well as work deadlines to meet. In addition, I have travel to prepare for and an event to speak at. I feel rushed, hurried, and stressed. But somewhere, sometime in the middle of it all, I have to find my focus.

It is easy to become like Martha – especially in ministry. Family and work are stressors everyone shares, but add *ministry* and it can really get crazy. I mean, this is for *the Lord*! Someone’s *eternal destiny* could hinge on a song, a sermon, the cleanliness of the bathroom, or one of many duties of ministry taken up by God’s people in and outside the church building.

Yet, among all of it, only one thing (or person) is necessary – Jesus. If we will but listen to Jesus, He will direct our feet to the things that He finds truly needful. He will make up for our lack. He will use our offerings – now properly directed by Him – for His glory.

But first – we must find our focus. Jesus.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Are you “anxious and troubled about many things” today? Spend an extra long time with Jesus and let Him redirect your focus and schedule.

- Greg

April 5

How Bright Are You?

SCRIPTURE: Luke 11:14-36

VERSE FOR TODAY: “No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it away in a cellar nor under a basket, but on a lampstand, so that those who enter may see the light.” (Luke 11:33)

How often do you turn on a light? Every day we switch on lights to help us see our way more clearly.

Some lights are brighter than others. We have two three-way lamps in our home and each turn of the switch makes their bulbs brighter. This text reminds us that our lives are like the three-way light bulb; sometimes we shine brightly and other times dimly. Our light becomes dim when we let sin into our lives and bright when we reflect the light of Jesus.

As new Christians, we study and work at our relationship with God because we see clearly the difference between a life with Christ and a life without Him. But sometimes, we let our light grow dull because of busy-ness, church work, and personal sins that crowd out our time alone with God. Our spiritual light becomes cloudy, and our lamp does not shine clearly.

We need to make sure our spiritual lamps have been maintained through personal and consistent contact with God and His Word so that His light will shine brightly though us in the ever-increasing darkness of our world.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105, NASB)

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you to keep your light shining brightly.

- Beth

April 6

Washing Dishes

SCRIPTURE: Luke 11:37-12:7

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But the Lord said to him, ‘Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness.’” (Luke 11:39)

This scripture reminds me of washing dishes as a kid. My cousin and I had a contest to see who would be the first one out of the kitchen when the task was done. She always won. I almost always got dishes back to be re-washed; they looked clean, but closer inspection proved that more elbow grease (or dish detergent) was needed. I focused on the dishes *looking* clean and not actually *being* clean.

The Pharisees always wanted to look good to those around them. They were so concerned about how they appeared on the outside that they didn't look at their hearts. Today we call this "image projection". Jesus let the Pharisees know that He saw their hearts. He chastened them for just *acting* righteous.

Sometimes as Christians we act the same way, we want others to think we have it all together. We don't want them to see that we have bad days - days when we know we haven't behaved the way a Christ follower should.

Let's make sure our inside is as clean as our outside!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray David's prayer: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way." (Psalm 139:23-24, NIV)

- Beth

April 7

Peace from the Father

SCRIPTURE: Luke 12:8-34

VERSE FOR TODAY: "And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?" (Luke 12:25)

Okay, hands up everyone who has worried yourself into an extra hour of life. Yeah, that's what I thought, no one. Now, hands up everyone who has just about worried yourself to death; you can put them down now, no need to count, it's unanimous!

Why? Why do we worry about everything, even after we have prayed and turned our troubles and concerns over to Jesus? Could it be that we believe He needs our help? Perhaps we could get things straightened out before He has to get too involved? Maybe we just don't believe the God of the Universe is capable of handling our problems. We trust Him to save our soul, but not our situation.

I think when we spend our days in anxiety we are sinning in several ways. Like Adam and Eve, we desire to be like God - all-powerful. Like Job's "friends", we think we know better than God. And like the nine lepers, we choose to forget Who has healed us in the past.

Our God wants us to rely on Him, not because He believes we have no wit or wisdom of our own, but because He truly is a loving Father who cares about our heavy burdens and desires to lighten the load of His children.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Speak to your Father now, give Him your burdens and enjoy the peace that only He can give today.

- Tom

April 8

Peace or Division?

SCRIPTURE: Luke 12:35-59

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.” (Luke 12:51)

I’m going to be honest here. Jesus’ words make me so...uncomfortable. I am the kind of person who wants peace. I want quiet happiness. I want harmony. Jesus is telling them that if they think they are in for some kind of nice, easy, get-along-with-everybody mission to unite people, they’ve got another think coming. Oh, boy. Here is where I would seriously consider bolting.

Coming into contact with Jesus requires a decision of some sort. Unfortunately, not everybody will make the decision to follow Him, and therein lays the conflict. So, I must ask myself, “Am I willing to cut ties with those who don’t believe Jesus is who He says He is?”

By “cut ties”, I don’t mean never speak to them again. However, I must be willing to live life differently even when it causes conflict. I must be willing to give up the approval of others. (And that sometimes includes even family members.)

I guess it comes down to this. I can choose peace with my fellow man and be divided from God; or I can choose to have a little conflict here on earth and live eternally in God’s peace.

Now that I think about it, it really doesn’t seem like much of a decision. What about you? What will you choose?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today praying about your willingness to be different from those around you.

- Lori

April 9

Tsk, Tsk

SCRIPTURE: Luke 13:1-21

VERSE FOR TODAY: “No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:3)

A very wealthy man had been building a large hay barn just outside our small country town. It just so happened that this man had recently been directly responsible for me losing my job. As I was passing by his house one day, I smiled to myself as I noticed that the previous night’s storm had completely destroyed the skeleton of the large unfinished barn. With no one in the car, I quoted to myself from one of my wife’s favorite movies,

“Tsk, tsk. See, God doesn’t like ugly.”

Indeed, He does not. He doesn’t like self-righteousness either. So, Jesus comments on that kind of attitude here in this passage. He warns them not to make the mistake of thinking great suffering you notice in someone else’s life means that you are any less guilty than they. All sin, regardless of whether we consider it great or small, separates us from God, and God has judged us all guilty of sin. If we do not repent, we will likewise perish – if not tragically in this world, tragically in the next.

Spend today taking stock of changes that need made in your life. If you do so, you may be so busy you don’t see too many faults in the people around you.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to reveal any self-righteous attitudes you have today.
- Greg

April 10

Spiritual Diet

SCRIPTURE: Luke 13:22-14:6

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.” (Luke 13:24)

My life changed on a plane trip in January of 2012. I was excited to be boarding the jet to be whisked off to warm, sunny Florida to assist at a Rock Solid Ministries revival. However, my excitement quickly turned to embarrassment.

As I stuffed myself into one of those economy airline seats, I found that the seatbelt did not fasten around me. In shame, I folded my arms over my lap and pretended my belt was buckled as the flight attendant passed. That embarrassment and anger with myself over the many other things I'd missed over the last several years because of my weight brought me to a decision to never be "too wide" again.

One might be the epitome of physical fitness, but have a very similar but more devastating problem. Jesus says the "door" to the Kingdom of God is narrow. Many who put a lot of emphasis on earthly things will find themselves too spiritually unfit for the Kingdom.

Have you grown "too wide" on the pleasures of the world to fit through the narrow door? Don't deceive yourself about your spiritual fitness level so long that one day you find yourself eternally embarrassed.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to show you the state of your spiritual fitness in the mirror of His Word before it's too late.

- Greg

April 11

Loving Jesus, Loving Other

SCRIPTURE: Luke 14:7-35

VERSE FOR TODAY: "If anyone comes to me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:26-27)

A quick read of this passage might lead us to believe that Jesus is telling us to hate our families, but how could that be since we know, by way of Scripture, that Jesus really loved His! What He means is that we should love Him so much that the love we have for our families (and even our own person), will seem like hate in comparison.

Remembering what the Word says about "hate" will help us keep this statement by Jesus in proper perspective. "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." (1 John 3:15)

So, the question for today would be, "Is my love for Jesus so strong that all other loves in my life cannot even compare?"

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Take a moment to recommit your love and devotion to Jesus. Let Him know that no one else and nothing else will ever be allowed to come between Him and you.

- Beth

April 12

Don't Bring Home the Bacon!

SCRIPTURE: Luke 15

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’” (Luke 15:21)

I love Luke chapter fifteen for it has three great stories about “lost and found” and the rejoicing that followed. Still, if I had to choose just one of the three stories to talk about, it would have to be the Prodigal Son. The sheep and the coin can't tell us about repentance, but the Prodigal can. This young man didn't just come to acknowledge who his father was and show up at the house with a pig under each arm and grin on his face. He knew that his Jewish father would not accept him back (even as a servant in the house) if he brought his pigs home with him!

True repentance is giving up the wrong and filth in one's life and taking up the cross of Christ to walk a new direction. Too many Christians are “bringing home the bacon” (metaphorically speaking, I like a BLT as much as the next guy!). We can't serve God while still holding on to a sinful way of life, and we have no biblical reason to believe that our Father in Heaven would accept us if we did.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you leave your sins in the past and then begin serving Him as the true child He has called you to be.

- Tom

April 13

Sneering at God

SCRIPTURE: Luke 16:1-18

VERSE FOR TODAY: “The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, ‘You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.’” (Luke 16:14-15)

Sneering just sounds down-right evil, doesn't it? I pictured devilish faces with red eyes and nasty little laughs when I first read this, but upon further thought, I'm not sure that is very accurate. I sort of want it to be that way though, because I know that I (sweet little thing that I am) would never make a devilish face or laugh a devilish laugh at something Jesus said. I'm much too spiritual for that.

I might, however, try to make light of a teaching that hits a little too close to home or makes me uncomfortable. I can see myself giggling and even making a funny comment to change the subject. I might think to myself (or even out loud to someone else), "Well, I think what Jesus must have meant was..."

Either way, God knows my heart. It does not matter in the least that I might use a more polite version of "sneering" than the Pharisees did. The fact is: I sneer.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today praying about your "sneering" attitude. Do you have one at times? Ask God for forgiveness and a new attitude.

- Lori

April 14

Justified?

SCRIPTURE: Luke 16:19-17:10

VERSE FOR TODAY: "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.'" (Luke 16:25)

"The Pharisees, ... were lovers of money..." Luke says in verse fourteen. So, Jesus addresses that here. Jesus says they could be lovers of money because they justified their sin to themselves. As a "for instance" Jesus points out how they had twisted the law to justify the unfaithfulness of divorce in their marriages. It was because of the ability to play these games they could love money. They had quite a knack for justifying sin.

So do we.

They did, and we do because we play the "short game". We look at today, maybe even tomorrow, and if we are really great planners we work life for the "five year plan" or retirement. That's not long enough if you want to quit justifying your sinful lifestyles and choices.

Jesus points out that there is a price to be paid for short-sighted justification – an eternity of torment in exchange for your momentary pleasures. Can you honestly justify what you are doing today in the light of eternity? I heard someone say recently,

“Choose wisely what you do today. You are exchanging a day of your life for it!”

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray about sin you may have blinded yourself to with justifications and ask God to give you eyes for eternity.

- Greg

April 15

Praising God

SCRIPTURE: Luke 17:11-37

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, ‘Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?’” (Luke 17:15-18)

A well-known tale among preachers goes something like this:

Three preachers met for lunch to discuss a common problem. It seems that they all had bats in their church bell towers that kept returning no matter how they tried to rid themselves of the nuisance. One preacher told that he had captured all bats and removed them to a community almost an hour away, and yet, they had all returned. The second preacher had done much the same with basically the same result. The third preacher was happy to report he had found a solution. As the first two listened intently the third explained that he had simply baptized all his bats and not one had returned!

This is a story most preachers understand all-to-well.

Every day we must give “praise to God” for our cleansing and on the first day of every week gather around the His Table to remember that His blood was shed for our sins. As “foreigners” in this world let us “with a loud voice” give glory to our God!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Praise God for the healing He has bestowed upon your life.

- Tom

April 16

Attitude Check

SCRIPTURE: Luke 18:1-17

VERSE FOR TODAY: “I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:14)

“Thank you God that I don’t have *their* problems!”

“Thank you Lord that I didn’t fall into *that* sin.”

You ever feel that way? Yeah, I know, me too. Sometimes we all feel like we have made better choices than some of those around us. We look at others and judge their lives when we should be focusing on our own walk with God.

There is an old saying, “Don’t judge someone else until you have walked a mile in their shoes”. When we compare our lives to others we always lose; the way they live their lives makes us feel better or worse about ourselves. We take our eyes off God and put them on man and we become bitter or vain.

In Psalms 139:23-24 David cried out, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.”

Approaching God with an attitude like this helps us to focus on our personal relationship with Him rather than on what everyone else is doing. We all need an attitude check occasionally.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to search your heart and help you focus on Him and not on others.

- Beth

April 17

All-In

SCRIPTURE: Luke 18:18-43

VERSE FOR TODAY: “When Jesus heard this he said to him, ‘One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven and come follow me.’” (Luke 18:22)

The old business fable of *The Chicken and the Pig* comes to mind here. The Chicken is trying to persuade the Pig to make a contribution to the breakfast table. The Pig responds, “For you it is a contribution, for me it is a complete sacrifice!”

In this passage, it appears to me that the rich ruler wanted to make a contribution from his life to serve God, but Jesus explains that following Him is more than mere contributions; it’s complete sacrifice. This was too much for the young man for he was “extremely rich”.

Full sacrifice means being willing (if God should require it of you) to give up not only your money and possessions, but also your family and lifestyle - and perhaps your very life. Are you ready for this?

Today’s world is a dangerous place for fully committed, all-in Christians. I believe this is a time of sifting in the Church. The part-time contributor will not continue to stand with the full-time committed. It’s time to make a decision if you have not already done so.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to open your eyes today so that you can be totally honest with Him and yourself. When you finish your prayer, be sure you know where you stand.

- Tom

April 18

Who’s Doing the Seeking?

SCRIPTURE: Luke 19:1-27

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” (Luke 19:10)

When reading this familiar story, we are told right away that Zacchaeus wanted to see whom Jesus was. He put forth some effort and put himself in a position to see Jesus. He was lost, and I think he knew it. He had obviously heard about Jesus and wanted to see for himself what all the hubbub was about. That’s pretty admirable considering who he was and what he did for a living.

However, when reading our verse for today, you will notice it says that Jesus came to seek and save what was lost. Jesus came to seek! He was doing the seeking in this story! As I look at the details of this “chance” encounter between Zacchaeus and Jesus, it becomes quite obvious.

First of all, consider the tree. Don't you think the earth's creator made that tree grow? Don't you think, over the years, He looked at that tree knowing that one day a short guy would climb it in order to see Jesus? Now that is what I call planning ahead!

Then when Jesus came to the exact spot, he looked up. He was looking for Zacchaeus. He was seeking him out. Wow! What a Savior!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today thanking God that he has sought you.

- Lori

April 19

I'd Give if...

SCRIPTURE: Luke 19:28-48

VERSE FOR TODAY: "And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' And they said, 'The Lord has need of it.'" (Luke 19:33-34)

There's an old story that I've heard many times about a preacher who went out to visit a farmer. After the usual pleasantries, the preacher asked Farmer Brown,

"If you had two cows, would you give one of them to the work of the Lord?"

The farmer replied, "Oh, you know I would, Preacher!"

"If you had two sheep," the preacher continued, "would you share one?"

"I certainly would, Preacher! No doubt about that!" he replied.

"If you had two pigs..." the preacher began.

"Now wait a minute, Preacher," said the farmer, "you know I have two pigs!"

Unfortunately, it always seems easier to commit what we do not have than what we do. "If I had more money, I'd give." "If I could sing, I'd sing." "If I could take time off work, I'd volunteer." "If I could travel, I'd preach." Yet we fail to tithe on what we do have or share the talent we do possess. We spend time we do have watching the TV and save our words rather than witness to the neighbor.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray that God would show you what things you are holding tightly to. Ask Him to help you let it go for the Kingdom's sake.

- Greg

April 20

“Why, Whatever Do You Mean?”

SCRIPTURE: Luke 20:1-26

VERSE FOR TODAY: “The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on Him at that very hour, for they perceived that He had told this parable against them, but they feared the people.” (Luke 20:19)

Now that I have grandchildren, I am reminded at what a young age children understand so many things. I have also been reminded how many things they understand that they pretend they don't understand. Sometimes they have a look on their face that says, “Why, whatever do you mean?” - though they have responded to your instructions affirmatively many times.

I think some of the religious leaders of Jesus' day were just as selective with their understanding of what Jesus taught and Who Jesus was. Only when feeling offended or trying to accuse Jesus of something did they confess their understanding of things and “perceive”.

Listen, the Bible teaches that there is no one on earth that has any excuse for ungodliness. No one can claim ignorance of God or ignorance of their need for Him. The Bible says “His invisible attributes...have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation.” (Romans 1:20) Even though it can be easy to claim we don't understand certain parts of the Bible or ignore the nudge of the Holy Spirit, don't think for a minute that we are not accountable for what our conscience knows is truth.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray that you will have a humble heart to God's Truth rather than pretend you are not hearing the Spirit.

- Greg

April 21

Stumping Scribes

SCRIPTURE: Luke 20:27-47

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Some of the scribes answered and said, ‘Teacher, You have spoken well’. For they did not have courage to question Him any longer about anything.” (Luke 20:39-40)

The scribes were always looking to trap Jesus with a question He could not answer in an attempt to prove Him a false prophet. Jesus always answered in such a way

that left them mad or stumped or both. This was one of those times; He seems to have stumped them, they couldn't think of another thing to ask. These were the "religious leaders" of that day, and He left them speechless.

Funny thing, more than two-thousand years later, He's *still* stumping the "scribes" or making them mad, or both! Many of today's "religious leaders" are still questioning Jesus, His way, and His words. They seem to think He didn't know what He was talking about, or that the Eternal Word is somehow stuck in a moment in time and needs to be brought "up to speed" on the changes in society and the new acceptable ways of the world.

It is good to remember that Jesus always has been and always will be. He is "the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." (Revelation 22:13)

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for always having the right answer to every question in life.

- Beth

April 22

"The Rest of the Story"

SCRIPTURE: Luke 21:1-24

VERSE FOR TODAY: "and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, 'Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them.'" (Luke 21:2-3)

In the early 1980's, Beth and I were serving a church in one of the western States. Every Sunday morning during our worship service we had communion and offering meditations. Some who shared the communion and offering thoughts took time to prepare (you could always tell), but others, it was obvious, did not. One of our deacons, the church treasurer, always, without fail, used the above Scripture passage and said the same thing. Why? Because he did not believe in nor practice tithing and contributed very little financially to the Lord's work, and he thought these verses let him "off the hook" so to speak, by saying that God likes it when you give small amounts. Sad, I know. The deacon somehow never got around to reading verse four, "she . . . put in all she had to live on."

It's easy not to read, "the rest of the story" as Paul Harvey used to say. Especially when "the rest of the story" convicts us of our sin and shows us our need to repent. Make a commitment today, "I will always read Scripture in context so that I will fully understand what God's will is."

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to show you “the rest of the story” from His Word.

- Tom

April 23

Getting Rid of Jesus

SCRIPTURE: Luke 21:25-22:13

VERSE FOR TODAY: “and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people.” (Luke 22:2)

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was approaching. There were huge crowds of people in Jerusalem for the feast-more than usual. The law stated that every Jewish man and boy over the age of twelve was to go. The population of the city exploded during this time.

The verse for today tells us the chief priests and teachers of the law were trying to find a way to “get rid of” Jesus. They were scared. They knew the crowds could be a problem, and so they were doing everything they could think of to get Jesus out of the picture. I am amazed that they thought it could be that easy.

But I suppose it isn’t that uncommon. We do the same thing. Don’t we fear what people are going to do/say/think? Therefore, we try to “get rid of” Jesus. Oh, we don’t go so far as to deny Him out loud. We do it very quietly. We “get rid of” Jesus in our conversations. It’s just easier that way. No one is offended. No one is uncomfortable, least of all us!

But we need to ask ourselves...is it really that easy to “get rid of” Jesus? I think we know the answer.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today praying for boldness to bring Jesus back to the forefront of our lives and our conversations.

- Lori

Why?

SCRIPTURE: Luke 22:14-34

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And He took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’” (Luke 22:19)

It’s been done as a rite of passage. “When can I take it?” a young person will ask. “When you’re older – after you’ve been baptized.”

It’s been done with solemnity as two elderly men sit on either side of an ornately clothed table, head in hands, looking very pious and prayerful.

It’s been done simultaneously as a group. It’s been taken as families. It’s been taken personally.

It’s been taken once, twice, or three times a week – or quarterly – or semi-annually – or – whenever.

It’s been done wrongly. And it’s been done rightly.

It’s been done out of tradition with little forethought. (“This is what always comes after the song that comes after the prayer that comes after the prayer hymn that’s after the two opening songs.”)

But regardless of the who, when, or where, the “what” of the Lord’s Supper should only have one “why”. Jesus said,

“Do this in remembrance of me.”

Amidst the hustle and bustle; among the worries and fears; in a few small, still, and silent moments – stop. Remember.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: In your prayer time today, think through the life of Jesus. Remember and retrace all you can about Him as you spend time in His presence.

- Greg

April 25

Tips for the Tempted

SCRIPTURE: Luke 22:35-53

VERSE FOR TODAY: “and he said to them, ‘Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.’” (Luke 22:46)

Have you been sleeping - spiritually speaking? A lot of Christians are. Many Christians have forgotten that “the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8) They have therefore fallen into temptation unaware that Satan is waiting to devour their very soul.

When we are weary, (as were the disciples in our text), we are more likely to become lax in our vigilant walk with Jesus.

Here are some helpful guidelines for avoiding Satan’s trap:

- Get into God’s Word; it will shine a bright light on temptation and sin so that you can see it for what it really is. (Psalm 119:9, 11, 105)
- Pray. Jesus understands temptation and can help. (Hebrews 2:18; Psalm 50:15)
- Fill your mind with good things. If your mind is full of garbage, your life will follow suit. (Philippians 4:8)
- Practice right living. With the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life, you can overcome temptations. (Galatians 5:22-23)
- Fellowship with other Christians; they will encourage you to walk right before your God. (Hebrews 10:24-25)
- Take God’s exit; He will always provide a way out for those who sincerely want to take it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray that you will not fall into temptation.

- Tom

April 26

Jesus Messes with Our Lives

SCRIPTURE: Luke 22:54-23:12

VERSE FOR TODAY: “If you are the Christ, tell us.’ But He said to them. ‘If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I ask a question, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.’” (Luke 22:67-69)

Jesus will not force anyone to believe in Him. It is our choice. Here the Council of Elders, the chief priests and scribes were once again trying to trap Jesus with His own words so they could have Him crucified. Jesus knew what they were doing, and He knew they would not be swayed from their agenda. Getting rid of Jesus was the top priority for this group; He was messing with their lives and livelihoods.

Sometimes a Christian can get to the point where he doesn't want Jesus to mess with his sin-filled life, so he chooses to no longer believe in Him. I recently spoke to a young man who had done this very thing. He grew up in a Christian home, accepted Christ at an early age and then decided he didn't even believe that God existed. Why did he suddenly change his belief system? I can only say that his life choices had, for some time, been in direct conflict to God's will and word.

Know this, when you choose to follow Jesus, He's going to mess with your life!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to mess with your life.

- Beth

April 27

Listening for One Voice

SCRIPTURE: Luke 23:13-49

VERSE FOR TODAY: "But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed." (Luke 23:23)

The crowds were "persuaded" by the chief priests and elders to ask for the death of Jesus. (Matthew 27:20) Whether this was done by lies or intimidation is hard to tell. But the fact remains that they were persuaded to call for the murder of the Son of God.

Have you ever been persuaded to go along with a crowd even though deep inside you knew that it was wrong? There's a lot of that going on today – people saying "yes" when they should be saying "no". I believe this is happening mostly because it's hard to hear the voice of God over the shouting of angry mobs unless our hearts are "tuned in" to His voice.

My brother has hearing aids that can block out the voices of all but those who are near him in a crowded restaurant. Don't really understand how that technology works. I do know however, that if we will open God's Word daily and read with a desire to learn, He will block out the shouting voices of the mob so that we can hear the one voice that really matters, the one nearest to us, the voice of Jesus our Lord.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you make your daily decisions based on His voice rather than the voice of the crowd.

- Tom

April 28

Looking for Jesus in All the Wrong Places

SCRIPTURE: Luke 23:50-24:12

VERSE FOR TODAY: “In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead?’” (Luke 24:5)

“Why are you looking for Jesus (who is living) among the dead (in a grave yard)?”

It was a simple question. While I don’t think the angel was looking for an answer from the women, I do think it was meant to make them think. “Why AM I here?” The angel reminded them of the words Jesus had spoken about the resurrection. Then they remembered.

Sometimes, I think we need to be reminded too. We look for Jesus in all the wrong places. We look for him in our job, our money, our recreation, our addictions, and even our traditions. All of these things lead absolutely nowhere. They are dead ends.

So where do we find Jesus? I think the obvious place is within the pages of the Word. Everything we need to know about Jesus and how to live a life in relationship with Him is spelled out for us. Instead of taking advantage of the privilege of reading His words, we look for the answers in all the wrong places.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today praying that you will not look to dead ends or dead things to make you feel fulfilled. Pray that you would seek Jesus through the Word.

- Lori

April 29

It's All About Jesus

SCRIPTURE: Luke 24:13-53

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” (Luke 24:27)

While having a conversation with my daughter about a sermon we'd just heard, I said that, unfortunately, the preacher didn't say much about Jesus. She replied that there really wasn't anything about Jesus in the passage that the preacher used.

That was the wrong thing to tell a preacher.

Her quick and innocent comment launched us into a deep theological discussion. “Jesus is in every page!” I assured her. “And if you don't believe me, pick out a verse – any verse – and I'll preach Jesus from it!”

She started to mumble something about Leviticus, but my wife just shook her head and gave her a look that said, “Don't even try.” So, that's when I guess she decided to take my word for it, and we moved on to other thoughts about the day's message.

As Christians, we should all aspire to see Jesus in every page, every story, and every line. He is there! In every Levitical code, Psalm, and Proverb. We never have to do any fancy footwork to insert Him; He is there. He is there.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: In your prayer time today, ask God to show you Jesus in the lines of scripture each day. Pray for your preacher, the Rock Solid team, and me. Pray we all would always spotlight Jesus – first and foremost – in all our preaching.

- Greg

April 30

Pour It On

SCRIPTURE: John 1:1-28

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” (John 1:16)

Recently, our daughter was making chocolate covered pretzels. My wife noticed she was dipping the pretzel, and then placing it on the wax paper to harden. My wife

commented that it is not enough to just *dip* it! That doesn't cover it all! At some point, you *pour* it on!

As John takes us from “in the beginning” to the coming of Jesus into the world, he reminds us that the coming of Christ did not initiate grace. God's grace had been in the world for millennia! As God moved history toward the time of the Jesus, grace took the form of patience as God pushed the sins of the faithful forward to the cross where God's grace toward them would become justified. The cross wasn't the first act of God's grace; it was just where God finally poured it on! The covering was complete! It was “grace upon grace”!

Have you let God “pour it on” the way He wants to in your life? We have all experienced the primary grace of God, made manifest in His patience with us as He awaits our decision to repent. But He ultimately desires to “pour on” His grace with a total covering and forgiveness.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: If you've not let God pour His grace on you through your acceptance of Him in immersion, talk to Him about why you are disobeying Him. If you have, thank Him for the grace that has completely covered your life.

- Greg

May 1

Good News

SCRIPTURE: John 1:29-51

VERSE FOR TODAY: “He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which translated means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas’ (which is translated Peter).” (John 1:41-42)

Andrew had heard John, the baptizer, preaching and became one of His devoted disciples. Then, when John declared the good news that Jesus was the “Lamb of God”, Andrew knew it was time to follow the One for whom John had prepared the way. He spent the day with Jesus, and then went to find his brother. He was anxious for Simon to hear about the Christ. When we accept Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, and our Lord and King, it is only natural to want our friends and family to follow Him as well.

Sometimes, after our witness has received a cold shoulder, we begin to shy away from sharing the Gospel. Also, the longer we are Christians it seems the less excited we are with our own salvation, much less that of others. We must remember that we have received the greatest gift ever given to man - the gift of God's love. To put that gift in a box and never share it is the greatest act of selfishness there is.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to show you who to share Jesus with today and seek wisdom on how to tell of His love and grace.

- Beth

May 2

How Jesus Meets Our Needs

SCRIPTURE: John 2

VERSE FOR TODAY: “When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine.’” (John 2:3)

This is the first recorded public miracle of Jesus, but I think it is something else as well. I believe this story gives us a very simple formula for how Jesus meets our needs.

First, there was a need revealed as indicated in our verse for today. Jesus knows our needs before we tell Him, but He desires that we communicate with Him.

Second, instructions were given, and there was a willingness to comply. (vv. 5-8) This gets to the heart of the matter! You want God’s help, answers and blessings, but are you willing to comply with His instructions as found in His Word? What if the servants had said, “Six of *these* jars, why that’s 180 gallons! Too much work! Why don’t we just fill up a few small jugs?” Do you think the miracle ever would have happened? Would the need have been met?

Third, the need was more than met. (vv. 9-10) Jesus provided better than the best! That’s what Jesus does. “Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.” (Ephesians 3:20)

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God whatever you need to ask today, but be willing to obey His instructions if you expect Him to meet your need.

- Tom

May 3

Nic at Night

SCRIPTURE: John 3:1-21

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, ‘Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.’” (John 3:1-2)

Sometimes I think Nicodemus gets a bad rap for coming to Jesus at night. People question his intentions or his bravery. However, I tend to see him as a man on a mission. If he approached Jesus during the day, when all the other Pharisees could see, it could easily turn into another opportunity for the critics to grill Jesus. That's not what he wanted. He wanted answers. He wanted to learn from Jesus. He knew the best time to get the answers he really wanted was when no one else was around. I'd say that's pretty brave and commendable.

What about us? Do we seek out the best time and opportunity to meet with Jesus because we crave to know His will? Do we meet with Him when there will be no other distractions? Sometimes that's hard, but it is necessary in order for us to seek the answers He has for us.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for a desire to have uninterrupted meetings with Jesus. Then consider when and where you could best meet with Him.

- Lori

May 4

The Best Man

SCRIPTURE: John 3:22-4:3

VERSE FOR TODAY: "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30)

Of the many weddings in which I've taken part, only once have I been the "best man". It was at my brother's wedding. As some have pointed out, it's quite a curious term. One would think that the *best* man is the one getting married! But if I'd run with that title – if I'd pushed my brother aside as his bride approached and stood beside her, to say the least there'd been quite a bit of chaos (not to mention some unpleasant looks from my wife!). No, the best man's job is not to woo, wow, or win the bride for himself. His job is simply to make certain preparations and insure that all is as it should be so that bride and bridegroom come together.

Yet, as humans, we often think the Bride (the Church) is somehow our own. We believe titles we may hold in the church entitle us to take her where we want to go. We tend to promote ourselves ahead of her Groom and maintain her for our own pleasures.

Our job is as John saw his. Our only goal is to decrease – to shrink from the limelight of our relationships – that Jesus may be known and glorified.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask our Father to help you step aside into your rightful place this day. Ask Him to show you as you go through the day where you can shine the light on Jesus rather than self.

- Greg

May 5

The Samaritan Woman

SCRIPTURE: John 4:4-42

VERSE FOR TODAY: “The woman said, ‘I know that the Messiah’ (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.’ Then Jesus declared, ‘I, the one speaking to you - I am He.’” (John 4:25-26)

A sinner, a disgraced woman, finds herself in a divine appointment with Jesus. This is one of those stories where it is easy to cast judgment on the Samaritan woman. She was a sinner, had a sin-filled past, and was living in sin. She knew what it was like to be judged by others.

Some people read this section and try to put their sin on a sliding scale. Many people think, “Well, I’m not that bad.” And others may think to themselves “I can never be forgiven because I’m done so much worse.”

We shouldn’t be attempting to justify or rank our sins by human standards. When we accepted Jesus and were baptized, our sins were washed away –we were made clean. The Samaritan woman learned of God’s grace all in a trip to get a bit of water. And while the conversation was probably more than she bargained for when she offered Jesus a drink...I can’t imagine how my conversation with Christ would go if I had a divine appointment on the way to post office this afternoon. Can you imagine your conversation with the Messiah?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Take a moment to reflect on what the Lord might say to you if you found yourself in a face-to-face conversation today.

-Kristin

May 6

Keep Following Jesus

SCRIPTURE: John 4:43-54

VERSE FOR TODAY: “When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and was imploring Him to come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death.” (John 4:47)

Have you ever gone to Jesus and implored Him to do something for you - heal a loved one, save a lost soul, or repair a broken heart? I have, and I know how this father felt. But it would be good for us to remember that God is not our personal magic genie

who can be called upon to wave his hand and with an “Abracadabra” put everything right.

It’s hard to read this passage without thinking of Job. He was living the good life - rich in finances and family, and then everything was taken away. He did nothing wrong; yet trouble came. Sometimes that happens to us. When things are out of our control, we often find ourselves at the foot of the cross begging Jesus to change our circumstances. Sometimes He does, but often He just changes us.

God has taught me a power lesson from this verse and Job’s life. When I’m desperate for answers, I will go to Jesus, tell Him what I need, and then keep my eyes on Him. The one thing I know I will do – keep following Jesus.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Seek how God wants you live today no matter what is going on around you.

- Beth

May 7

“Do You Want to Be Healed?”

SCRIPTURE: John 5:1-23

VERSE FOR TODAY: “When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he asked him, ‘Do you want to be healed?’” (John 5:6)

At first reading, it may seem like a silly question, but I can assure you it was quite valid. Some folks enjoy living in pain and uncertainty; it’s a part of who they are. Through the years many have told me they wanted spiritual healing, but then were not willing to do what Jesus told them to do. So, I understand why Jesus would ask this question.

The sick man told Jesus what he was trying to do. (v. 7) Isn’t this just like us? Jesus wants to heal us physically, mentally, or spiritually; He wants to help us through a difficult time in our lives; He wants to show us the way. Our response? We begin explaining to Jesus what we have been doing to fix the situation. Stop talking, and start listening. We just might learn something!

“Jesus said to him, ‘Get up, take up your bed, and walk.’” (v. 8) Jesus already has the answer! If you want to be healed, I mean really healed - listen to Him and do what He says. It really is just that simple. Don’t argue with Him, don’t tell Him how you would fix the situation, just do what He says.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God for His help with your situation today, then do what He tells you to do.

- Tom

May 8

How Can I Believe?

SCRIPTURE: John 5:24-47

VERSE FOR TODAY: “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?” (John 5:44)

In this passage, Jesus is talking to the Jews at a feast. He tells them earlier that they searched the Scriptures in hopes for eternal life, but they refused to believe in the one to whom the Scriptures testified: Himself! He shows the Jews how they have believed in people who have come in their own name, giving them glory and praise, but will not receive one who comes in the Father’s name.

Many times people will read the Bible, go to church, or listen to self-proclaimed prophets to achieve the hope and glory of eternal life. But Jesus says it’s not enough if it doesn’t lead you to put your trust in Him. As Jesus put it,

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Reading the scriptures yet not believing in Jesus isn’t going to get you to Heaven. You have to believe, and accept Him as your Savior - being buried with Him in baptism – to experience all He has for you. You can believe when you stop relying on glory from others, and start seeking the glory from the only God.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God, to help you stop looking to others for approval or validation and only to Him.

- Truli

May 9

The King Makers

SCRIPTURE: John 6:1-21

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Perceiving then that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by Himself.” (John 6:15)

Many of us reading this together may understand what Jesus did here and why. The time had not yet come for a “Jesus rally”. His kingdom was not “of this world”, so He ducks the king-making crowd. But let’s stop and consider for a moment what might have happened had Jesus let events take their course and accepted a crown and scepter from the crowd.

Think about it! Most, by human logic would reason, “Hey, if I were king, then people would have to do whatever I say! People are wanting to follow me as king – what better way to lead them where I want them to go!”

But here’s the thing: the truth is that no man can *make* Jesus King. He already is King. We can only bow before Him in subjection or stand against Him in rebellion. In fact, part of the problem today is people “making Jesus” into things. When people “make” Jesus king, they tend to make Him King Santa Claus, King Grandpa, King Best Friend, etc. No, Jesus *is* King. Accept Him as He is on His terms – or not at all.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask the Father today if you have truly surrendered to the Jesus that is or if you have made Jesus into something He is not.

- Greg

May 10

Prove It

SCRIPTURE: John 6:22-40

VERSE FOR TODAY: “So they asked him, ‘What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?’” (John 6:30)

Are these guys forgetful? Oblivious? Slow? I mean, really. They had just seen Jesus multiply the loaves and fish to feed a multitude just *the day before!* I’m talking 24 hours ago! Now, they ask Him (to His face, mind you) what miraculous sign He would do for them. Basically, they are saying, “Prove it, Jesus. Prove who you are and what you can do.” I wonder if Jesus rolled His eyes or let out a long sigh before He answered them.

Before I get too carried away with my critical comments, I wonder if He ever rolls His eyes in my direction. I have seen Him work in my life (even miraculously, at times). I know who He is, and I know His nature. Yet, there are times when I am forgetful...and oblivious...and slow. I fret and worry about circumstances around me. I sit and wonder how in the world things will work out. I beg for some sign that will reassure me and “prove it”. All the while, I forget the numerous times when He has worked in my life, even just prior to now. When will I learn?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time praying that you would be mindful of who Jesus is and what He has already done in your life.

- *Lori*

May 11

Grumbling

SCRIPTURE: John 6:41-71

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, ‘I am the bread that came down out of heaven.’ They were saying, ‘Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, ‘I have come down out of heaven?’” (John 6:41-42)

Have you ever noticed that when people don’t understand something they grumble? The Jews were often in this place. In Moses’ day, they were saved from slavery, and they grumbled because they missed the fruit in Egypt. And in this passage they didn’t understand who Jesus was and so they grumbled.

We are much like the Jews in this regard. Jesus tries to share His life with us, and we are too busy doing churchy things to understand. We find ourselves spiritual armchair quarterbacks. We don’t understand all the things happening on the field, so we grumble and decide how we could or would have done it better. How often have you sat in a worship service and just grumbled? It is easy to obsess over that which is unimportant and not spend time with Him. We find ourselves being critical over minor things - the flower arrangement, the long song we don’t like, and much more - when we need to concentrate on the Lord’s Table, His Sacrifice for us, and worshipping Him.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray that God will keep you from grumbling so you can focus your eyes on Him.

- *Beth*

May 12

Eyes on Calvary

SCRIPTURE: John 7:1-29

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly but in private.” (John 7:10)

Jesus knew that every move He made was being watched. The leaders of the people would stop at nothing to have Him arrested and killed. He knew His time of

crucifixion was coming, but not just yet. Jesus was making daily choices with His eyes on Calvary. He was deliberately moving toward the cross, making sure that every decision was within the will of His Father.

I was just wondering this morning how well I am doing at making daily choices with my eyes on Calvary. Am I making every decision within the will of the Father, and am I daily aware that every move I make is being watched by someone who would stop at nothing to crucify Jesus publicly all over again?

We make choices every day. You've already made at least two: wake up, and read God's Word and the RSM devotional. But what about the rest of your day, where do you go from here? What will you wear; where will you eat lunch; what will you eat and with whom? Will your choices help you to keep your eyes on Calvary? Will your decisions bring glory to God or public disgrace to Christ and His Church?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to keep the sacrifice of Calvary in your mind's eye and in your decision making all day long.

- Tom

May 13

An Encounter with Jesus

SCRIPTURE: John 7:30-8:1

VERSE FOR TODAY: "...Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him." "Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, 'Why didn't you bring him in?' 'No one ever spoke the way this man does,' the guards declared." (John 7:32b, 45-46)

The temple guards were sent, by the Pharisees, to do a job – arrest Jesus. And yet, when they returned, they were empty handed. Of course, the Pharisees didn't like that at all. "Why didn't you bring him in?"

They had an answer, and it was a good one. "No one ever spoke the way this man does." They knew He was different by the way He spoke to them and the things He said, and it changed them. Jesus spoke with compassion and authority. They were compelled to change their actions, even disobey orders, when they encountered Him. What about you?

When you come into contact with Jesus, through time spent in prayer and in the Word, are you so touched by His words and His authority that you change your actions? Are you willing to even go against what the world around you expects you to do? Allow yourself to truly experience Jesus. You will be changed.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today thanking God for the life-changing love and compassion of Jesus. Thank Him for the awesome opportunity to encounter Jesus and be changed by His words. Then pray for the willingness in your own heart to be changed.

- Lori

May 14

Old Enough to Know Better

SCRIPTURE: John 8:2-20

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before Him.” (John 8:9)

Ever notice that? Once Jesus had wisely pointed out their own sin, shame, and disgracefulness in this ill-conceived attempt to trap Him, it is the older men who walk away from the scene first. Why was that?

Were they old enough to know more of the scriptures that maybe Jesus wrote about in the dirt? Was it the longer backlog of sin in a long life that made them more quickly realize their own guilt? Did they simply know from life experience when someone had gotten the best of them and determined to try again another day?

Or did they finally realize that they were just old enough to know better?

Time and again the scriptures tell us that with age should come wisdom (Job 12:12), and that time spent following God ought bring a spiritual maturity deep enough to guide others. (Hebrews 5:12) While, as in the Hebrews passage, this is not always the case, it is the expectation!

Has that expectation of God come to fruition in your life? Do you see that you have outgrown and are continuing to outgrow many sins?

Aren't you old enough to know better?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray today about sins that you continue to struggle with. Ask the Father to help you walk away from them today.

- Greg

May 15

Always Pleasing the Father

SCRIPTURE: John 8:21-30

VERSE FOR TODAY: “The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.” (John 8:29)

Today, I made lunch for my youngest. It wasn't her favorite. She picked at it a bit and asked for some dessert. I stated she could have dessert when her lunch was finished. Easy, right?

As I walked away, I instinctively knew what would happen next, so moments later I wasn't surprised when she told me she had finished her lunch. She hadn't - and we both knew it. I was not pleased. Yet, she was sticking to her story until I reminded her that continuing to lie would increase the consequences when we found her lunch in the trash. After getting the truth, we went into the kitchen, looked at the evidence and discussed choices and consequences. She looked up at me and said, “Mommy, why do I make bad choices?”

Why do we make bad choices? We know God loves us and sets guidelines for our well-being, but we still do things that are displeasing. Then, we attempt to hide our sins in the trash and hope no one sees them! God sees them, He knows about our messes. Thankfully, we don't have to be perfect. God loves us, and forgives us when we confess to Him.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for His perfect Son and plan of redemption for us.

-Kristin

May 16

“Continue in My Word”

SCRIPTURE: John 8:31-59

VERSE FOR TODAY: “So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, ‘If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine.’” (John 8:31)

How do we know we are Christians? We know because we follow His Word. We have accepted Him as our Lord, repented of our sins, confessed His name, and were buried with Him in baptism. We accepted our new name – Christian - and our new family – the Church.

The problem is, having done all this, we begin to think that we have arrived. But in truth, we have just begun a long journey, because Jesus said, “continue in My word”. Continue means to remain in existence – to endure. We must remain in Christ; we must endure to the end.

We can’t just “get by”. All my life I’ve heard people say that they hoped to get into Heaven by the “skin of their teeth”. I’ve thought about that a lot through the years and I understand why it’s said, but for me, I’d like to walk into Heaven knowing that I have done everything to the best of my ability to live for Christ. I long to meet Jesus and hear God say “well done.” (Matthew 25:21) I look forward to the day when God calls me home, but until He does, I will continue in His Word.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to continually make His Word a lamp to your feet and a light to your path.

- Beth

May 17

Do It

SCRIPTURE: John 9

VERSE FOR TODAY: “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work.” (John 9:4)

The times we live in are dark, and it’s getting darker by the moment. We have friends, co-workers, and family members who need to know about Jesus. We must share the Gospel with them before the night overtakes them.

We have our marching orders. “And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.’” (Mark 15:15)

We must do it. Understand this, there is no “Plan B”. God chose you and me to carry out His work, and He is counting on us to work “while it is day”.

We must do it right. Those who do not obey the Gospel will be lost forever. (2 Thessalonians 1:8) There is only one Gospel (Galatians 1:8-9), and it pertains to the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:3)

We must do it right now. We don’t know how long this world is going to last. (Matthew 24:36-39) So, let’s quit waiting for someone else to share the Gospel with people we already have a relationship with.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to open doors of opportunity for you to share the Good News about Jesus and don’t hesitate to walk through them. Do it, do it right, and do it right now!

- Tom

May 18

Oh, There You Are

SCRIPTURE: John 10:1-21

VERSE FOR TODAY: “I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me - ” (John 10:14)

There I stood. I was in the middle of the food court in an enormous mall. It was the end of November, Christmas shopping was in full swing, and it would be an understatement to say it was crowded. Saturday at 1 p.m. was quite possibly the worst time to eat, but my pregnant daughter-in-law was hungry. So, we braced ourselves and entered the dreaded food court. Of course, the inevitable happened and we lost track of each other within seconds. After receiving my food, I decided to scan the area to try and locate them. It took me about four seconds to see my kids in that sea of people. Over the past 24 years of being a mother, I have experienced this event over and over and it still baffles me. I think it is a God-given super power bestowed upon moms.

Jesus said, “I know my sheep and my sheep know me.” We are His sheep – His kids. He knows us. Now for the big question: Do we know Him that well? Do you look at a situation and immediately recognize His presence? I hope so. If you truly know Him and spend time with Him daily, I think you will. It might take you more than four seconds, but hey...

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today praying that truly knowing Him will cause you to recognize His presence in your daily life.

- Lori

May 19

Check the Stats

SCRIPTURE: John 10:22-42

VERSE FOR TODAY: “but if I do them, even though you do not believe in me, believe in the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” (John 10:38)

I love baseball. My lack of TV channels keeps me from watching a lot, but I do enjoy it. When it’s time for the All-Star game, I do my duty as a fan and vote. While I’d love to see the team filled with guys from my favorite team, I actually do some research

to see who is really worthy. Sometimes I say, “Who’s that guy?” and look up his statistics so far for the year and vote accordingly.

That’s kind of what Jesus said to the Pharisees here. He is OK with their doubt to an extent. And He is OK with yours. All He asks you to do is check His stats.

Do you have a hard time buying that God would actually send His son to die? Is it unfathomable that He be born of a virgin, in poverty, far-off in a seemingly unimportant land in an ancient time? Jesus points us to His body of work: blind eyes, deaf ears, lame legs – healed! And for His greatest feat He resurrects a friend and Himself from the dead!

Check the stats. Let doubt go and believe!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Admit doubts that you may have to our Father. He understands and wants to strengthen your faith in prayer today.

- Greg

May 20

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus

SCRIPTURE: John 11:1-54

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ‘Take away the stone,’ he said. ‘But, Lord,’ said Martha, the sister of the dead man, ‘by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.’ Then Jesus said, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?’” (John 11:38-40)

Martha has a habit of questioning Jesus, doesn’t she? She isn’t attempting to be rude or disrespectful; she is a “type A” personality. She wants to understand the logistics. “Why open the tomb, Jesus? To what end? What good will come of it?”

I have always felt that Martha gets a bit of unfair treatment when the subject of a study. She is a servant, a worker-bee. She sees something that needs to be done, and she gets on it. You will never be thirsty or hungry at an event she oversees; all plates and cups will be full. Being a servant is a good thing! We need people with this personality to help get things accomplished.

However, in this moment, her servant personality bursts through and keeps her from seeing that Jesus is about to do something truly amazing. Her mind, cluttered with logistics, keeps her from enjoying what is about to happen.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Is your mind cluttered with concerns that you should turn over to God? Take some time to stop and see what He has on the agenda.

-Kristin

May 21

Anointing Jesus' Feet

SCRIPTURE: John 11:55-12:19

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of perfume." (John 12:3)

Can you capture the moment in your mind? The image of Mary anointing Jesus's feet is absolutely one of the truest moments of worship recorded. She was worshipping Jesus without reserve not caring what others might think. When was the last time you did this by yourself or in a public worship service?

Mary brought perfume that costs almost a year's wages (now that's a lot of money for a bottle of perfume), poured it on Jesus' feet, and then, instead of using a towel, dried His feet with her hair! Jesus's heart was heavy with the knowledge of His approaching betrayal and crucifixion. How blessed Mary was to worship and minister to Jesus in such selfless abandon. To anoint the King of Kings, her Savior and Lord - this was an act of love and supreme devotion.

Can we worship Jesus like Mary did? Of course, we can. We can worship Him with our whole being today - loving Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. (Mark 12:30)

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you abandon yourself in worship as you never have, then sing His praises alone or with some friends.

- Beth

May 22

Seeing Jesus

SCRIPTURE: John 12:20-50

VERSE FOR TODAY: "So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.'" (John 12:21)

When Jesus was at the height of His popularity among the common people, Greeks came with the request, “We wish to see Jesus.”

To see Jesus is to be convinced and convicted. Nathanael, speaking of Jesus, wondered if anything good could come out of Nazareth. Philip’s answer, “Come and see.” (John 1:46)

The woman at the well told the people of Sychar, “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did.” (John 4:29)

They later responded to her, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.” (John 4:42)

Thomas, who had once doubted the resurrected Jesus, took one look and exclaimed, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28)

We live in a world of doubters who so badly need to see Jesus. But where can they see Him, in the Bible? Yes, but they won’t read it. Looks like it’s up to us. “And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God.” (2 Corinthians 3:2) Remember, this world has seen plenty of so-called Christians; now they want to see Jesus!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to let people see Jesus in you.

- Tom

May 23

What Do You Say to a Love That Big?

SCRIPTURE: John 13:1-30

VERSE FOR TODAY: “It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He now showed them the full extent of His love.” (John 13:1)

When I read the verse for today, my reaction was simply, “Wow. What do you say to a love that big?” Think about all the inadequacies of those Jesus was speaking of. The disciples had been with Him for a long time. He had seen them in some very low times. He knew each of them intimately – including their mistakes and sins. Now, very soon, He would be betrayed by one of His own, denied by another, and deserted by the rest at least for a time. He knew all this and still He loved.

Still He loves. He loves me.

When I doubt His power... When I forget to speak to Him... When I judge others... When I am jealous... When I disobey Him... When I speak harshly to my family... When I don't love my enemies... When I think unkind thoughts...

Still He loves. He loves me. What do you say to a love that big?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time thanking Him for His undying, unconditional love and sacrifice for you.

- Lori

May 24

Love Only One Another?

SCRIPTURE: John 13:31-14:14

VERSE FOR TODAY: “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35)

Since I'm a visitor somewhere almost every Sunday, I see Church members hugging, laughing, conversing – especially during the “hug and howdy” time. This all happens while my family and I – if we do not go out of our way to travel the auditorium – will get one or two polite “good mornings” with tight-lipped smiles and an obligatory handshake. Surely the Lord had more in mind than loving *only* one another. And surely it was more than surface niceties.

The Church would be known by the way she loves all the members of her body, and it would be more than surface conversation. Acts 2 gives us a very different picture from the way today's Church loves one another. Jesus also commanded we love those we don't know – our neighbors (anyone we've opportunity to love) and even our enemies.

When you go to church this week, go out of your way to love someone you don't know. Go beyond the surface conversation with those you do know – serve them in some way – don't just pray for them, pray with them. Go deeper. Then, when you get home or when you go to work, look for someone else to love.

Let Jesus' disciples be known by real love.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to open your eyes to people who are around you daily that need love.

- Greg

May 25

On This Side of the Rainbow

SCRIPTURE: John 14:15-31

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” (John 14:27)

I have always enjoyed listening to Judy Garland sing what became her life’s theme song, “*Somewhere Over the Rainbow*”. I think it’s because it transports me to a beautiful, far-away, peaceful place where “problems melt like lemon drops”.

Peace, sweet peace.

Now, the difficulty is that when the song ends I find I’m still here on *this* side of the rainbow and my problems are nowhere near the melting point! How will I ever find peace in this world? How will I ever cope with the day-to-day stresses of my job and relationships?

First, I must accept the fact that I’ve had to deal with trouble in the past, and I’m going to have to again in the future. Being a Christian doesn’t change that. Jesus said, “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (Matthew 6:34)

Second, I need to seek peace in the only place it can be found – Jesus Christ. Rainbow songs and lemon drops will not get me through this day (and today is all I need to be concerned with); only an unshakable faith in the One who gave His all for me will do.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for peace that only Jesus can give.

- Tom

May 26

Branches

SCRIPTURE: John 15

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.” (John 15:4)

I like to garden. Well, I like to plant things and watch them grow. I don't really like to pull weeds, but it is necessary to have a healthy garden. I like to eat the produce of my garden as well. If a plant does not produce what it is intended to, it is not going to stay in my garden long.

This verse is easy to understand if you know anything about gardening. If the branch is pulled off the vine, it will die. Life is in the ability to get nourishment from the vine to the branches.

Jesus is our vine. If we are not firmly connected to Him, we will have no nourishment and therefore not produce fruit. In the end, we will be cutoff.

How sad it is to put a lot of work into your garden only to have bugs or blight ruin your hard work. Don't let the bugs and blight of this world separate you from your source of strength. Remain attached to Jesus, produce a good crop, and wait with great anticipation for the coming harvest!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to trim you so that you will be stronger and more firmly attached to Him.

- Beth

May 27

From Sorrow to Joy

SCRIPTURE: John 16

VERSE FOR TODAY: "So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you." (John 16:22)

Jesus was preparing His disciples for His crucifixion. There would be great sorrow, followed by the joy of knowing the resurrected Christ that no one could ever take away.

Have you ever been at a point in your life where you felt that someone or something had stolen all your joy? I have. In over forty years in the ministry I have found myself in the pit of despair many times. Usually it was a difficult individual or family in the church that seemed to suck all the energy right out of me along with the joy of serving as evangelist for a local congregation.

I remember sitting in a Sunday worship as the services began. The church had grown from less than 20 members to well over 200 in a relatively short time. As a result, I had been working over 100 hours a week: calling on prospects, going through our second building program, and constantly dealing with a demanding "founding" family of

that congregation. As a very dynamic hour of worship began I thought, “Where is my joy?”

Since that day I have been reminded many times that joy comes from knowing Jesus and no man can take that away from me.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to remind you daily that your joy comes from Him!

- Tom

May 28

Be Evidence of Your God

SCRIPTURE: John 17:1-26

VERSE FOR TODAY: “I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.” (John 17:6)

According to an online dictionary the word “manifest” means “display or show (a quality or feeling) by one's acts or appearance” or to “be evidence of”. In our verse for today, Jesus said he had manifested the Father’s name to the people. He showed by his actions who God was. He was evidence of God. Wow. His very being was proof of who God was and is. That was a quite a responsibility if you think about it.

Aren’t you glad you don’t have to live up to that kind of responsibility? Oh...wait a minute. That is our job description, isn’t it? The Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 that we have been given the ministry of reconciliation. It is up to us to display (through our actions) and tell (with our mouth) who God is to those who don’t know. We are to be about the business of reconciling lost men to their God. That is indeed quite a responsibility. It seems a little overwhelming at times. But lest you get discouraged, remember the words of a wise evangelist I once heard, “It won’t take forever, just the rest of your life.”

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today praying about your responsibility to be the “evidence of” God to those around you.

- Lori

May 29

Crossing the Kidron

SCRIPTURE: John 18:1-24

VERSE FOR TODAY: "...He went out with His disciples across the brook Kidron...." (John 18:1)

It was "across the brook Kidron" that King David left Jerusalem in Absalom's rebellion. As he drew near the edge of the city, he stopped to watch the procession he'd been leading walk past. People wept bitterly as they feared the time of the great King had ended. Then, they all crossed the Kidron. In fact, "crossing the Kidron" became a Hebrew idiom for "leaving town" with a kind of infamy. Yet, David eventually returned to the throne.

Before the cross, and sometimes today, it indeed seems that Jesus has been removed from the throne. But know this - He too will return to it. Jesus Himself tells us *His* hour has come. (Mark 14:41; John 17:1) Nothing happens to Jesus but by His permission and glory. In fact, Nehemiah tells us that to the east of Jerusalem – near the Kidron - was the "King's Garden." (Nehemiah 3:15) It was His time, and He was in His place. Jesus too would return to Jerusalem – to be lifted on a cross and proclaimed King, to be lifted from the grave and proclaimed God, and to be lifted from the earth and proclaimed returning - all in His time.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Share with God your worries about your world where it does not identify Him as King. Ask for the peace that comes in knowing He sits on the throne of the New Jerusalem.

- Greg

May 30

Peter Denies Jesus Three Times

SCRIPTURE: John 18:25-19:22

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, 'You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?' He denied it, saying, 'I am not.' One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, 'Didn't I see you with him in the garden?' Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow." (John 18:25-27)

Have you seen the TV show "*What Would You Do*"? The premise was to set up unsuspecting people in various scenarios to see how they react. One example: what

would you do if you saw a foster parent being kind to their biological child and treating the foster child badly. Simple tests to see how unknowing Americans react when faced with an ethical situation.

When it comes to Peter denying Jesus, I think everyone has wondered, “What would I do in that specific scenario?”

When you consider that there are people in the world today that have to consider this question on a daily basis, it adds additional heaviness to the thought. Would your convictions give you the strength to speak up as a Christ follower, even if the result would be death?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God that we are only thinking in hypotheticals today, and pray for the truly persecuted faithful around the world.

-Kristin

May 31

It Is Finished

SCRIPTURE: John 19:23-42

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’ And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.” (John 19:30)

“It is finished,” what powerful words – you can almost feel His relief. Jesus’ fleshly body had been ripped open by beatings and crucifixion. If just for a moment we realize how human Christ was, and that He submitted to all of this for us, we must fall to our knees in thankfulness.

This passage brings one right to the foot of the cross. Have you been to the foot of the cross? You cannot follow Christ until you have been there, until you have knelt at His feet and let Him cover you with His sacrifice – the Blood of the Lamb, until you have submitted to Jesus just as He submitted to God.

It is finished! Yes, the suffering of Christ on the cross is finished, but we are still on our journey. We are on the narrow road surrounded by difficulties, the world’s temptations and roadblocks. Keep your eyes on Jesus, the risen Savior, and keep walking with Him, then someday you too will be able to say with great relief “it is finished,” as you walk into the arms of the One who gave His all for you.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you, though His grace, to finish well.

- Beth

June 1

Peering into the Empty Tomb

SCRIPTURE: John 20

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.” (John 20:1)

The most amazing and wonderful event in the history of the World – the resurrection of Jesus Christ! There had never been a day like it before, and there would never be a day like it again. Resurrection Sunday! The day of the greatest victory ever recorded in the annuals of history. The victory over death and the grave – the day Jesus rose from the dead!

Something to consider, why was the stone rolled away – to let Jesus out? Certainly not! Do you think a rock could constrain the Creator of the Universe? No, I believe the stone was moved so that we could go in. “Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there.” (John 20:6)

God already knew the victory was His, but He needed us to know that the victory was ours as well! Don’t let the bad news of this world get you down. Peer into the empty tomb every time you pray, partake of the Lord’s Supper, or participate in the baptism of a new believer, and be reminded that the victory is already ours through our Lord Jesus Christ!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to allow you to peer into the empty tomb today as a reminder of your victory in Jesus.

- Tom

June 2

Nosey Rosey

SCRIPTURE: John 21:1-25

VERSE FOR TODAY: “When Peter saw him, he asked, ‘Lord, what about him?’ Jesus answered, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.’” (John 21:21-22)

When I worked in a Special Education classroom, I had a little boy that I would teasingly call Nosey Rosey. He was far more concerned with what everyone else was doing, or not doing, than what he should be doing. He got a kick out of me calling him

this, and he would laugh and shout, “Me not Nosey Rosey”. It was a fun exchange that we repeated daily.

Peter, in the verse for today, tends to be a Nosey Rosey. He has just had an intimate conversation with Jesus in which he has recommitted himself to not only loving Jesus, but serving Him in a whole new way. Immediately, he notices another disciple in the background and his first question is, “What about him?”

How familiar this little bit of Peter’s conversation with Jesus seems to me. Unfortunately, I tend to look around and say, “Hey, Jesus, what about him?” “Does he have to do as much as I have to do?” I often concern myself, as Peter did, with what others may or may not do.

Jesus’ answer to Peter applies to me as well. “What is that to you? You must follow me.”

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to remove thoughts of comparison from your mind so that you may focus on your own commitments and service to Him.

- Lori

June 3

Never to Be Heard from Again

SCRIPTURE: Acts 1

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.” (Acts 1:26)

I wonder if Joseph was upset. Put forward as a potential apostolic candidate, in what would seem to many as a game of chance, he loses to Matthias. Two men have the same qualifications - so much so the choosing is left to God. But Joseph is so attractive just by name.

Joseph – an all-time great Bible name.

Also called Justus, meaning “upright”.

Last name? Barsabbas – “Son of War”.

It just doesn’t get any stronger and manlier.

Might Matthias have been a little intimidated by the choosing? With Jesus “from the beginning”, he’d heard the Master speak of the difficulties of following Him. James

would later write, “not many of you should become teachers”. How much more daunting to be an apostle.

God knows whom He wants for each job. Ours is never to match up to anyone - never to wonder why someone has a place that we don't. Ours is but to realize that each life surrendered to Jesus is a different tool in His hand. Even while one is chosen and the other not – neither are ever to be heard from again in the pages of scripture. The choice was always only for God's glory.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to shed more light on your calling today and give you joy and peace about the role He has asked you to play in His story.

- Greg

June 4

What Must We Do to Be Saved?

SCRIPTURE: Acts 2

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.’ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” (Acts 2:36-38)

Rock Solid Ministries uses this section of scripture a lot. Our evangelists use it from the pulpit, in everyday conversations, and we have multiple pieces of free literature that outline the steps of Salvation for churches and individuals to use in their personal ministries.

You may have heard it said that because of the chaos of trying to baptize all the people that may come forward if you preach about baptism, it is easier to skip it! We can't imagine taking *any* part out! They are all important, significant, individual steps. You must believe, repent, confess, be baptized, and live a Christian life.

Think of it this way, Matthew through Acts was written for the unbeliever, the seeker. Once you are saved, then you begin to read the letters to the churches. They teach us how to live as Christians.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Think back on the day of your baptism. What led up to you making the decision? If you have not been baptized, what is stopping you?

-Kristin

Walking and Leaping

SCRIPTURE: Acts 3

VERSE FOR TODAY: “With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.” (Acts 3:8)

This story brings back memories of the first time I went to Christian Service Camp. I was married and a sponsor. On skit-night, our team chose this scripture to act out. The boy who was to play the part of the beggar was not too happy to have the part, but when it came time for him to walk and leap and praise God, he did it with gusto. Tom and I still remember that time fondly.

Our camper took notes from the beggar and did not hide his enthusiasm. Everyone knew the healed man; they had seen him begging at the gate, and they wanted to know what had happened to him. Peter took the opportunity to preach and invite those around him to follow Christ. It’s wonderful what a little “walking and leaping and praising God” will do!

Like the beggar, we need to be enthusiastic about the healing that Jesus has brought into our lives. And, like Peter, let’s be sure that we never pass up an opportunity to share our faith with others and invite them to follow Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, keep “walking and leaping and praising God!”

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Use your prayer time today to praise God for setting you free; then you might want to leap out of your chair and go find someone to share Jesus with.

- Beth

Be Bold!

SCRIPTURE: Acts 4

VERSE FOR TODAY: “So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge.’” (Acts 4:18-19)

Peter and John were threatened and told to speak no more in the name of Jesus. In verses 18 and 19, we see their response. Later, they shared their experience with other

Christians who began to pray with them. I find it interesting that they did not pray for God to remove the threat but to increase their boldness! “And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.” (Acts 4:29)

Peter had been frightened into timidity once before, and he wasn't going to let it happen again! God answered their prayer. “And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.” (Acts 4:33)

I personally know the cost of standing strong on God's Word in the world, in my family, and yes, even in the church. But now is not the time to become weak in our spirit. Now is the time to speak the truth and to speak it boldly!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Today, add these words to your prayer: “grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.”

- Tom

June 7

Still Bold

SCRIPTURE: Acts 5

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And every day in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.” (Acts 5:42)

Thrown in jail – then beaten and released. Surely this would stop the most bold and stout-hearted of us, wouldn't it? Stop for a moment and consider what that would be like! Think about the public humiliation, disgrace – not to mention the pain! But what did they do? Even when the very men who'd arrested them continued to threaten them, the Apostles stood firm in their faith. I wonder if we could?

When we attempt to spread God's Word, we may also face persecution. As a matter of fact, Jesus guarantees it! But the Apostles give us an example of diligence. They simply answer, “We must obey God rather than men!” (v. 29)

Paul told the Galatians that he would not live a life of man-pleasing, he was determined to please only God. (Galatians 1:10) This is the lifestyle Jesus expects of His followers as He admonished them, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both the body and soul in hell.” (Matthew 10:28)

Be bold!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you be bold and confident when spreading the Gospel.

- Truli

June 8

Not the Perfect Church

SCRIPTURE: Acts 6

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Now in those days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.” (Acts 6:1)

When I was a young boy I had terrible leg aches at night. They were “growing pains”. My small body was lengthening, and it hurt. Yet, there would definitely be something wrong if I were *not* growing.

The Church is not an organization, but an *organism*. It is the living body of Jesus. Where it is alive, it grows. And with growing comes “growing pains”. In today’s reading, we find the Church in Jerusalem growing by leaps and bounds and, since it is growing through the addition of people, problems erupt – “growing pains”.

The love and service of one another in the body is somehow having trouble keeping up with its fast growth. This problem erupts in “human” ways: complaining, accusations, and selfishness. How do you handle such problems?

The congregation in Jerusalem selected men of their own who were known to be obedient and wise to handle the needs of their widows, while the all-important work of prayer and preaching continued. Deal with problems in the church wisely and expeditiously, but *never* be distracted from the mission.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Talk to God about what is or is threatening to distract you or your congregation’s leaders from the mission today. How can you either get back to the mission or help your leaders stay focused?

- Greg

June 9

Your Moment of Truth

SCRIPTURE: Acts 7:1-29

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And the high priest said, ‘Are these things so?’” (Acts 7:1)

What would he say?

Accusations flew. Lies were being told. There wasn't a friendly face in the crowd – the mob – which was now encircling him. Would he do his best politician imitation and back-pedal on some of the bold statements he made? Or would he clarify, in no uncertain terms, just exactly who Jesus was and the folly of the mob's mindset?

One day, and I believe it will be sooner than later, you (and I) will come to our “moment of truth” like Stephen did. It will be the moment when the truth about all the things we say about Jesus will be known. It will not concern the truth of who *Jesus* is; that is fact. But it will concern who *we* are. For in the moment we face persecution for our words about Jesus, the question of our lordship will be made clear.

Stephen didn't just simply say, “I am a follower of Jesus.” He went on to tell them why they should be as well and how guilty they were for not being! Truly, as Stephen faced death and held to his conviction, he was a disciple of Jesus.

What will you say in your “moment of truth”?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to prepare you now to be bold when you are faced with persecution.

- Greg

June 10

Mission from God

SCRIPTURE: Acts 7:30-50

VERSE FOR TODAY: “When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look *more* closely, there came the voice of the Lord:” (Acts 7:31)

When God called Moses, there was no question about what He wanted; He had heard the Israelites crying out for relief from slavery. God had a mission to lead His people from slavery to freedom, and Moses was His man. It would not be easy to follow God's plan. The Israelites often grumbled and complained about the journey; they sought

other gods and even worshipped them at the very time the one true God was providing their needs in the Desert!

God has called each of us to the same mission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:19) This world will never hear about freedom from sin if we don’t tell them. Like Moses, we must be willing to accept our mission. It wasn’t easy for Moses, and it won’t always be easy for us. But no matter how hard the journey becomes, we need to keep our eyes on our mission.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to make His calling and mission clear to you today and every day and guide you to those who are crying out for freedom from the slavery of their sins.

- Beth

June 11

Stiff-Necks

SCRIPTURE: Acts 7:51-8:13

VERSE FOR TODAY: “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.” (Acts 7:51)

Wow! Stephen was completing his retelling of God’s dealing with His people throughout history to the High Priest and other leaders of the Jewish people. Then, he concludes with the words recorded above (and a few more – see vv. 52-53). This did not go over well at all! “Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.” (Acts 7:54) Then they killed him.

How would you respond if your preacher stood before the congregation next Sunday and preached those same words? If you say you would “Amen”, I guarantee you would be in the minority. Some would tell the preacher what they thought on the way out, others would have “roast preacher” for lunch. And then the “Leaders”, after becoming enraged and grinding their teeth at him, would “kindly” let him know that he’s “not very pastor-like”, doesn’t understand compassion and grace, and needs to “learn how to compromise and accept people where they are”. All this before telling him they have come to the conclusion their little flock needs a new “shepherd”.

Probably true, they *do* need a new Shepherd – they need Jesus. Do you need to spend more time with the Great Chiropractor, Jesus?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to work the stiffness out of your neck so you won’t ever resist the Holy Spirit.

- Tom

June 12

“That Very Passage”

SCRIPTURE: Acts 8:14-40

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.” (Acts 8:35)

I’m not sure how it first started, but on several occasions I have heard my husband and two sons playing a game of sorts. One of them (usually my preacher husband) throws out an obscure passage of scripture. The boys then see how they can relate it to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The idea is to be able to come up with a communion meditation from any passage of scripture. Sometimes, they come up with something that is just silly and ridiculous, and we all get a good laugh. However, sometimes they have some truly inspired thoughts that are good. Then we all congratulate them on their massive brainpower.

We need to practice the ability to look at scripture and tell people the good news about Jesus. That is exactly what Philip did in the verse for today. He took what the eunuch was already reading and showed him how to find Jesus in it! What was the result? The man made a decision for Jesus. He had the driver pull that chariot over at the first pond they came to. Philip was able to go down into the water and baptize the man! Now that is being used by God!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend time praying that God would reveal to you Jesus through the Scripture you read. Then be ready to share it with those around you.

- Lori

June 13

The Chosen Instrument

SCRIPTURE: Acts 9:1-23

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine....’” (Acts 9:16a)

As a musician, it can be frustrating to figure out which instrument is right for a particular part in a given song. We might try it a few (or many) different ways or with a number of different sounds from the keyboard to get just the right sound or mood we want the song to create. In that case, when an arranger picks an instrument, it doesn’t mean that the instrument is better or more important; it just means that it’s the correct one for the job.

Sometimes we can be frustrated with our work in God's Kingdom. We may ask, "Why can I not do acts of service like Kristin? Why can I not sing like Lori? Why can I not preach like Tom?" It is because they are God's chosen instruments for one thing and you for another.

Someone has said, "To someone who only has a hammer, everything looks like a nail!" We've been around those kind of folks, and when they decide you're a nail (and sometimes you are, you know!) – look out! Thankfully, God has much more finesse. He has literally millions of options, and knows the right instrument for the song. And sometimes, you get to be it!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Have you ever considered what kind of instrument for God's service you are? Talk to God about that today.

- Greg

June 14

The Dorcas Legacy

SCRIPTURE: Acts 9:26-43

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them." (Acts 9:39)

Is there anyone that wants to be considered lazy, a complainer, a gossip, or bully? No, of course not; that would be a horrible legacy. I believe it is fair to say that most Christians have a desire to be remembered for the good we have done with our time on earth.

Dorcas certainly set an excellent example for us. Her short description in our text includes the words: disciple, doing good, and helping the poor. She followed the example of Christ in her daily life, and she was remembered for it.

Of course, her story continues...she was brought back to life and able to resume the good work she had started. What a dramatic moment for the widows who were mourning her death. They must have been overjoyed to have this amazing woman back!

Let the Dorcas legacy be our legacy. Let's actively share Christ by helping those around us and sharing the blessings He has poured out on us with a world that desperately needs to know the love of God.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to open your eyes to the needs of those in your congregation and community.

- *Kristin*

June 15

Jesus for All

SCRIPTURE: Acts 10:1-23a

VERSE FOR TODAY: “About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, ‘Cornelius!’” (Acts 10:3)

There are two visions in this reading, Cornelius’ and Peter’s.

Cornelius was a God-fearing, prayerful Gentile man. In *his* vision, he was told that his prayers had been answered, and he was to send some men to find Simon (Peter).

Peter was a Jewish disciple of Christ. God had a plan for him to be the catalyst for Jewish Christians accepting Gentiles. In *his* vision, a sheet came down from Heaven with unclean animals that he was told to eat. Well, any good Jew will tell you don’t eat unclean animals! But the vision persisted, being repeated three times, and ending just as men from Cornelius were approaching Peter. God’s timing is wonderful!

This passage challenges the preconceived notion in the mind of some that Christ came only for the Jews or any one group of people. Jesus died for all men everywhere - regardless of their national origin or the color of their skin. God doesn't set the worth of a soul by skin pigmentation or accent, and neither should we. Let’s make sure we go beyond the barriers this sinful world has set, when we seek to share Jesus with the lost and dying souls around us.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to remind you throughout the day that Jesus died for everyone and everyone is lost without Him.

- *Beth*

June 16

Introspection

SCRIPTURE: Acts 10:23b-48

VERSE FOR TODAY: “So Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.’” (Acts 10:34-35)

What a powerful proclamation by Peter about the first Gentile household to come to salvation in Jesus Christ! I love knowing that “God shows no partiality”. But I was curious to dig deeper and see what it was that the Gentile Cornelius had done right.

He was a devout (deeply religious) man who feared God, gave alms (food, money, and clothes) to the poor, and “prayed continually”. (Acts 10:2) He brought people to hear the Word of God. (Acts 10:27) Upon hearing the Word of God, he readily obeyed it. (Acts 10:48)

Just wondering today, do I do what is right and acceptable to God? So much of my life I have done what was right and acceptable to me. This verse calls for a great deal of introspection. Don’t get me wrong, I understand grace; I’m not trying to work my way to Heaven by doing what is right. I just want to do “what is right and acceptable to him” because He has saved me and put me on the path to Heaven. I love God, He is my Father, and I want to please Him.

This is a good day for self-examination.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to reveal to you, through His Word, what is right and acceptable to Him. Then do it.

- Tom

June 17

Be a Barnabas

SCRIPTURE: Acts 11:1-30

VERSE FOR TODAY: “News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.” (Acts 11:22)

When the church at Jerusalem heard that Greeks in several regions were turning to the Lord, they swung into action. They decided to send someone to assess the situation and see what could be done to help. The scripture does not tell us the process they used to determine who would go. We don’t know if they took their time deciding who to send or how they came to the conclusion that Barnabas was the man for the job. The Bible just says the news reached their ears and they sent Barnabas. My guess is that Barnabas was the obvious choice.

When he got to Antioch, we are told that he was glad, he encouraged them, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. That’s the kind of guy you want helping out. Often times we see servants of the Lord that are sour and jealous; they are discouraging and complain about insignificant details. Barnabas, however, lives up to his name – “son of encouragement”.

What about you? When you see the work of the Lord being accomplished, are you glad and encouraging, or do you find something to complain about? Do you join in whole heartedly, or do you drag your feet and cause an interruption in the work? Make sure you are a Barnabas.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today praying that you become the encourager God needs in His church.

- Lori

June 18

Surprise!

SCRIPTURE: Acts 12:1-23

VERSE FOR TODAY: “So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.” “But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed.” (Acts 12:5, 16)

One of my pet peeves is to have earnestly prayed with people and have our prayer answered to their surprise. People will say things like, “Oh, it wasn’t as bad as it seemed after all,” or “The Dr.’s couldn’t find anything wrong. But thanks for praying anyway!”

Might we recognize that God played a part in this just as we asked?

James wrote, “...The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” (James 5:16b)

Of course, our prayers must be “in Jesus name”. This is not just a magic phrase added before the “Amen”, but means prayer must be by the given power and authority of Jesus because it is His will. When we pray for God’s will to be done, and we trust in His the promise that “*all things* work together for good” in the lives of those who love God and are called by Him, then we can know He will answer. We might be surprised in the *way* He answers, but He will answer.

As the old song said:

*“Be not dismayed whate’er betide,
God will take care of you.”*

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Talk to God about prayers you’ve been praying that you would be surprised if He responded to. Quit disbelieving and pray with faith today!

- Greg

June 19

The Lord's Straight Path

SCRIPTURE: Acts 12:24-13:12

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, ‘You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?’” (Acts 13:9-10)

I was just wondering if I have ever made crooked the straight paths of the Lord. I certainly never want to do that, but to avoid being a “son of the devil” it might be good to consider some of the ways that a person could “crooked-up” the Lord’s path for himself and those around him.

- Agree that Jesus sinned.
- Agree that there are many different roads to Heaven.
- Agree that sins committed by family and friends are acceptable.
- Agree that as society changes, so does the mind of God.
- Agree that the Bible has many errors.
- Agree that Mary was not a Virgin.
- Agree that Jesus may not have really risen from the dead.
- Agree that there are no absolutes in this life.
- Agree that truth is only truth if it is truth to me.

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” (Matthew 7:13-14)

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for God to direct your feet always on His path.

- Tom

June 20

Showing the Way

SCRIPTURE: Acts 13:13-41

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’” (Acts 13:25)

“What do you suppose I am?” Well, John, I think you are a little extreme - living in the wilderness, eating locusts and honey, and, to be quite honest, a little crazy looking in that camel hair clothing!

John was given a message for the people of his time. He was given the task of bringing them to repentance and pointing them to their Savior. He was called to prepare the way for Jesus, then step out of the way, and let the Master do His work.

How would you answer this question for yourself? Like John, you are supposed to lead people to repent of their sins and point the way to their Savior. You may not be called to live in the wilderness and eat and dress as John did, but you are called; every Christian is. We are called to be different from the world, to be a little extreme in their eyes, and always willing to point the way to Jesus.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you point someone to Jesus before the day is done.

- Beth

June 21

Jealousy

SCRIPTURE: Acts 13:42-14:7

VERSE FOR TODAY: “The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.” (Acts 13:44-45)

Jealousy. It kills marriages, destroys friendships, makes the work place unbearable, and in some cases, hinders the preaching of the Gospel. We can see from today’s Bible reading (coupled with yesterday’s reading) that jealousy brought much trouble to the mission field for Paul and Barnabas in Antioch of Pisidia - as well as Iconium.

In the church, I’ve seen it cause good workers to quit, leaders to quarrel, staff members to speak ill of one another, and whole congregations to implode. How can this happen among a group of people who call themselves Christians? 1 Corinthians 3:3b gives us a clue, “For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?”

God’s Word tells us that if we live according to the flesh we will die (Romans 8:13), and that if we live by the Spirit, we will also keep in step with the Spirit. (Galatians 5:25) We cannot keep in step with the Spirit while walking in the fleshly way of jealousy,

and we sure can't be a Christian witness or a leader in the Lord's Church while living this way.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to remove jealousy from your way of life and then keep better in step with the Spirit.

- Tom

June 22

Fickle Folks

SCRIPTURE: Acts 14:8-28

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them. Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead." (Acts 14:18-19)

Can you say fickle? My goodness! First, the people were begging to sacrifice to Paul, and a few days later they stoned him. They actually left him outside the city thinking he was dead. How could they possibly change their minds that fast?

Let me tell you from experience in ministry, people are like that. You do something they like and they are on your side, praising your ideas, and telling anyone who will listen how wonderful you are. Then, someone comes along with a differing opinion, and hang on to your hat (or have somebody else hang on to it) because they are looking for rocks!

What I find most intriguing about this passage is in the next verse. Look at what Paul does. Verse 20 says he got up and went back into the city. Then, the next day he left for the next stop on his journey. He didn't whine and complain? He didn't nurse his wounds for even a day? Nope. He dragged himself back into the very place they tried to kill him, and he went about his business of ministry. That is a lesson most of us could learn from.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time asking God for faithfulness in ministry through good times and bad.

- Lori

Preach!

SCRIPTURE: Acts 15:1-35

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words.” (Acts 15:32)

The Apostles came back and delivered an “official ruling”. They did their job. Then the preachers got involved. They did their job and encouraged and strengthened the rejoicing congregation using, as it says, many words. They took the time to carefully expose all the truth of the Word as it was needed among the people.

Preaching has fallen on hard times these days. In many places it seems that the church has agreed with the world that the preaching of the cross is foolishness. We are told that another “lecture” on Jesus will not be effective. Preaching has been moved down the list of “relevance” behind the “social gospel” and “worship-tainment”. What’s left of preaching is often relegated to a short, media-enhanced, feel-good, warm-fuzzy thought with little tie to revealing the meaning of the Word.

Service is great. Worship styles will come and go. What remains? The gospel and the need for it to be preached remains – both one on one and to the masses! The proclamation of the good news to the lost and the encouragement of that hope for the saved will always be relevant and needed.

Preachers, encourage and strengthen! People, spread the news! “Preach the Word; ...in season and out...”

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to give you a “pulpit” today by which you can proclaim the good news to someone or many.

- Greg

Flip-Flop?

SCRIPTURE: Acts 15:36-16:15

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.” (Acts 16:3)

Paul just finished pleading before the elders in Jerusalem over the whole circumcision question! What happened? Did Paul flip-flop in his preaching? It was actually *because of* Paul and Timothy's commitment to the gospel that they carry out this decision.

Everyone knew Timothy's father was a gentile – meaning that Timothy was uncircumcised. That would offend the Jews that Paul and Timothy wanted to share the good news with. So, to give everyone their best chance at hearing the gospel clearly, Timothy was willing to limit his own freedom. He did something that could never be undone so that there would be one less barrier for someone else to get past to receive Jesus with gladness.

You might say, "That's too much consideration for a group of people who were *wrong*." Yet the Bible says, "...in humility count others more significant than yourselves." (Philippians 2:3)

You might say, "That seems like giving up too much!" Yet Paul said that if his Jewish brothers could be saved, he would give up his own eternal life for them. (Romans 9:3)

Could you give up some earthly things that others might gain the heavenly things you are looking forward to?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to point out to you what the people around you need you to give up in order that they see Jesus more clearly.

- Greg

June 25

Prayer

SCRIPTURE: Acts 16:16-40

VERSE FOR TODAY: "It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling." (Acts 16:16)

Paul had a vision that told him to go to Macedonia to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Upon the arrival of Paul and Silas at Philippi, a leading Macedonian city, we find Paul twice (vv. 13, 16) speaking about going to a "place of prayer". One might not think much about this because, after all, they were on a mission trip.

Somehow I think these men were not praying simply because they were on a mission, but that praying was an integral part of their everyday lives. Praying is the most

important thing we do as Christians. God wants to hear from us. He wants to lift our burdens, listen to our praises, and answer our needs.

How much time do you spend praying? “Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” (I Thessalonians 5:16-18)

God gave us the gift of prayer. Christ sacrificed His life so that we could have the privilege of talking to our Father. Prayer is also a responsibility.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for the salvation of your friends, family, co-workers, and even your enemies. Pray also for those who serve in political office, and strength for Christians around the world to endure whatever might come their way.

- Beth

June 26

Nobility

SCRIPTURE: Acts 17

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” (Acts 17:11)

The people in Berea seemed to be more concerned with truth than those in Thessalonica. They would not settle for a short sermon on a given subject; they wanted to read it for themselves.

Sad to say that I could (though I never would), walk into almost any church building in America and preach a bunch of lies, and, if I did it in a dynamic or dramatic way, most of those in attendance would walk out and tell me what a “fine message” I had presented that evening! Very few Christians in the modern American church could be called “noble”.

It appears that the Thessalonians were more concerned with their position within the community than they were with the truth. This is true of a great many Christians in today’s society. You see, “examining the Scriptures daily” takes a great deal more time than a lot of folks are willing to give. That’s why there are so many charlatan preachers and gullible people.

I’m pleased to know that you are striving towards nobility and that your daily devotion time with the Rock Solid Ministries Team is a part that journey!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to give you an insatiable appetite to examine and know His Word.

- Tom

June 2

Can You Relate?

SCRIPTURE: Acts 18:1-21

VERSE FOR TODAY: “There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.” (Acts 18:2-3)

There is something comforting about sharing common experiences with someone who understands. I wonder if that was one reason Paul, Aquila and Priscilla connected so easily. They had much in common.

They were far from home. Paul, while journeying by choice, undoubtedly missed the places, friends and family that were familiar. Aquila and Priscilla had been expelled from Rome by Claudius. They were not given a choice, and that must have made it hard to leave their home and set out to a new place. I wouldn't be surprised if they didn't share stories of their home places and encourage each other in their grief.

They shared a common occupation – tent-making. Not only were these craftsmen highly skilled, but were very necessary to daily life. Our verse for today says that Paul not only stayed with Aquila and Priscilla, but also shared in their work. They learned from each other, and they shared in business. How encouraging it must have been to have people to rely on.

Who can you relate to? Is there someone with whom you can share your life experiences?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to show you how to give comfort and encouragement to someone today.

- Lori

Humility

SCRIPTURE: Acts 18:22-19:10

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him.” (Acts 18:27a)

I’m not sure I know many preachers who could’ve done it. I hope I could have.

Apollos is a native of Alexandria, yet he is found in Ephesus preaching everything he knew about Jesus. Having only heard the preaching of John, he was spreading the good news of the *coming* Kingdom. He had taken up the Great Commission before the Great Commission was cool! He was an original missionary.

Yet, since he still had information he needed to know, he was kindly pulled aside by Priscilla and Aquila and taught more completely. We are not told exactly how he reacted to what they had to say, but we have a few clues:

- One, Priscilla, Aquila and company were glad to recommend him to the next people group he was seeking to visit.
- Additionally, it seems from Paul’s later letter to the folks in Corinth, Apollos has gone on to become quite the disciple-maker in other places.

Evidently Apollos had received the teaching with humility and eagerness.

Sometimes it can be hard to be told we don’t know it all – especially from someone we might consider new comers. What if, when we lack humility, we were to miss something as important as Apollos received?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to give you a heart humble enough to receive all the truth you need in your walk with Him.

- Greg

June 29

When the Word Prevails Mightily

SCRIPTURE: Acts 19:11-41

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.” (Acts 19:18-20)

Life-Changer - that’s what Jesus is; He not only saves us from our sins and gives us a new home in Heaven, but He also changes us from the inside out making us totally new! Like those who “practiced magic arts” in Ephesus, we desire a new direction and to rid ourselves of anything that may cause us to be drawn back into an ungodly lifestyle.

When the light of Christ begins to shine through our lives, those around us take notice. This in turn gives us the opportunity to share our faith, and through our witness the Word of the Lord increases and prevails.

However, if we have not changed direction (repented), we leave the door open for criticism of the Lord and His Church, the Word of the Lord is diminished in the eyes of the lost, and Satan prevails.

Remember, the word of the Lord will “increase and prevail mightily” when those around us see real change in our lives.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to make you aware of how your actions impact your witness.

- Tom

June 30

Christian Family

SCRIPTURE: Acts 20

VERSE FOR TODAY: “When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again.” (Acts 20:36-38a)

I love these verses! As a minister’s wife, I understand Paul’s sadness at leaving the church at Ephesus. I have left a lot of friends over the years as we moved from

church-to-church to minister in different places. We have left communities never to see the people there who meant so much to us again. I could not even begin to name all the people that have made such a difference in my life. They were there when my children were born; they held my hand as I mourned two miscarriages and the loss of Grandparents. We faced life together, ministered to one another, and laughed and cried as family. It's always hard to let them go when God moves us to a new field of ministry.

Sometimes we don't appreciate our Christian Family as much as we should. Sometimes we take each other for granted. Sometimes we forget to thank God for the good people He has brought into our lives.

Paul and the Ephesian elders understood the importance of Christian Family. Perhaps we could learn something from them today.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for the Christian Family God has put in your life.

- Beth

July 1

I Am Ready!

SCRIPTURE: Acts 21:1-16

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Then Paul answered, 'What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.'" (Acts 21:13)

A bold statement by Paul, yet we know he meant what he said, and historians tell us he followed through all the way to his grave! The Bible is full of these types of people, people who believe so strongly in the person of Jesus Christ, they are willing to die for Him.

There are many who feel the same way today: Cassie Bernal - shot to death at Columbine High School in Colorado in 1999, Kim Sun-il, Korean Missionary to Iraq – beheaded in 2004, the 21 Christians beheaded in Libya in February 2015, business owners sued and everything they have worked for all their life taken away by a godless government, and hundreds of thousands of others all around the Globe who suffer daily.

Why was Paul so bold, and why have all these others followed his example? Because Jesus is worth it! If there were no promise of Heaven, if no threat of Hell existed, He would still be worth it. Take away all I have; take away all I love; take away my life; but let me follow Jesus!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for the privilege you have to be called His child and a follower of His Son Jesus.

- Tom

July 2

Don't Follow the Crowd

SCRIPTURE: Acts 21:17-36

VERSE FOR TODAY: "...some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, shouting, 'Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place.'" (Acts 21:27b-28)

Have you ever noticed the sweeping accusations and rash generalizations that fly around when someone is trying to discredit someone else? Words like "always" and "never" seem to make their way into the conversation.

The Jews from Asia were doing that very thing in this passage. They had seen, or at least heard of, the effective ministry Paul had in their area, and they wanted to shut him down. It is ridiculous the way they attempt to discredit Paul.

The verse for today says they seized Paul and then shouted, "Help!" They spewed lies about Paul. "Hey, guys! This is the man who has bad-mouthed our people...and our law...and even this place to all men everywhere. Oh! And we almost forgot...we think he might have brought a Greek into the temple area!"

They fell for it - hook, line, and sinker.

Be careful when you begin to hear that kind of talk. Don't get sucked into accusing and discrediting someone who is doing the work they are called to do.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for wisdom and a prayerful attitude when you hear accusations.

- Lori

What's the Hold-up?

SCRIPTURE: Acts 21:37-22:16

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.” (Acts 22:16)

I was driving down the highway recently when traffic came virtually to a standstill on the interstate. We crept along for a few miles and then, suddenly, everyone took back off. I looked for a reason, but never saw anything. I wondered aloud, “What’s the hold-up?”

Ananias had a similar question that I have asked many people. I have asked it from the pulpit and from sofas in homes. Yet, as many times as I’ve asked it, I’ve never once heard a good reason.

“I’m going to – someday.”

“I am waiting for my husband (or wife, or father, or mother, or son, or daughter) to be baptized too.”

“I am waiting until two Sundays from now when my husband (or wife, or father, or mother, or son, or daughter) will be here.”

“I don’t know.”

“I don’t need to.”

“I don’t want to”

Those are just a few reasons I’ve heard. None of them are good. There is no good reason for putting off what God is telling you to do right now. Regardless of whether it is being baptized or any other calling God has put on your life. Get busy now! What’s the hold-up?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Talk to God today about something He’s called you to do that you’ve been putting off. Most importantly, if God is calling you to be immersed, don’t wait!

- Greg

July 4

On Being Bold

SCRIPTURE: Acts 22:17-23:10

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Paul looking intently at the Council, said, ‘Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.’” (Acts 23:1)

It is hard for me to stand up and speak even before a group of Christian women, much less in a crowd like the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Paul was not what you would call a shy person, and he had a way of stirring up trouble even when he was trying to witness for Jesus. “Brethren I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.” Wow, that is a pretty bold statement to make anywhere, but especially in front of a group who believed they held the moral and spiritual high ground of their day.

Working with Rock Solid Ministries has sometimes been a challenge for this introverted southern girl. I have been asked on many occasions to speak to women’s groups and Sunday School classes - sometimes with very little notice. I’ve never thought of myself as bold - just available.

I do wish I had the boldness of Paul. But maybe Paul was not so much bold as he was available. When God called, he answered. When he answered, God gave him boldness.

I think I’ll just keep working on my availability to God’s call, and let Him instill the boldness when needed.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you to be available when called and bold when needed.

- Beth

July 5

Killing the Messenger

SCRIPTURE: Acts 23:11-35

VERSE FOR TODAY: “When it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul.” (Acts 23:12)

The Jews did not want to follow Jesus, and they wanted to stop Paul from proclaiming His truths. They even planned how they would carry out their dastardly execution. They were so sure of their plan that they took the oath of fasting (wonder how many of them kept *that* oath?).

Being married to a preacher has given me a unique insight to this. Tom never backs down on the truth as revealed in God's Word, and that has led to some very interesting confrontations. People sometimes blame the messenger for the message. When sermons stomp on toes, it sometimes leads to problems and, once in a while, it has erupted into a full-scale battle when a sermon hit home hard about a particular sin. Instead of giving up their sin, they want to give up their preacher!

This scenario repeats its self every week in churches all around the world. It would be good to remember that killing the messenger will never kill the Message; that's been tried many times beginning on a blood-stained cross more than two-thousand years ago.

Let the messengers live; kill this sin that's in your heart.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for your preacher and all the messengers around the world.

- Beth

July 6

A Clear Conscience

SCRIPTURE: Acts 24

VERSE FOR TODAY: "So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man." (Acts 24:16)

This is just one of more than thirty references to "conscience" in the New Testament. Here's another one, "but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame." (1 Peter 3:15-16)

The simple definition of "conscience" as found in the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary: "the part of the mind that makes you aware of your actions as being either morally right or wrong".

I was just wondering, have I *always* taken pains to be sure that my actions were morally right before man and God? Sadly, I have to admit; I have not. I have way too

often been more concerned with my opinion, my goals, my desires, and my plans than I have with what is really right or wrong in the eyes of God or man. If I don't *start* my day with God, I will most assuredly spend it *without* Him and therefore lose all concern for "a clear conscience". That's why I'm thankful for my time with Him at the beginning of each and every day.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for a clear conscience with God and man today.

- Tom

July 7

Let Them Know

SCRIPTURE: Acts 25:1-27

VERSE FOR TODAY: "When his accusers got up to speak, they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive." (Acts 25:18-19)

I find it interesting that even though Festus didn't know that much about Christianity or the things Paul was teaching, he somehow instinctively knew that this whole dispute had something to do with the resurrection. He obviously was not a believer because he referred to Jesus as a "dead man" that Paul claimed was alive. It wasn't very long until Paul was given the opportunity to give his defense and tell about whom Jesus was. He made the most of it. He was able to give his whole testimony to some of the most powerful men in the region.

When unbelievers encounter you, do they somehow know that something is different about you? Do they instinctively know your attitude and beliefs have something to do with this Jesus guy? Does everything about you point to the idea that the resurrection is central to who you are? If you give it a little time, God will present you with an opportunity to share your story.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today praying about the opportunities that will be presented to you to share Jesus. Be ready.

- Lori

July 8

Common Ground

SCRIPTURE: Acts 26

VERSE FOR TODAY: “King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you believe.” (Acts 26:27)

Sometimes people will come to tell me they really appreciated my sermon. The comments I like hearing are when they say something like, “That was exactly what I’ve been struggling with in my life. I feel like I have the answer now.” My usual response is that I’m just crazy enough to believe that most of us are the same. If I struggle with it, you probably do. If it’s a question I’m asking as I read this scripture, you may be asking it too. A good sermon is often just a matter of finding some common ground as we look at the scripture together.

Paul does much the same here as he shares his testimony once again. He begins with that which he shares in common, his Jewish faith – particularly being a Pharisee, with his listener, the current “king of the Jews”, Agrippa. This is always Paul’s method. Even when he stood in the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:16ff), he found something in common with the pagans!

Struggles that your friends are encountering are not much different than ones you’ve had or are having. Could you use those struggles as common ground to tell your friends how Jesus has made, or is making, a difference in your life?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to give you a nudge when there is an easy opening to share your faith with your friends today. Then do it!

- Greg

July 9

Overboard!

SCRIPTURE: Acts 27:1-20

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo.” (Acts 27:18)

Desperate times call for desperate measures. Can you imagine how heart-sick these sailors were to be throwing overboard all the stuff that they were to be hauling into port? Don’t you think their minds were calculating with every crate and barrel they dumped what they were losing?

I don't!

When it gets down to life or death – people gladly choose life! Why try to save the stuff and lose their lives? They just wanted to live!

We are in desperate times. We and the people around us need Jesus more than anything. We are storm-tossed. Yet, we and so many others are hanging onto things that are passing away. These things will be dashed against the rocks. They will be sunk and destroyed.

Two things that Jesus said come to mind:

“For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36)

and

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” (Luke 10:2)

Jesus would have us pray that we be willing to let go and be cast overboard from the sinking ship, into the angry waves, that lives might be saved. It's not time to count the cost of the earthly goods, but to count what might be the heavenly gain.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask the Father to throw you overboard!

- Greg

July 10

Always Thankful

SCRIPTURE: Acts 27:21-44

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to eat.” (Acts 27:35)

As a family, we have always prayed before our meals. No matter where we are we want to thank God for our food. This is a powerful witness to some and considered quite stupid by others. It is precious when children begin to pray; they fold their little hands and say whatever is on their minds. Some prayers are for everything on the table, “Thank you God for the peas, the mashed potatoes, the roast, the carrots, etc.” Other times it is just a few words, “Thank you God for... food... amen!” No matter how we do it, it's always good to take a moment to be thankful for God's provisions.

In the midst of a terrible storm, Paul encouraged those on the ship to eat. They had not eaten for fourteen days, and he knew they need to keep up their strength; the journey was not done. He witnessed to them as he thanked God for the food they were eating. Paul never missed an opportunity to point those around him to the Lord, and he was always ready to thank God - even in the middle of a storm.

Let's not miss the opportunity to be thankful for God's provision and strength in the midst of our storms.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Even as your ship is tossed on angry seas, thank God for His provisions.

- Beth

July 11

Suffer No Harm

SCRIPTURE: Acts 28

VERSE FOR TODAY: "When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, 'No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live.' He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm." (Acts 28:3-5)

Here was Paul in the center of God's will doing exactly what God would have him do, and a snake took hold of him and tried to poison his experience. Isn't that just like the devil? Anytime we try to kindle the fire which God has put deep inside of us as Christians, we can be sure that the devil is going to sneak up on us, fasten himself to us, and try to destroy our walk in the will of Christ. It has happened to me many times; perhaps, it has to you as well. Maybe Satan's venomous fangs are secured deep in your soul even today.

Learn a lesson from Paul. "He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm." Shake Satan off into the fire of the Holy Spirit that God has put deep inside of you and suffer no harm today!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to heal you of the devil's venom and keep you in the center of His will.

- Tom

July 12

Help Each Other Along

SCRIPTURE: Romans 1:1-17

VERSE FOR TODAY: “I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith.” (Romans 1:11-12)

One of my sweet daughters-in-law recently sent me a text seeking counsel and encouragement concerning her spiritual life. My first thought was, “What an honor for her to think of me.” After several minutes of conversing back and forth, I’m not sure if she felt encouraged, but I sure did. I felt inspired by her desire to learn from scripture and to please her Savior.

The next morning I received another message from her thanking me for taking the time to share with her my thoughts. She later sent me a scripture she had read that morning during her study time. She thought it might encourage me and solidify the conversation we had the night before. I ended up being the one that was greatly encouraged.

That’s how it works! Paul called it being “mutually encouraged by each other’s faith”. One person’s spiritual gifts may be used in a way that is exactly what another person needs to gain strength. It is God’s perfect design for His church. The world around us can be hard. Let’s help each other along on the journey to our new Home.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today asking for an opening to encourage a brother or sister in their faith.

- Lori

July 13

The Debased Mind

SCRIPTURE: Romans 1:18-32

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.” (Romans 1:28)

Recent cultural trends in our society concerning homosexuality may surprise some. But it should not be a surprise to anyone who’s read the first chapter of Romans. Once any people do not see fit to acknowledge God, they cease to be able to make

biblical choices. They will go from not only tolerating sin, but also to giving their approval of it.

Yet, when Paul goes on to list some other sins that come as a result of a debased mind, we might see that there are more people who do not acknowledge Him than we might think at first glance. There is a list of things that we hardly think of as sin.

Covetousness? Really? How could wanting just a little more – achieving the American dream – be wrong? It’s a sinful product of someone’s life that does not acknowledge God.

Gossips? Paul is going to lump them in with “those kinds of people”?

All sin comes from a disbelief in what God has said about what is sin and the seriousness of it. The speed and direction of the consequences of our choices depend only on how fully we believe what God has said.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you take inventory of the sin in your life. Ask for His help in removing what does not belong.

- Greg

July 14

Lesson Learned

SCRIPTURE: Romans 2:1-24

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?” (Romans 2:1-3)

My last year in High School was also my first year as a Christian. It was a tough year in which I learned a lot of lessons that would help me in a lifetime of serving Christ. One such lesson began with my being called a hypocrite by a fellow worker in the school office. The accusation landed hard and stung deep in my new heart. But, as I said, this was the beginning of the lesson – my mother finished it.

Mom was kind, but always ready to give correction to her children if they needed it. Looking for a bit of solace, I shared the hurtful words with her, but instead of patting me on the shoulder and telling me I was a good kid, she looked me square in the eye and asked, “Well, are you?”

Lesson learned. Make sure you are walking the walk if you are talking the talk. Never give anyone a reason to call you a hypocrite.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10)

- Tom

July 15

Heart Transplant

SCRIPTURE: Romans 2:25-3:8

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.” (Romans 2:25)

The Law said you must be circumcised, so as a Jew you were circumcised. Yet, it did no good to be circumcised if you did not keep the whole law. Your physical body was keeping with the Law, but your heart must *also* follow the Law.

This is really technical for a good Gentile girl like me, but I get the message. If I am a baptized believer but my heart has not changed and I continue to live in sin, what good was it for my body to have been washed in the watery grave of baptism?

Coming to Christ is not about outward appearance; we have to change on the inside as well. We must have a heart transplant.

Tom tells a story of the little boy that is being disciplined and his mother tells him to sit in a chair in the corner. He looks at her and says, “I may be sitting down on the outside, but I am standing up on the inside!”

Many people who appear to have surrendered to Christ on the outside are still rebelling on the inside, and that’s what sin is - rebellion. Repent if you need to, but make sure that a heart transplant has taken place in your life.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God that He is changing your heart day by day.

- Beth

July 16

Sin

SCRIPTURE: Romans 3:9-31

**VERSE FOR TODAY: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”
(Romans 3:23)**

The Bible tells us that sin is a terrible thing. It is the one thing that stands between man and God. Let’s take a quick look at sin in the light of God’s Word and therefore gain a little knowledge as to what Romans 3:23 tells us we are all involved in.

Sin is lawlessness. (1 John 3:4) A sinner is the destroyer of good. (Ecclesiastes 9:18) God does not listen to sinners. (John 9:31) The wages of fully-grown sin is death (Romans 6:23; James 1:15) The pleasure of sin is temporary. (Hebrews 11:25) Sin deceives the sinner. (Proverbs 14:12) Sin will find out the sinner and return to him (Numbers 32:23; Galatians 6:7) Sin changes honor into shame and puts pain into death (Hosea 4:7; 1 Corinthians 15:56)

Sin is an effort on man’s part to enjoy the un-enjoyable. It is our blind and foolish attempt to make gods of ourselves. It is loving ourselves more than anyone or anything else including God. The Bible says we all do it.

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (Romans 6:1-2)

I think you know the answer.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Confess to God what you and He already know – you are a sinner. Ask God to guide you in His way of righteousness.

- Tom

July 17

Blessed

SCRIPTURE: Romans 4:1-12

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.” (Romans 4:7-8)

When I was in the sixth grade, I was a mean girl. I hate to admit that, but it is true. I never hesitated to pick on some poor girl who didn't happen to be in my group of friends. There was one girl in particular that I picked on, not because I disliked her, but because my "friends" thought she was an easy target.

During the summer between my 6th and 7th grade years something changed. I decided that I was tired of being mean and being negatively influenced by my friends. I was tired of being a hypocrite. So, I went to the girl that I had picked on relentlessly for an entire year and asked her if we could be friends. Without hesitation, she accepted. Immediately, we were friends, and I was forgiven.

Wow! Did I deserve that? No way! She never mentioned it again, and she didn't hold it against me. In fact, we were best friends throughout high school, we were roommates in college, and she was a bridesmaid in my wedding. I was blessed because she was willing to forgive me.

How much more so when God forgives us? He never mentions it again. We are truly blessed.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time thanking God for His grace and forgiveness. You are blessed.

- Lori

July 18

Fully Convinced

SCRIPTURE: Romans 4:13-5:5

VERSE FOR TODAY: "fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. That is why his faith was 'counted to him as righteousness.'" (Romans 4:21-22)

Ability and willingness are the two things upon which an act of any person hinges. I can only do that which I am able to do; I will only do that which I am willing to do. It is the same with God.

God's ability depends upon His power, and His willingness depends upon His love. Paul's letter to the Romans speaks of both. In chapter eight, Paul will declare God's willingness (and promise) to always do that which is truly good for those He's given a calling at their declaration of love for Him. In today's verses, Paul demonstrates Abraham's trust in God's ability.

I don't know the experiences that Abraham had with the I Am that caused him to trust in such outrageous promises, but the experiences were indeed enough. That trust was enough for God to stamp "righteous" on the spiritual books of Abraham's life.

If you will consider the places that you've been in life and how you got there, if you will consider the creation around you today (as Paul suggested in chapter one), I am fully convinced that you will also be as fully convinced that God is able. He is able today.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend time with God recounting your life and what He has brought you through. Ask Him to convince your heart of His ability in your times of struggle.

- Greg

July 19

Death

SCRIPTURE: Romans 5:6-21

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned - " (Romans 5:12)

"If there was a *loving* God, why is there death and evil in the world?"

While the circumstances are far from simple, the answer is. The answer is sin.

All bad things are a result of sin. Please hear me out! It is not necessarily *your* sin (though it might be), but it is most definitely the result *of* sin. It might be your sin, it might be the sin of someone you cross paths with, or the sin of Adam that this verse said brought death into the world. But the answer is sin!

"Then God must not be all-powerful; or He would do something about sin and death!"

The answer to that is just as simple. He did.

The Son the Father sent to sacrifice Himself on behalf of mankind is the antidote for the world's sin problem. However, we are resistant to God's solution. We want *everyone else* to either "do right" or be punished! But we want to have our own choices for *our* lives. It's one or the other.

However, one day God's patience for our choosing will run out. (1 Peter 3:9-10) Before we complain about others' choices, let's make sure we are not trying God's patience ourselves!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for both what He has done and will do about the pain, death, and evil in the world.

- Greg

July 20

Slaves to Christ

SCRIPTURE: Romans 6

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:4)

This verse reminds me that I will be with Christ in eternity. I was buried with Him in baptism (just as He was buried in a tomb), and I was raised from death to walk with Him in glory. What a beautiful, wonderful, awesome thought. I have life eternal because Jesus died for me.

Romans chapter six is about who will control your life. If you die to yourself and really become alive in Christ, you will not desire to live in sin. Sin will make you uncomfortable.

It reminds me of the cartoon where you have the little devil on one shoulder and the little angel on the other, and they are each telling you what choice you should make. Haven't we already chosen? Didn't we make that decision when we united ourselves in His death? Then why do we ever choose sin? It only leads to death.

We will take time to enslave ourselves to God by praying and reading and obeying His Word, or we will ignore His Word and once again be enslaved by sin.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you let go of the sin in your life.

- Beth

July 21

Thankful for the Word

SCRIPTURE: Romans 7:1-13

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.” (Romans 7:13)

My parents both quit going to church on a regular basis when I was about six. (Though both returned to regular worship and service later in life.) I received very little “Bible learning” from my parents when I was young, although they did teach me the difference between right and wrong (something that I doubt I would have figured out by myself), and for that I am very grateful. In my adult life, I have seen time and again the Bible reinforcing the moral values instilled in me by my parents.

I am thankful that God shows us the difference between right and wrong. Without His Word constantly showing me what is right and pleasing in His eyes, I would never have understood what is evil and disagreeable to His will.

Judges 17:6 says, “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” Were it not for the Word, this would be me – doing right in my own eyes and condemning myself in God’s eyes. My daily devotion time helps to keep me on the path that God has laid out for us all.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for the daily guidance of His Word.

- Tom

July 22

Choices

SCRIPTURE: Romans 7:14-8:8

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.” (Romans 7:19)

When I was a kid, I used to think verses 14-20 were a tongue twister. It was amusing to try to read it and not fumble the words. I didn’t give a second thought to what all the “what I do I don’t want to do’s” and “what I don’t want to do I do’s” really meant.

Now that I am an adult, I can easily relate to what Paul is saying. As a matter of fact, sometimes I sit and wonder what in the world is wrong with me that I can’t just do the right thing. I know what the right thing is, and I know how to do it. I understand the benefits and the rewards, and I know I would be better off in the long run. I just choose to do otherwise. Doesn’t that sound crazy?

I’m so thankful that these verses are included in Romans. They are a great reminder that I am not the only person to struggle with this. But most of all, these verses give me hope that I will someday choose to do the right that I want to do, and I will have one less thing that day of which to repent.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today praying that you will obtain the desire and the discipline from God to do the right thing.

- Lori

July 23

Full of Which Spirit?

SCRIPTURE: Romans 8:9-25

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For all who are lead by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” (Romans 8:14)

She came to the revival meeting full of the spirit, but it wasn't the Holy Spirit! Whatever she had indulged in early that day had obviously affected her speech and behavior. It was easy to see that she was intoxicated. (We were glad she was there, by the way, so she could be ministered to!)

It is no wonder that liquor stores often advertise “wine and spirits” on their shop's signage. That which they sell is that which takes control of a man's mind and leads him – just the same as our own spirits *can* or God's Holy Spirit *should*.

Paul says that Christians should be easily recognized as God's sons because of His Spirit that is controlling them. Our hearts are to become the sails the breath of God will fill to drive us into new behaviors and speech patterns. Repentance demands that we not only agree with God about the sin of our past, but also agree to let God have control over our present and future lifestyle.

What spirit do people recognize as most evident in your life? Is it a concoction of a brewery or distillery, your own human nature, or the very Spirit of God?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you lay aside anything that takes the Holy Spirit's wind out of your sails.

- Greg

July 24

The Spirit Intercedes

SCRIPTURE: Romans 8:26-39

VERSE FOR TODAY: “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the

Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God. (Romans 8:26)

We can rejoice in the knowledge that the Spirit intercedes for us. We will have times when we do not know how to pray...our grief may be so deep, or our troubles may seem too much.

Some time back, my family went through an incredibly challenging time. It was time of deep grief. I couldn’t eat, I couldn’t sleep – I couldn’t pray. At the time, I couldn’t put into words what my needs were. I knew I needed strength from the Lord to get through, but at the time – I wasn’t able to articulate even that simple of a thought. However, even as bad as it was – I could rest in the knowledge that the Spirit was interceding on my behalf. I had hope in the midst of it all that it would get better. And, though the situation remained the same, God did give me the strength to walk through it.

The Spirit intercedes during those most difficult times. Perhaps you are going through a difficult time now. Maybe you are having trouble articulating your concerns or needs to God. Take solace in the knowledge that you have an advocate.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for the help He gives in times of weakness.

-Kristin

July 25

A Reason for Sorrow

SCRIPTURE: Romans 9:1-21

VERSE FOR TODAY: “I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.” (Romans 9:1-2)

Sorrow and grief for mankind; as a Christian and a preacher’s wife I have felt both of these emotions many times. I have felt it for those who have never accepted Christ and those who chose to walk away from Him and once again follow the sins of the flesh and mind. I have been sorrowful to the point of tears. Many preachers will tell you that nothing is more discouraging and heartbreaking than pouring your heart and time into people and then to watch them turn their back on Christ and His message.

Do you grieve for people? Paul was grieving for people. He said in the next verse, “For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated from Christ* for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh (*italics mine*).” He wished that he could be separated from Christ so that his fleshly family and Israel would come to Christ. Could you say that? I am so thankful that this is not an option! Christ was and is the ultimate sacrifice for us.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Today, consider anyone you know who has never accepted Christ or who has walked away from God. Grieve for them, and pray they may be reached before it is too late.

- Beth

July 26

The Good Confession

SCRIPTURE: Romans 9:22-10:13

VERSE FOR TODAY: “because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” (Romans 10:9-10)

The “Good Confession” is essential to our salvation. This is not just confessing Jesus Christ as the one and only Son of God in front of Christians in a Christian worship facility during a Christian worship service or to your friends at a small group Bible study. No, confessing Jesus Christ as God’s Son and your Savior is a way of life!

Matthew 10:32 says, “So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven.” This goes so far beyond our Christian friends and acquaintances! It is a way of speaking that leaves no doubt about our beliefs and loyalty. It is in our words at work and play. It is our manor of speech at the Rotary Club with fellow business men and women or at the Science Club with fellow students. Jesus is on our lips at the Lord’s Table and the breakfast table. We live the Confession all day, every day with no excuses and no apologies. We are disciples of Jesus Christ!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to make you bold before all men in your daily confession of Jesus Christ.

- Tom

July 27

Goodbye, Worm Toes

SCRIPTURE: Romans 10:14-11:12

VERSE FOR TODAY: “How then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’” (Romans 10:14-15)

Problem: I have ugly feet. My toes are way too long for the rest of my foot. My sister refers to them as “worm toes”. I have funny shaped toenails, and the tops of my feet are swollen more-often-than-not (thanks to my mom’s side of the family). I have tried pedicures, soaks, scrubs, keeping my nails painted, and not wearing open-toed shoes. It doesn’t help.

Solution: When I read our verses for today, it sounds to me like the people who hear about Jesus, believe in Him and call on Him for salvation consider the messenger’s feet to be “beautiful”. I better start being a “preacher” if I want beautiful feet in this world. Now, I don’t consider myself a “preacher” in the sense that we normally think. However, I can tell my neighbor about Jesus. I can tell my friend what Jesus has done for me. When I do this, I am a messenger. And, just like that, I have beautiful feet.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today praying about how you can be a messenger to your community.

- Lori

July 28

Continue in His Kindness

SCRIPTURE: Romans 11:13-36

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Note then the kindness and severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in His kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.” (Romans 11:22)

Paul, as he addresses Gentile Christians, warns them about thinking of themselves too highly. Yes, others were broken off so they could be grafted in, but the same fate awaits those who do not continue in faith. Eternal security? Absolutely. Our eternities are fully secure when we stand in faith. But that does not have to be the case. While there is no sin we could ever commit as Christians that is out of the reach of God’s great grace, if

we no longer desire it – if we no longer trust in Christ – God, Paul promises, will be just as severe toward us as he was the Jews.

“How then may I have assurance of my salvation?” you ask.

Assurance comes by walking in faith – not by walking in perfection. When we trust daily in the Father’s forgiveness and submit ourselves to Him for the renewing of our minds, we can be sure that we “continue in His kindness”.

But beware of the entanglements of sin. As someone once said, “Sin always takes you further than you want to go.” And the trouble is that, by the time we get there, we won’t care anymore.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for God’s help to walk faithfully today.

- Greg

July 29

The Body of Christ

SCRIPTURE: Romans 12

VERSE FOR TODAY: “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.” (Romans 12:6-8)

In every spiritual-gifting test I’ve ever taken, I score high on encouragement with mercy and teaching trailing close behind. Translation: I am a helper and tend to give a lot of grace.

Each part of the body is important. Consider a church body without any servant hearts, teachers or givers in the mix. How would anything be accomplished? Who would lead the classes? If we had no evangelistic voices or leaders, who would preach and help us stay on the right path?

If everyone were like me, there would be too much grace and not enough correction. If everyone were prophetic, there would be plenty of correction, but not enough grace. We need all the parts and interesting personalities. We need each other.

The next time you find yourself annoyed with a fellow Christian, consider their spiritual gift mix...perhaps God is allowing you the opportunity to sharpen one another.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: How are you using your spiritual gifts in your local congregation?

-Kristin

July 30

Beyond “Middle Age”

SCRIPTURE: Romans 13

VERSE FOR TODAY: “The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.” (Romans 13:12)

There was a day a couple of years ago that I realized I was not middle aged. I had passed it. Do you ever add a few years to your age and realize just how close to the end of life you really are? Well that day I did, and I was shocked. It was not new information, just a bit of a shock to realize how close to old I really was!

As I consider these words, “The night is almost gone”, I can’t help but look forward to that time when either Christ returns in the sky with the trumpet sound or I cross into the Day that never ends.

So, with my life passing quickly, I realize how much *more* important it is for me lay aside the deeds of darkness (selfish pursuits) and get busy at being a soldier for Christ by daily laying aside *my* will for *His*.

As I look in my rearview mirror at “middle age”, I am determined to start every day by putting on “the armor of light” though prayer and the reading of God’s Word.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Take a few moments today and consider how quickly life passes, then ask God to help you make the most of your remaining years (many or few) to walk in “the armor of light.”

- Beth

July 31

“Give an Account”

SCRIPTURE: Romans 14

VERSE FOR TODAY: “So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.” (Romans 14:12)

Do you believe God's Word to be true – all of it - including the verse posted above? I think though many Christians would answer in the affirmative to these questions, most are living as though they really don't believe the Bible to be true!

Matthew 12:36 says, "I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak." Think about this past week. How much of your life in these recent days do you really want to account for before the all-knowing, all-seeing God? What careless words or tidbits of gossip have easily floated from your lips to the ears of anxious co-workers, fellow students, or neighbors? What personal actions have you taken that have discredited the cause of Christ or the church where you worship? Who has suffered because of your careless or intentional activities?

This is a lot to think about, especially if we really believe Romans 14:12. I am so thankful for the grace and mercy of God! Without it, I would have no hope, but this is no excuse for continuing to sin. It is His love and mercy (along with a healthy dose of account-giving fear) that causes me to strive for a more righteous life.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Truly thank God for His mercy and grace and ask for strength to live as one who is ready to "give an account".

- Tom

August 1

So That...

SCRIPTURE: Romans 15:1-21

VERSE FOR TODAY: "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:4, 13)

I am sure you have heard it said that we must learn from the past. Most generally, when you hear this, it is in reference to mistakes we have made, and how we should not repeat them.

While this is true, I think the verses for today go beyond that. Yes, we must learn from the past (the things that have been recorded for us in God's Word), but why? Did you catch the "so that" in verse 4, and again in verse 13? We must learn "so that" we might have hope – an overflowing hope! God inspired the writers of the Bible to include what they did to be an encouragement for us! If we know how God has worked in the past, we can get a pretty good picture of what we can expect from Him today and in the future. We can have joy and peace and power, but most of all hope.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today thanking God for His Word, His encouragement through scripture, the power we have through the Holy Spirit, and for giving us hope!

- Lori

August 2

Ought Also

SCRIPTURE: Romans 15:22-33

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.” (Romans 15:27)

When we are worried about material things, we cannot focus on the mission God intends for us to be a part of. He wants us to focus on the spiritual calling and allow Him to take care of the rest. But the fact is that part of the spiritual calling on our lives is to fill the physical and material needs of others. God uses us to take care of one another as we work at God’s call. In addition, he says there is a special material debt we owe to those who have blessed us in spiritual ways.

Rock Solid Ministries has been blessed to be the recipient of so many people’s generosity. They are people who recognize the spiritual contribution God has made to the life of their church, and to their lives as individuals, through RSM. Their gratitude not only makes us feel good, but it also allows us to keep blessing others across North America.

To whom in your life do you owe a spiritual debt? Is there an act of kindness you can do for them that will help them be a spiritual blessing to others?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray God will open your eyes to how you can fulfill the physical needs of someone you know.

- Greg

August 3

Those Who Cause Divisions

SCRIPTURE: Romans 16

VERSE FOR TODAY: “I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites,

and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve.” (Romans 16:17-18)

In more than forty years of ministry, I have met a lot of people who cause divisions, and believe me when I say that I did “watch out” for them and tried at every turn to “avoid them”. They will steal your joy if you let them.

I have noticed that “those who cause divisions” are usually (not always, but usually) smooth talkers who use flattery and by speaking one-on-one or to very small groups “deceive the hearts of the naïve”. By doing this they divide, and sometimes conquer, whole congregations, ruin lives, and destroy the work of many Christians. This is done because of pride and/or a hunger for power that the individual has not been able to attain anywhere else in his or her life.

Do you know people who cause divisions at work, at church, or in your family? Avoid them, and if you can’t do that at least make sure that you are always on your guard around them so that you won’t be deceived.

One more thought worth considering: make sure you are not the one who causes divisions.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to make all your motives pure in His sight.

- Tom

August 4

No Divisions

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 1:1-17

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.” (1 Corinthians 1:10)

I was taught as a young girl that, when studying a Bible passage, you always needed to know who wrote it, to whom it was written, and to always read all verses in context. This has helped me many times as I struggled with a particular reading to know what the Scripture meant and how it applied to my life.

It’s quiet clear that the Corinthian Church was divided. They were arguing over who was baptized by whom! Can you imagine that? How often the local church divides over the unimportant things. Have you ever argued with a brother or sister in Christ over something that, in the end, really didn’t matter - like the color of carpet in the church building or arrangement of utensils in the church kitchen cabinets? Churches have split

over much less. Silly, yes; sad, absolutely! We need to keep our eyes focused on the Cross of Calvary and the One who gave His life for all.

You and I were not saved to divide the Kingdom but to build it!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you know when you may be causing division in the Body and to make you a builder of His Kingdom.

- Beth

August 5

The Power of the Cross

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18)

The preaching of the Cross is folly, or foolishness, to those who are perishing; that explains a lot! The world has gone crazy! And to tell them that the power of God can be seen in the Cross of Jesus Christ dumbfounds them. Yet it is true.

Those of us who have been saved by the blood of Christ fully understand the power of The Cross! We have been yanked out of the grip of death and hell, pulled away from a life with no meaning or purpose, and given a new life that shall last forever and a reason for living. God’s power through the cross of Christ has accomplished this! So why would we live as those who have no power, strength, or hope?

The power of the cross can separate us from this evil, dying world. (Galatians 6:14) The power of the cross can reconcile us to God. (Colossians 1:15-23) The power of the cross can save our souls (Romans 1:16) This is the same power that God “exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.” (Ephesians 1:20)

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for the power He has placed in your life through the cross of Christ.

- Tom

August 6

Grow Up!

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 2:6-3:4

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly – mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly?” (1 Corinthians 3:1-3a)

My son and my niece were born eleven months apart. When they were young, they were adorable. They had sweet, angelic, chubby-cheeked faces that would melt your heart. They loved each other, or maybe they hated each other. We couldn't tell. They couldn't wait to be together, but would then fight like cats and dogs when they were. They made every family gathering miserable for about four years. We tried everything. We threatened them, we punished them, we bribed them, and we begged them to stop fighting. All of it was to no avail.

Now they are 19 and 20 years old. Things have changed. I can't imagine an instance that would make those two come to be at odds with each other. They get along wonderfully and love to spend time together.

What made the difference? Maturity. They have grown up and don't act like little children anymore. Isn't it time that we as the Church grow up and quit acting like little kids? It's time we quit quarreling and being jealous of each other. We need to take measures to ready ourselves for the solid food of His Word.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today praying about your growth in Christ.

- Lori

August 7

All for Naught?

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 3:5-23

VERSE FOR TODAY: “each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.” (1 Corinthians 3:13)

We would love to believe that, “No work done for the Lord Jesus is wasted.” It sounds so true. It sounds so right. How could anyone say any different? And in fact, it

may be true. The problem may be our ability to really know what work is that which is truly done for the Lord Jesus.

We must come to grips with the fact that not every activity “at church” is “for Jesus”. Even if the desired outcome or intention is something worthy, our heart and motives may play spoiler. Our churches are filled with activities on both a congregational and individual level that I fear will be only stubble in the end.

Have you ever done something because you felt someone expected you to do it, even if God Himself did not call you to it? Have you ever piddled in the work that many could do to avoid that which only you could? You have engaged in that which will be stubble at the Last Day.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you order your steps today and chose only those tasks that He is truly calling you to. Ask for the courage to say “no” to that which is not His work and the courage to say “yes” to that which is.

- Greg

August 8

“I’m Just an Old Preacher...”

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 4

VERSE FOR TODAY: “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” (1 Corinthians 4:1)

OK. Time to share a pet peeve. It always makes me cringe to hear someone addressed as “Reverend” or “Father” – or even “Pastor” if in a hierarchy kind of way. While what the preacher, teacher, elder, or deacon does is important – while their lives are to be looked to as examples of the Christian walk at its best - they are no *more* important or to be esteemed any higher than any other member of the body of Christ.

Paul, an Apostle, said, “We are just servants and stewards.” Servant. They were there for the benefit of others. Steward. They offered nothing of their own, but were simply passing on what they’d been given. Would that we all – leadership and other Christians alike just see ourselves in that light.

When my preacher friend, Les Boldt, would hold a revival meeting with my congregation, I heard him many times when meeting someone say, “I’m just an old preacher.” I like that. We are just Christians with a job to do. Let’s do it and leave it at that, shall we?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray that God would help you appreciate both your work in the body and others as we all strive to be servants and stewards of Jesus.

- Greg

August 9

“Immorality Among You”

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 5

VERSE FOR TODAY: “It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father’s wife.” (1 Corinthians 5:1)

When Tom preaches on sexual immorality, the people in the pews nod their heads in agreement; “There should be no sexual sin in the church!” The problem is not that Christians don’t agree that sexual immorality is bad, but that they no longer understand what sexual immorality is! It’s not as if God doesn’t inform us in His Word, but we have become so corrupted by the world’s values that we can’t discern them from God’s instructions.

The Church is being torn apart by Christians who cannot, or will not, read God’s Instruction Manual, the Bible. And many of those who *do* read what the Bible has to say about sexual sin believe that God will make an exception in their case - or the case of their family member or close friend. “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons.” (Acts 10:34, King James Version)

Immorality, un-repented of, has no place in the body of Christ. Study the Word to know exactly what God considers to be immoral and adjust your life accordingly.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for those who are caught in the web of worldly deceit about God’s plan and immorality, and be sure to keep your way clear of sexual sin as well.

- Beth

August 10

Our Greatest Danger

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 6

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor

idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

Our world has lost its sense of sin. The Church has lost the ability to evaluate, define, describe, appraise, and announce the fatal nature of sin. Men have decided that sin is only wrong when you get caught! It’s the philosophy of our time. It is the greatest danger facing the church today – our own lack of moral restraint and the disintegration of Christian standards in our every day lives.

So many Christians are accepting or participating in things today that just a few years ago they considered quite sinful. Perhaps it’s time to take a good look at our holy and righteous Father in Heaven. I believe when we do, we will see how filthy we have allowed our own lives to become and cry out as Isaiah did, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (Isaiah 7:15)

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for His righteous rule and ask Him to keep you from being influenced by the values of a lost and dying world.

- Tom

August 11

God’s Place for You

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 7:1-24

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.” (1 Corinthians 7:17)

Sometimes when people find themselves in a tough place, they assume they are in the wrong place.

“Maybe I have married the wrong person.”

“I must somehow be out of God’s will.”

I suppose this may be true in some cases. However, just because a situation is difficult, that doesn’t mean you aren’t meant to be there.

The Message puts it this way: “And don’t be wishing you were someplace else or with someone else. Where you are right now is God’s place for you. Live and obey and love and believe right there. God, not your marital status, defines your life...”

You can accomplish God's will for your life right where you are. Paul's whole purpose in writing to the people of Corinth was to give them instructions on how to live out God's will for their lives even in the midst of a very corrupt place. We live in a corrupt world too. Live out the life to which God has called you, and do it right where you are.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today praying that you will be content in your place in life, and that you will live out His mission for you.

- Lori

August 12

The World in Its Present Form

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 7:25-40

VERSE FOR TODAY: "For the present form of this world is passing away." (1 Corinthians 7:31b)

On the surface, especially for those who do not know Jesus, Paul's words here may be disturbing. For people who are struggling to "make it" in this world, or who feel they just are finally reaching the top, or even for those who have lived atop the heap for their whole life – the thought of the world passing away may be scary. Yet we see it happening. And the Christian should rejoice in the fact!

At first, Paul's words don't seem to make sense in the preceding verses. What is it you want us to do, Paul? The point he makes is to not be trapped living by worldly standards. Don't let the world distract you from Kingdom priorities.

If you're married, don't live like the world expects married people to live – the world in its present form is passing away. If you're not married, don't give into the world's philosophies of the single life – the world in its present form is passing away. Don't rejoice over things the world says are worthy – the world in its present form is passing away.

Christian, if you have grieved our modern world, don't! Rejoice! It is passing away. Live with Kingdom priorities.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray a prayer of praise today for the plan of redemption that God is bringing about in history.

- Greg

August 13

Puffed Up

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 8

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know.” (1 Corinthians 8:2)

We like to think we understand God’s intentions better than those around us, don’t we? How frequently do we hear a fragment of a situation that a fellow church member is going through and we immediately know how they should respond? In fact, it is infuriating that they would do it any other way... “Do they *not know* what God would have them to do?” Ah, pride - constantly making us feel so good about ourselves.

We all sin and constantly fall short. It seems so much easier to look at the chaotic lives of other Christians to feel better about our own problems. However, we need to ditch the superiority and seek forgiveness regarding our own sinful nature. We should show love to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Certainly, this does not mean that we should enable sin, but speak into people’s lives rather than speaking about them to others.

We do not “know it all” or “have it all together” – we are all being perfected, and we each have different flesh patterns and struggles. Let’s remind ourselves that we do actually make mistakes, put down our prideful nature, locate our compassion, and put it to use.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to show you where you have been prideful and seek forgiveness.

-Kristin

August 14

No Regrets

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 9:1-18

VERSE FOR TODAY: “So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.” (1 Corinthians 9:14)

What a blessing I have had from being married to a preacher of the Gospel! I am blessed beyond measure. We have had some wonderful experiences, and traveling with Rock Solid Ministries is certainly one of them.

Early in our ministry life we were looking at a church to serve which would require a move of great distance from our family. One of the questions Tom was asked,

“How little can you get by on?” This church boasted about their missions giving and had a nice building and a parsonage. While taken aback, Tom figured out the bare minimum we would need, they accepted it, and we moved.

Lesson learned: never, *ever* go to a church that is unwilling to pay you a livable wage. It is not as if they did not have the money; they were just unwilling to pay the preacher. Some of them felt that if you want to serve the Lord, you should be willing to suffer, and they were willing to help us along in that process. We *were* willing to sacrifice for the Lord and do not regret the time spent with this congregation.

Again, we have been blessed in our service to the Lord, and He has always provided for our needs. No regrets.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for provision; trust God.

- Beth

August 15

Eyes on the Prize

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 9:19-10:13

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air.” (1 Corinthians 9:24-26)

“Are you training for a triathlon?”

Just one of many questions people started asking me a few years ago when I lost 50-60 pounds (purposely). I didn’t even have to consider the question, “No,” was always my immediate and definitive response! I cannot think of a single race I have ever won in my life. Long and “lanky” in my teens made no difference. I was still “as slow as Christmas”, and I really don’t think losing weight in my 50’s is going to change that now! I just wanted be healthy. It took a lot of self-control (eating habits, early morning walks, and bike rides), but in the end, it was well worth it.

The same is true in my spiritual life. If I am going to obtain my goal, if I am going to receive the prize, it’s going to take self-control (feeding on God’s Word, early morning talks with my Lord, and riding His “narrow way”), but in the end, it will be well worth it!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you keep your eyes on the prize, and then – go for it!

- Tom

August 16

My Right or My Responsibility?

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God – even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.” (1 Corinthians 10:32-33)

If you know me very well, you know that I am a little stubborn. On top of that, I have a friend that constantly reminds me that I am not the least bit subtle. If you combine those two character traits there could be trouble. When I read the verse for today, I immediately think, “Yeah, but...did you read the ‘everything is permissible’ part?”

For a long time I had a real attitude when it came to this passage. I figured, if I had the maturity to handle freedom, everybody else should just buck up, grow a little bit, and “arrive” like I had. Why should I give up my “rights” just because someone else might get offended? Isn’t that their problem? Um...no. It isn’t their problem; it’s mine. It is my responsibility to “not cause anyone to stumble”.

Why? So that they may be saved! That is my ultimate goal! I am to get people to heaven, even if it means I don’t get to exercise all of my “freedoms”. It seems a small price to pay, doesn’t it?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to give you an attitude of willingness – willingness to sacrifice your “rights” for the sake of other’s salvation.

- Lori

August 17

Glory!

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

VERSE FOR TODAY: “...but woman is the glory of man.” (1 Corinthians 11:7b)

My wife would be the first to tell you that I don’t know much more about women than most men, I suppose. Romantic relationships can be confusing, especially in our culture. But if you want to make any sense of the male/female relationship, you can only begin to understand it through the lens of the scriptures.

Many a man has taken parts of the scripture to force his wife into some sort of submission. But while this passage does teach male leadership in the home, it also tells us that families cannot operate without the important role of women. After all, it's the women who bare all people into the world! That kind of levels the playing field about who is "important" even if we don't share the same roles in the home.

But I really think I could spend some time on verse seven. The "woman is the glory of man."

I think a lot of men believe their glory comes from their job, their achievements, their intellect, or their physique. No. What does Paul say makes a man? A woman. And lest you men who are single think you've nothing to "make you glorious" – you do have a mother!

Guys, I think we need to begin treating the women in our lives a little more preciously than maybe we do!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for women in your life who made you (whether literally or figuratively).

- Greg

August 18

Remember

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

VERSE FOR TODAY: "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." (1 Corinthians 11:24b)

My thoughts sometimes wander during communion. I find myself thinking of all sorts of things.

"Why do these crackers always stick in my back teeth?"

"That juice is sour this morning, I wonder how long it's been in the frig."

"I should have spit out my gum, now I have crackers in it."

To my own shame, it's true.

We are told in scripture that we are to remember Him. The reality of Jesus' suffering and death ought to jolt us into a riveting time of tremendous thankfulness and grievous repentance. That should be enough to keep our minds busy for quite a while.

However, we don't really remember. Oh, we picture Him with a sad look on His face, situated nicely on a well-hewn cross, not a drop of blood in sight. We forget the scandal. We forget the flesh-tearing whipping that left Him weak with blood loss and quivering exposed muscles. We forget His facial hair was ripped out and a thorny crown was beaten into his head and face. We forget that He was made to drag a wooden beam weighing 125-300 pounds through streets. We forget that after spikes and spears ripped through His hands, feet and side, he spent hours fighting suffocation. We forget that He hung there dying because He loved *us*. Me. You.

How could we NOT remember? Lord, forgive us.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask the Father for a vivid reminder of what He endured for you.

- Lori

August 19

The Body

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 12:1-26

VERSE FOR TODAY: "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ." (1 Corinthians 12:12)

One thing I love about traveling is getting to know how *big* the family of God is. We get trapped sometimes into believing that our church or fellowship of churches is all there is, but it is not; the Church is worldwide. I have made many wonderful friends that I never would have met except through Rock Solid Ministries.

The body of Christ is larger than my mind can comprehend; it is past, present, and future generations. It is to be cared for just like our own bodies. We feed it, nurture it, clean it, and generally promote its good health and well-being. We would not dismember or hurt our body because of our pride, selfishness, or any other foolish reason. We need to lift one another up with words of encouragement and love, not tear each other down with gossip, hatred, jealousy, or fear.

As we travel through this world, we need to remember that *we* are the Body of Christ. Maybe we are the toe, the nose, or the knee, but each part is important and needed for the overall health of the Body.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you encourage and promote good health in the Body of Christ.

- Beth

August 20

Body Language

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 12:27-13:13

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” (1 Corinthians 12:27-30)

“He’s just not ‘our kind’.”

“They really don’t fit in.”

“She doesn’t belong.”

All statements from “God fearing” church members about new folks in the Body of Believers, or folks who have been members for a long time, but have never really been accepted by the “lifers” in a particular locale. What a shame that anyone would think or be made to feel that way! The fact is that, when it comes to the Body of Christ, everybody fits in - even if some do “stick out like a sore thumb”!

We will not all be alike or think alike. Some will be the hand, some the foot, others the eye; too many will serve as the mouth. But everyone is needed! That is how the beautiful Body of Christ functions.

Find your place and encourage others to do the same so that the Body functions as God intended.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for every part of His Body and do your part to see that all members “have the same care for one another.” (v. 25)

- Tom

August 21

Play the Right Tune

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 14:1-17

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle?” (1 Corinthians 14:8)

For centuries before modern communication methods, armies were summoned to battle by the sound of the bugle. The horn issued forth all manner of commands. A bugler had to know many “tunes” and play them correctly and distinctly. To fail at such could spell disaster!

Good preaching is a bugle that assembles and moves the Church, and the preacher its bugler. Our gathering together on the Lord’s Day is to be for the edification and encouragement of the *whole* body of Christ (Hebrews 10:25). But what is the purpose of the bugle playing a muster the army doesn’t recognize?

In contrast, tongues was given by God to allow a person to speak in a language previously unlearned to share the gospel with the lost. It was largely unneeded in the Corinthians local gatherings. But who wouldn’t want to show off such a flashy gift at church? (Especially since no one could tell if it was fake anyhow!) But what they were doing was helping no one. Paul said only God knew what they were saying; it was a mystery to the rest. Paul said what they *ought* desire, rather than to speak in tongues, was to prophesy - that is, to *preach*.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for our preachers to be competent buglers to summon and move the Church of God.

- Greg

August 22

Think!

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 14:18-40

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.” (1 Corinthians 14:20)

Somehow people have gotten the impression that all the work of the Holy Spirit is spontaneous and out of control. Thinking and planning have gotten a bad rap. Anything that takes thought or planning is “of men” and “leaves the Spirit out of it”. I don’t know where this notion came from or why. What it has led to, for one, is a lot of bad “Saturday-night-special” sermons.

“I had something prepared for you this morning, but I just felt like the Holy Spirit was telling me to preach something else.”

I’m not saying that can never be the case. But I will say that most often it should not be. In the words of one of my preaching professors, “Don’t blame the Holy Spirit for your lack of preparation!”

Intellect is not the antithesis of the Spirit; intellect is the Spirit's tool when our minds are in submission to Him. Christians are to be thinking people. We are to be people who use the minds the Good Lord gave us to serve and love Him with all our heart, soul, *mind*, and strength. (Mark 12:30)

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Take time to prayerfully submit your mind to the Lord this morning in prayer. See if your thoughts, understanding, and planning of all life's workings isn't better and easier.

- Greg

August 23

Remember the Gospel

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 15:1-19

VERSE FOR TODAY: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures." (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

Chapter 15 begins with Paul reminding the Corinthians of the Gospel he had preached, and they had received. Somehow the Gospel message was getting lost in the everyday life of the Corinthian Church. My guess is that they spent so much time arguing with one another - planning their church dinners and contemplating who was the greatest among them - that they just didn't have time to remember the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This has been a problem for the redeemed throughout the centuries. Christians get so caught up in "churchy" activities and selfish pursuits that they forget the very reason for their existence.

In our conversion, we reenact the Gospel. We die to our sinful nature through faith and repentance, and then are buried and resurrected with Christ in the watery grave of baptism." (Galatians 3:26-27; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16).

Remember the reason for your existence. Remember the preaching (vv. 1-4); remember the witnesses (vv. 5-8); remember Paul's testimony (vv. 9-10); remember, "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied" (v. 19); remember the Gospel!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus *and* yourself.

- Tom

August 24

Muddy Feet

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 15:20-58

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.” (1 Corinthians 15:49)

Do you have muddy feet? I don't mean your feet are dirty. I mean does your spirit ever feel weighed down by your body? I really identify with this scripture. I feel weighed down in my spirit because I am made of flesh and bone. I must face fear, sorrow, hate, envy, and many more emotions because those are feelings my body imposes on my spirit. If I did not have a body, why would I fear? Why would I be sad, angry, or jealous? I wouldn't; those are emotions and feelings that all have to do with living in a fleshly body. We are held back from flying with Jesus spiritually because we have muddy feet – still clinging to this world. We so often forget Whom we belong to and who God made us to be.

As a child, I went barefoot and hated having to wash my feet to go to bed, but there was no getting into a clean bed with dirty feet! Are you going to bed every night with “muddy feet”? We must get rid of that which muddies our spiritual life!

Jesus understands washing feet. Maybe it's time to ask for His help.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you clean your muddy feet so you can fly spiritually with Him today.

- Beth

August 25

“My Love Be with You All”

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 16

VERSE FOR TODAY: “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.” (1 Corinthians 16:21-24)

This is an amazing conclusion to Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church. When I read this, my mind goes back to all the hard words Paul had written to his brothers and sisters in Corinth. He had written about their quarreling and divisions, sexual immorality and lawsuits, idolatry and immaturity. Paul was not easy on them, but then he concludes

by saying, “My love be with you all in Christ Jesus!” Come to think of it though, if he did not love them, why would he have gone to so much trouble to chastise them?

Paul was doing just what God does. Our heavenly Father loves us and so chastens us when we are wrong. He does this through our Bible reading, through Christian family or friends, and sometimes through the preaching of the Word.

Let’s be sure that we show our love for others by always speaking the truth from God’s Word and not getting upset when they do the same.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for your Christian friends and family who love you enough to always tell you the truth, even when it’s not easy to hear.

- Tom

August 26

Comfort Through You

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

VERSE FOR TODAY: “who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” (2 Corinthians 1:4)

When my son was six years old, I watched him do something extraordinary. His great-grandpa had passed away, and it was time for the funeral. He insisted on sitting beside his Mema during the service. I watched from behind as he scooted right up next to her. He stretched his arm out several times to pat her back. At one point, he got up on his knees. I almost reached out to make him sit down, but I realized what he was doing. He had climbed onto his knees so that he could reach up high enough to caress his Mema’s face and lay his head on her shoulder. He didn’t understand everything that was going on, but he knew this: His Pepa was gone. His Mema was sad. He wanted to make her feel better.

How many times had his daddy held him close to pat his back? How many times had I caressed his chubby cheek to wipe away a tear when he was crying? He wanted to do the same for her.

How many times have you received comfort from your relationship with God? Do you want to share it with others?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time praying for your own willingness to share God’s comfort with others.

- Lori

August 27

Painfully Honest

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:11

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.” (2 Corinthians 2:4)

Sometimes preachers have to deliver hard sermons. Sometimes preachers avoid delivering hard sermons. Sometimes preachers make allowances to deliver hard sermons in ways that will seem less harsh. Such was the life of the Apostle Paul and his relationship with the congregation in Corinth.

Having already written them twice, and having to say some pretty tough things, Paul wants them to know how difficult it was. The responsibility for him to tell them the truth about their need to repent in certain areas was not something he relished, but that caused him great anguish. But love demanded he tell the truth – even the painful truth.

Certainly, and unfortunately, there are some preachers and elders in God’s Church that enjoy a kind of authoritarian attitude. A few are almost sadistic in their policing of Christians’ lives. However, most are men who genuinely care about the condition of our souls and the witness of the Lord’s Church. They are men who weep over your sin and their own. And so, they, with as much humility and tenderness as possible, call us to repentance.

Let us be people who will humbly accept the message of truth – even when it’s painful.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to give you a humble heart – ready to hear the truth of the Word.

- Greg

August 28

Pew!

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 2:12-17

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.” (2 Corinthians 2:15)

You stink! At least to some you do. Then again, to God and others, you may be a pleasing aroma. It all depends on your “spiritual olfactories”, I suppose. But those who follow Christ are supposed to have His “smell”.

That smell, or aroma, depending on your “smeller”, is distinct. When you’re driving down the road where a skunk has been hit, you don’t need anyone to tell you what it is! Once you’ve smelled it, you recognize it every time.

You also don’t have to – as in the words of our director, Tom Weaver – “pick up a skunk to *know* it smells”. A life lived well smells good from a long ways away. A life lived poorly stinks as much. You don’t have to get close to sin and godlessness to know and understand the repulsive nature of it.

You can’t fake it either. I’ve never done it, but I’m pretty sure there is no amount of cologne, deodorant, or soap that will cover up skunk stink. And you can discern *fake Jesus smell* from a mile away too.

So, what about it? How do you smell? Maybe you can ask someone around you! Even if you’ve gone “nose-blind” to yourself, no one else has!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to make your life a pleasing aroma to Him and others.

- Greg

August 29

Lifting the Veil

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 3

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.” (2 Corinthians 3:15-16)

A veil is a covering that prevents us from seeing the face clearly. When I got married, I wore a wedding veil, and I couldn’t see Tom clearly until he lifted it near the end of the ceremony.

When we turn to the Lord, “the veil is taken away”, but when does that happen? Is it when we start to believe or when we are baptized into Christ? I think when we hear and start to believe, God begins to lift the veil so that we may see the whole truth. This is a whole new thought process for me. As we share Jesus with others, God is removing the veil that keeps them from seeing Him, from understanding His plan of salvation and grace. If I refuse to share the Gospel, many around me will spend their entire lives with their faces veiled to the truths of God.

We are like the preacher at a wedding. We ask the questions which, when answered correctly, lead to an everlasting bond between Christ and His Bride, the Church.

“Do you believe?”

“Yes.”

“Will you confess that belief?”

“Yes.”

“Will you repent of your sins?”

“Yes.”

“Will you be baptized?”

“Yes.”

“You may lift the veil!”

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you share His love with others today and start lifting veils.

- Beth

August 30

Do Not Lose Heart

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 4:1-12

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.” (2 Corinthians 4:1-2)

To “lose heart” is to become despondent and demoralized, to give up and give in. Do you ever feel you are losing heart? Some days I feel I am. I see the disgraceful, underhanded ways of people who call themselves Christians, watch as one preacher after another tampers with God’s Word to please himself or his congregation, and then I see a world that mocks our Creator-God and His Son Jesus, and I just start to lose heart!

It's on these "lose heart" days that these twelve verses in Second Corinthians are such a blessing. I'm reminded that Satan has blinded the eyes of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the Gospel and the glory of Christ. My battle is with Satan, not the people of this world. I will daily renounce disgraceful and underhanded ways, and I will never tamper with God's Word so that the world can be won to Christ.

Remember, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair." (2 Corinthians 4:8) Don't lose heart; with God's help, you will win your battles today!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for His encouraging Word.

- Tom

August 31

Renewal

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:10

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 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." (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

If you have ever watched Alzheimer's take over a person's life, you know what a horrible thing it is. We would hardly think of it as a "light and momentary trouble" after witnessing the devastation it leaves behind. I watched my mother waste away from this disease. One step at a time, it took her abilities, and it ultimately took her life.

I remember one afternoon when I was visiting my mom. Her ability to read or even speak was long gone. Yet, there she sat in a chair with her Bible opened before her. She was looking at it, fingering the pages and caressing the cover. She didn't remember how to brush her teeth, but she knew that renewal and hope was in the word of God.

Anything we might face on this earth is "light and momentary" compared to the eternal glory we are awaiting. "For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

Yes. Yes, it is.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time praying for inward renewal in the midst of your outward circumstances.

- Lori

September 1

The Power of Persuasion

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.” (2 Corinthians 5:11a)

Though the hope of the Christian is great upon his physical death, Paul ends the previous passage with the truth of judgment. The fact is that at the close of all history there will be a time when everyone gets his due. The Christian will receive what is due him in the acceptance of Jesus’ life on the Christian’s behalf; the unbeliever will receive the penalty of his sins. It is this thought to which the “Therefore” of verse eleven points. This is the thought that drives Paul to persuade others.

Does it us? Do we honestly care enough about the souls of others that we are driven in an attempt to persuade them of the coming judgment and offer them the hope of eternal life?

Always understand that the power of persuasion and conviction of sin comes with to one from the Holy Spirit. However, we are the tools of the Holy Spirit to others. Seldom does Jesus come to people in a “Damascus Road experience”. He will use our loving hearts and our obedient lips to care to tell others the story of Jesus.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for a loving heart and obedient lips today. Pray that the Holy Spirit would use your life to convict and persuade the souls of men.

- Greg

September 2

No Obstacle

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

VERSE FOR TODAY: “We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way;” (2 Corinthians 6:3-4a)

According to a Google search, an obstacle is “a thing that blocks one's way or prevents or hinders progress”. I’d say that’s a pretty accurate definition in anyone’s book.

Everyone seems to think they have an abundance of rights, but almost no responsibilities. This may be true in the make-believe-safe-room world of an over-sensitive populace, but it simply doesn't bear out in the real world – physical or spiritual.

As an Ambassador for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20), I have more responsibilities than rights. One of my greatest responsibilities is serving as a credible witness to the changing power of Jesus Christ. I must always be aware that my words and actions will serve as a stepping-stone to the Cross of Christ or a stumbling block to the pits of Hell. This makes the way I live my life of great importance in God's plan for the redemption of man. I can never be a stealth follow of Jesus because He is on display to the world everyday through me. Even if I never teach a Bible class or stand in front of a congregation of believers to share a message from the Word of God, I still teach the Word by the way I live.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to keep you from ever becoming a stumbling block on His Kingdom road.

- Tom

September 3

Idol Talk

SCRIPTURE: II Corinthians 6:14-7:1

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.'" (2 Corinthians 6:16)

What pact does the temple of God (the Christian) have with idols? We, (our bodies), are the temple of the living God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). God dwells in us through the Holy Spirit. Wherever we go, God goes with us; He guides us and helps us to be His people. He has provided all we need in His Word so we can walk with Him.

Sounds simple enough doesn't it; so why can't we do it?

This passage continues with instructions on how to maintain our walk with God: do not unite with sin, be separate, and do not touch what is unclean. In other words, give up your personal idols and don't live the way you used to – in and of the world.

What idols do you have? What comes between you and God? Work? Recreation? Possessions? Anything that takes your focus away from Him is an idol. Isn't it time to clean your temple and make sure that the one living God is firmly seated on the throne?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you recognize your idols and destroy them all this very day.

- Beth

September 4

“Good Grief”

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 7:2-16

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.” (2 Corinthians 7:10)

Every time our round-headed comical friend made a poor decision, we could count on a little girl named Lucy to once again exclaim, “Good grief, Charlie Brown!” Did you ever wonder what “good” grief might be? Perhaps we should first define what grief is.

According to dictionary.com, grief is, among other things: “sharp sorrow; painful regret”. So, good grief (or godly grief) brings about such great sorrow and regret in our hearts for sins against God that we are compelled to turn away from the wrong in our lives and turn toward God (repent). It is not a sorrow for being caught but a deep felt regret for having offended our Creator God.

Something that helps me in this regard is to remember that Jesus Christ bore the guilt of the sins of all mankind on the cross of Calvary. I consider how my heart breaks when I realize I have sinned and brought pain upon God and others. The anguish I feel was multiplied by the entire human race and placed on the heart of Jesus when He died for us.

Today, let’s consider the weight of our sins on the heart of God and then repent. Good grief - it’s what we need!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Go before God with a penitent heart and ask for His forgiveness and guidance today and every day.

- Tom

September 5

A Privilege in Worship

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.” (2 Corinthians 8:3-4)

When you hear the words “urgently pleaded”, what comes to your mind? Politely offering? Asking nicely? Not me. I picture someone on his knees, hands folded while begging with great emotion. “Please, please, please!”

When was the last time you begged someone to let you give to him or her monetarily? I can remember politely offering to pick up a check at a restaurant. I know I have uttered the words, “I really want you to take it” when offering someone money or payment for something. However, I’m not sure I have ever “urgently pleaded” with someone to allow me to give.

The Macedonian people, to whom Paul refers, lived in poverty. Yet, they begged for the opportunity to give. They considered it a privilege to share what they could not afford to give in order to help Paul’s ministry.

Do we tend to have that attitude when the opportunity to give comes our way? We should. We should consider it a privilege in worship to our Savior.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today praying about your own attitude in giving. Pray for a willing, sincere and generous heart in all aspects of worship, but especially in giving.

- Lori

September 6

A Man Who Needs No Introduction

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 8:16-24

VERSE FOR TODAY: “With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel.” (2 Corinthians 8:18)

“He’s a man that needs no introduction, so without further ado, I give you...”

I had to reread this chapter a few times. Did I miss something? Who is this “famous” brother? Did the Corinthians really know? Or was Paul building anticipation by sending them a famous mystery speaker.

“I’m not gonna tell you who it is – but lemme just say this – he’s famous!”

I love this verse.

Through the centuries people have speculated over the mystery man to whom Paul refers. Some have thought that it may be Luke. “Famous” for his preaching through his gospel account, maybe he was stopping off to make some more copies and tell some

more “live and in person” stories of Jesus. Maybe it was some of Paul’s other companions – Tychicus or Trophimus.

But here’s what’s great about it: no one knows. And thus it should be. For long after the preacher is gone to his reward, the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ is what should remain solid in the hearts and minds of the messenger’s recipients and their generations of disciples afterward.

Whatever people will say of you – famous or not – will they remember you most for your abilities or your message?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray that God would let His message be that which takes center stage when people encounter you.

- Greg

September 7

The Supply

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 9

VERSE FOR TODAY: “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.” (2 Corinthians 9:10)

I’m going to skip the admonitions we all give from this passage to be generous with our money (although you should). I’m also going to skip talking about being a cheerful giver (even though that’s important).

Note *what* God gives, or at least how Paul describes it here. He says God will “*multiply your seed for sowing*”. While God may increase *your* harvest, the first thing He promises is that He will give you more to sow! That is, He will bless you with even more that He would have designated for you to *give away*.

As we begin trusting God with a portion of our income by giving it away, He doesn’t expect that we will just continue to give that amount. He wants us to increase as He increases. This is a promise I think God is overjoyed to keep. When He finds someone that is willing to be a conduit of blessings instead of a hoarder of them, He really pours it on. And you know what you’ll find? I think you’ll find that the “harvest of your righteousness” has less to do with the excess spending money you will get, but the joy you will experience that only comes from ridiculously and cheerfully giving!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray that God will increase your trust in giving so that He can increase your joy of living life in Him.

- Greg

September 8

Facebook Bold

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 10

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent!” (2 Corinthians 10:1)

Paul sounds like many people on Facebook. I have a feeling that his online posts would have been strong and powerful. I know men of God who are like this; they are strong and passionate, they love God - following Him without reserve - and their preaching and writing is powerful and bold. Yet, if you were to meet them “face to face”, you might say, “Really, this is the person I heard preaching on the CD or who’s daring article I just read?” Paul’s letters *were* bold; he often chastised the saints harshly. He tried to keep the church on the right path, helping them to see how far off course they had gone.

But Paul was on the journey himself. He struggled against his own flesh. I like verse 9, “for I do not wish...to terrify you by my letters”. He did not want to bully but to inform. Strong but meek, seeking to lead while facing his personal weaknesses and shortcomings.

Like Paul, we are trying to be a good example while learning, growing, and sometimes stumbling. That is why we “boast in the Lord” (v. 17), because we realize that our strength is from God at the expense of Jesus.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you be “Facebook bold” with the face-to-face meekness of Paul.

- Beth

September 9

A Sincere and Pure Devotion

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 11:1-15

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.” (2 Corinthians 11:3-4)

I have read this passage in general, and these two verses in particular many times, and have always focused on the three things Paul says the Devil will use to lead us astray:

1. Someone teaching about a Jesus other than the One the Apostles had taught about;
2. Christians accepting a spirit other than the One which is holy'
3. Permitting a gospel other than the one we have already accepted.

“You put up with it readily enough,” Paul says. After many years on the “revival road” I know how true this is. Churches using Sunday school materials that tell about a Jesus who is curiously absent from the pages of our Bibles, worldly spirited people in the pews, a gospel of self-glorification preached from the pulpit, and Christians with big smiles and glazed-over eyes accepting it all.

Let's be sure that we “readily accept” only that which we know is from God.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you stand firm with “a sincere and pure devotion to Christ”.

- Tom

September 10

Establishing Credibility

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 11:16-33

VERSE FOR TODAY: “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, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.” (2 Corinthians 11:24-28)

Paul hated to boast. Actually, he said he felt foolish talking about such things. However, false teachers had wormed their way in and were spreading accusations against him. It was necessary for him to step in, reestablish his credibility among the Corinthian people, and combat the false teaching. He had to prove that the message of the gospel was true and worth any hardship he may have endured. He had quite a list.

What about you? What does your list look like? What can people look to, in your life, as proof that the gospel message is true and worth hardship in your life?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray about your willingness to stand up for the message of the gospel.

- Lori

September 11

The Likes of Which Cannot Be Told

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

VERSE FOR TODAY: “and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.” (2 Corinthians 12:4)

Amidst all the popular books reaping thousands of dollars from people touting “near death” or “actual death” experiences, my oldest son made an interesting comment and observation. He looked at Paul’s experience (if in fact it is Paul himself that he is referring to in the third person) as he tells it here and noted that Paul was not allowed to tell what he saw in heaven. Of all the people that we might believe, of all the opportunities to know new things about heaven – he could not nor would not write about them.

I don’t judge people’s experiences. If they experienced something, they experienced it. I don’t know what it was. I don’t know what they may have seen versus what Paul saw. I just find it interesting that God didn’t find it necessary for our faith to fill us in on Paul’s experience.

Be careful of putting faith in people’s experiences. Trust God’s Word to give us all the facts we need for life and godliness. His general revelation from creation (Romans 1) and His specific revelation of sixty-six books has - so far - been more than we can even begin to know and apply to every-day living. Let’s let it start and end there – with *God’s Word*.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God today for His Word to us.

- Greg

September 12

A PK Perspective

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 12:11-21

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.” (2 Corinthians 12:20)

Growing up as the daughter of a minister, I find that I have an interesting perspective on churches. As a child, I was keenly aware of issues within the church – I was always observing and listening. I would overhear the frustrations of my parents when people would return to their sin patterns – knowing they had done all they could. I sadly had a front row seat when those in leadership positions would fail or fight for “power” within the church walls. Thankfully, as an adult, I have a better understanding of how our enemy uses confusion as a warfare tactic.

As I read this passage, I feel a sense of understanding with Paul. He is concerned for the church at Corinth. He is anxious that many have fallen back into old habits. I often wonder what a previous minister would write to my current church. What would be his thoughts on both individual and corporate progress? Have we moved forward, spiritually speaking, or fallen backwards? What would Paul say to my church? Better yet, what would Paul say to me about my life?

Of course, Christ set the standard; let us live above reproach – so that when we do leave our earthly congregation and join the ranks of saints above, we will hear the words “well done”.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Lift your church staff and leadership up in prayer this morning.

- Kristin

September 13

“Testing...1-2-3”

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 13:1-14

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you - unless indeed you fail the test?” (2 Corinthians 13:5)

Have you ever watched preachers or musicians getting ready for a worship service? It's interesting. "Testing 1-2-3!" Adjust this microphone up; bring that one down; and don't forget the crowd will absorb a good deal of the sound! (Since I started running Tom's PowerPoint presentations, I've learned quite a lot about the audio/visual ministry.)

Each individual microphone must be tweaked to work well with the sound system. Though the testing is a great help, adjustments still need to be made during the song service or preaching. Just like that, we need to test ourselves to see if we are in the faith, and each Christian will need to be tweaked a bit so they can work well with God. Don't forget, adjustments will still need to be made as we continue to serve our Lord.

This is a good reminder that we all need to look deep into our hearts and see where we are in our walk with God. Thanks, Paul, we needed that. "Testing...1-2-3." Plan a time to examine your walk today.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you examine yourself, look deep into your soul and see if you are living strong in the faith.

- Beth

September 14

Whom Shall I Please?

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 1

VERSE FOR TODAY: "For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ." (Galatians 1:10)

I have been preaching for more than forty years, twenty-nine of those years in "located" ministry – serving as evangelist/preacher for one congregation. On a number of occasions during those twenty-nine years as Beth and I would meet at the main door of the church house following the assembly/worship time (to shake hands with folks as they left the building), she would lean over and whisper in my ear, "So, are you just trying to get fired?" All I had done was preach what the Word says and let the "chips fall where they may".

Please don't misunderstand my wife. She would not be happy if I ever compromised! She just understands how the uncompromised Word can affect the uncircumcised heart. In many churches, the people have a mindset that they should destroy the messenger if they cannot destroy the Message.

I have always believed that the only one I need to fear is the One who has the "authority to cast into hell..." (Luke 12:5) I hope you feel the same way.

By the way, if you have a preacher who refuses to compromise the Word, why don't you personally thank him this week?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you always be pleasing to Him.

- Tom

September 15

For the Truth of the Gospel

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 2:1-10

VERSE FOR TODAY: “This matter arose, because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.” (Galatians 2:4-5)

Dear Leaders of God's Church,

Please notice several things about the verse for today:

First, “false brothers” had weaseled their way into the church. Notice that it calls them brothers. They were posing as one of the church in order to be accepted and to cause trouble (or maybe even push their own agenda).

Second, these “false brothers” had a mission. They were out to enslave the people of the church. They wanted to entice the church by whatever means possible to make them fall for their scheme.

Third, the leaders of the church did not give in, give up, slow down, compromise, sell out, accommodate or bargain with the false brothers – not for a moment. Let that be your goal as a leader.

Fourth, the leaders of the church had a clear vision and knew the purpose of their efforts. They were determined that, under no circumstance, was the truth of the gospel to be lost.

Now, Leaders of God's Church, go do your job – for the sake of the gospel.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray that God would give you a great desire to defend the truth of the gospel within His church (whether you are a leader or not).

- Lori

September 16

Bewitched

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 2:11-3:9

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Who has bewitched you?” (Galatians 3:1b)

Remember the show from the sixties *Bewitched*? It was a comedy of a man who fell in love with a witch and all the situations that such a relationship spawned. Comedy came from people who had spells put on them with funny results. In much the same way, Paul tells the Galatians that they have, in a sense, fallen prey to a “spell”. However, the consequences are far from comical.

Good-sounding religious folk claiming authority from high places had come and told them they need not only faith in Jesus, but needed also the works of the old law and all its regulations to be righteous before God. This bewitching spell endangered their very soul!

Christians today need be ever as vigilant to the false teachings of good-sounding religious folk who claim authority from high places. Places with large crowds, TV ministries, and lots of “alphabet soup” at the end of a name do not give authority to a man’s words. Many of the most faithful-to-the-Word preachers are not PhD’s who speak before thousands, but those who minister daily in small corners of the Lord’s Kingdom. Do not be bewitched! Pay attention to the Word and those who proclaim it faithfully!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to enlighten you through His Word about false teachings you may have picked up and received as truth. Also, give thanks to God for those He’s put in your life that provide solid biblical truth.

- Greg

September 17

A Christ-Centered Promise

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 3:10-22

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ.” (Galatians 3:16)

Four hundred and thirty years before the Law was given, God made a Promise to Abraham; and the coming of the Law could not and did not nullify that Promise. God promised Abraham, “I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:3)

This promise was fulfilled in Christ. Speaking of Jesus, the Hebrew writer tells us, “Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.” (Hebrews 9:15)

“The promised eternal inheritance”...I like that! Because of Jesus, we all have the opportunity to become children of Abraham and therefore, heirs of the Promise.

“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’” (Galatians 3:8)

“So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” (Galatians 3:9)

“And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.” (Galatians 3:29)

Our God is faithful!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for always keeping His promises.

- Tom

September 18

Choosing Clothes

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 3:23-4:20

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” (Galatians 3:26-27)

As a parent, I have had struggles with my children on what they should wear. After a few battles, I sometimes caved and let them go out dressed miss-matched or in clothes I didn't think were appropriate for the season. Sometimes you just have to let them choose for themselves. God offers us the same thing. We can choose to dress ourselves with Christ or go around in rags.

What a beautiful picture of God our Father! He allows us to *choose* Him; He does not force us. He provided the way and lets us decide. I am God's daughter; I have a very real relationship with the Creator of the Universe. That was *my* choice. Throwing off the rags of the world and putting on Christ. Leaving all the filth of this world is not easy - each of us have things that tend to pull us back. Friends or relatives don't accept the

change in us, some watch for us to fail, and all the time we continue to feel that we are not worthy.

Christ changed all that for us; we *are* worthy because of His sacrifice when we choose to clothe ourselves in Him.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for allowing you to choose your clothes, and then wear them with confidence.

- Beth

September 19

Live Free or Die

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 4:21-5:12

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” (Galatians 5:1)

World War II was nearing a successful conclusion in 1945 when the New Hampshire Legislature adopted the words that General Jon Stark spoke on July 31, 1809 as their State motto: “Live Free or Die.” As a citizen of the United States of America, I have always liked that motto, but as a citizen (first and foremost) of the Kingdom of Christ, I absolutely love it!

Our reading today is all about people “born of the flesh” trying to make those “born of the Spirit” live according to their rules. This has a very contemporary ring to it, don’t you think? Paul says that if we conform to the ways of the people of the flesh, we will become slaves to the flesh once again. I *would* rather die!

Christ has set me free from the chains of my past and the burdens of the flesh! Why would I *ever* want to go back? I am a citizen of a Kingdom that shall never end. Will I give that up to follow the thinking of those who have no hope? Absolutely not!

Christian, live as one who has been unshackled. “Live Free or Die!”

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for setting you free through Jesus Christ.

- Tom

September 20

The Cost of Living (by the Sinful Nature)

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 5:13-26

VERSE FOR TODAY: “If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.” (Galatians 5:15)

Paul warns us to watch out...for our own brothers and sisters. That is sad, but oh, isn't it true? Unfortunately, there are those brothers and sisters that are so critical, bitter, power-hungry, or maybe even jealous, that they can only see fit to “bite and devour” - tearing others apart. However, the command mentioned only one verse before is to “Love your neighbor as yourself”. “Biting and devouring” doesn't sound like love, does it?

If we read further, Paul admonishes us to live by the Spirit. If we don't, it becomes quite evident. Look at the obvious results of living by the sinful nature (vv. 19-21). I find it interesting and sometimes convicting to read this list. You mean that being jealous is as bad as sexual immorality? Having discord among brothers is as bad as witchcraft? You bet! Sin is sin. Verse 21 states quite clearly that those who “live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Let that soak in. Don't live a life of biting, devouring, hatred, jealousy and dissension. In the end, it will not accomplish what you had hoped, and it could cost you eternity.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray today that you will give up living by the sinful nature, and be filled with the Spirit to live a life of fruitfulness.

- Lori

September 21

“What Is That to You?”

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 6

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor.” (Galatians 6:4)

This verse brings to mind an incident that Jesus had with His disciples just after His resurrection. Peter, after having been command by Jesus to “follow me”, asks about John.

“Lord, what about this man?”

Amid other words, Jesus replies, "...what is that to you? You follow me."

God is not much interested in how we fare at our calling in comparison to how others are doing at their calling. Jesus says it is none of our business how good a job they are doing. And we can no more compare our work in the Kingdom to anyone else's any more than we can compare apples to oranges. Even if every other thing were equal (which it certainly cannot be even close to being), I am completely unique from every other individual in history. I have my own calling, my own history, my own struggles, and my own strengths. If I will boast (which certainly doesn't seem like something we should be doing anyway), I will need to do it after taking stock of how I'm doing at the work given to me – not to someone else.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for God's help keeping your eyes off what others are doing and accomplishing, and that you can keep your mind on your own Kingdom work.

- Greg

September 22

The Eyes of My Heart

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 1

VERSE FOR TODAY: "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." (Ephesians 1:18-19a)

"I am praying for you."

How many times have you heard that statement? Normally, it is when we are sick or facing a tough time in our life that people pray for us. This prayer for the saints at Ephesus is for a different reason, and I absolutely love it.

We tend to forget about "the hope of His calling". We have "the riches of the glory of His inheritance" - an inheritance that will not fade, rust, or be spent and then gone, but one that will last forever. We get so bogged down in the normal things of life, that we forget just how *abnormal* a life in Christ is. We must never forget just how wonderful it is to be a child of God.

Are the eyes of your heart enlightened? Are you totally and constantly aware of the inheritance you have in Christ?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray "that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His

inheritance in the saints and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.”

- Beth

September 23

Dead Men Walking

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 2:1-22

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.” (Ephesians 2:1-2)

Zombies are very popular these days. I like science fiction, but I really can't get into zombies. Something about that dead look that grosses me out. I have a lot of better things to do than waste my time watching that kind of sci-fi.

Thankfully, we are not part of the walking dead; we have a new life because God loved us and showed us mercy through the sacrifice of Christ. We are no longer walking according to this world, and the prince of darkness does not control us.

But we do need to be reminded that just because *we* have been set free does not mean everyone else has. We are literally walking around in a world of zombies - spiritually dead men and women trapped in sin with no hope of freedom unless we show them the way to forgiveness, love, and grace. This is reality, not television or a movie, but sad truth in a sad world.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God that you have been set free and ask Him how you can better share the Good News of freedom with the walking dead.

- Beth

September 24

Five Things to Pray For

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 3

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father.” (Ephesians 3:14)

In our passage today, Paul speaks about his call from God to share the “mysteries of the Gospel” and God's grace with the Gentiles. He also speaks of the boldness we

have through Jesus Christ. After explaining himself and his calling to the Ephesian Christians, he tells them that it is for these reasons he prays for them. He then tells them the five things he is praying for - five things that we should be praying for as well:

1. That God will strengthen them through His Spirit (v. 16),
2. That Christ will dwell in their hearts by faith (v. 17),
3. That they will be rooted and established in love (v. 17),
4. That they may have strength to comprehend and know the great love of Christ (vv. 18-19),
5. And that they be fully filled with God. (v. 19)

While writing this devotion, I began to think that this would be a good prayer for the Rock Solid Ministries Team to pray over every church where we are involved in a revival, seminar, or some other event. It would also be good to pray this *for* the RSM Team and their families on a regular basis.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray the five requests listed above for yourself and those you worship with every week. You might want to make this a part of your regular prayer time.

- Tom

September 25

The Body of Christ

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 4:1-16

VERSE FOR TODAY: “He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.” (Ephesians 4:16, New Living Translation).”

In this passage, Paul writes clear instructions to the church in Ephesus on how to maintain unity. Everyone in the church has their own spiritual gift and their own calling. They are joined together by one Spirit, one hope (expectation), one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all (vv. 4-6). Paul explains further to the Corinthians, “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” (1 Corinthians 12:27)

Each person is to fulfill their calling, and while doing so, be humble, gentle, bear with others in love, and seek to maintain unity. God has also given leaders to help His people in their work of ministry and for building up the church. When you focus on what God has called you to do, you are working together with others to help the church grow in love. Wouldn't it be great for the church to, in this way, become spiritually mature, and rather than being deceived by false teachings, be able to speak the truth in love and grow to be more like Christ?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you fulfill your calling and maintain unity in the church.

- Truli

September 26

Today's To-Do's

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 4:17-32

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32)

The old preacher's favorite verse hung on a large sign above the pulpit of the sanctuary. It admonished the congregation's members as to how to treat one another. That old preacher was the man God used to call me to His work, as I sat next to him in one of the big “preacher chairs” during the services many times as a boy. I've always tried to remember that verse, although many times I failed to live up to it.

But the whole of today's reading is full of apostolic commands. How many of “Today's To-Do's” can you accomplish?

- Don't walk in futility, but put off your old self and be renewed in the spirit of your mind. (vv. 17, 22-23)
- Speak the truth. (v. 25)
- Don't leave anger burning overnight. (v. 26)
- Work and share with the needy. (v. 28)
- Use only words that build others up – otherwise you grieve the Spirit. (v. 29)
- Throw away the words and actions that are the fruit of past hurts. (v. 31)
- And follow Jesus' example of being kind, tender, and forgiving. (v. 32)

Sound like plenty to do today? Let's get busy!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for God's help remembering how Christ has forgiven you. Pray that it will change how you treat others. If you've not yet received God's forgiveness, please contact us at Rock Solid Ministries today!

- Greg

September 27

Watch Your Mouth

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 5

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.” (Ephesians 5:3-4)

I remember my High School history teacher telling the story of how embarrassed she was each week as her family filed out of church while her dad told the preacher how much he loved the sermon. Mostly, she was embarrassed because every other word was a curse word. This was all “rationalized” by family and friends as part of her father’s identity, due to location, education, etc. He couldn’t control himself; it was “just who he was”.

As an adult, I’ve met people that can’t control their tempers very well. Well-meaning friends will look past it, and some may say, “That’s just the way she is.”

But that isn’t true, is it? We can control ourselves. We can stop and think before we speak (or post). God gave us that ability as humans. Admittedly, I am not a confrontational person. However, I believe that correcting a friend in a loving way, is more caring than rationalizing it for them. Sometimes, one person speaking up can help a friend see the need for a change.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: How is your speech? Take a moment and confess any concerns about your mouth to God and dedicate yourself to thinking before you speak.

- Kristin

September 28

Armor

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 6:1-24

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.” (Ephesians 6:10-11)

God has provided us with armor to protect ourselves and to keep us safe from the forces of darkness. I have heard many sermons on this text, and it is one of my favorites. Brother Jerry Gibson once preached a revival sermon in which he said that every day he literally thought about putting on the armor of God as he got dressed. Listing each piece:

the Breastplate of Righteousness, the Belt of Truth, the Shoes of the Gospel of Peace, the Shield of Faith, the Helmet of Salvation, and the Sword of the Spirit. I remember thinking what a good idea that was and even tried it for a while. I don't know remember how long I kept it up, but it did help me start my day with the right attitude.

If we want to be strong in the Lord, we must apply God's Word to our hearts and minds and remember that He provides strength and protection for us as we face the many battles of Spiritual Warfare. We can stand firm if we prepare. Put on the Armor of God.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to remind you throughout the day that you are protected by the armor He provides.

- Beth

September 29

For His Glory

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 1:1-26

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ ." (Philippians 1:1-2)

I once heard the story of a man who fell from the twentieth floor of a skyscraper. As he passed open windows on his journey to certain death he was heard to shout, "So far, so good!" Certainly an optimist!

The difference between the "falling man" and the Apostle Paul - I don't believe Paul was as much an optimist as he was a man of faith. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (v. 21) was not just a catchy slogan for Paul's ministry; it was the way he lived! So, in prison he wrote to fellow Christians in Philippi an encouraging letter.

He was not concerned with prison; it gave him a captive audience with whom he could share the Gospel of Christ! He was not concerned about others preaching in his place (for whatever reason); Christ was proclaimed! And he was not concerned with the possibility of death; that was a bonus!

A lesson to learn from Paul: God is always in control. Trust Him and use your circumstances to His glory.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to show you how you can use any difficult circumstances you are going through for His glory.

- Tom

September 30

Attitude Adjustment

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 1:27-2:18

**VERSE FOR TODAY: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus”
(Philippians 2:5)**

Read the verse for today one more time. “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” If only every Christian would adopt the attitude of Jesus.

Consider His attitude concerning the Father. Jesus, being one with Him, didn't give up His deity, yet did set aside His rights as such in order to identify with us as humans. I should be eager to set aside any “rights” that I may have in order to “look out for the interests of others”.

Consider His attitude concerning self. There are a couple of things mentioned here that blow my mind. He made himself nothing. He went from having the glory of God to nothing! He made himself a servant. What a humbling experience. He was God incarnate, but willingly took the role of a servant. What have I done to become a servant to those around me? Have I given up anything?

Consider His attitude in regards to such humility and obedience. I know that Jesus was humble and obedient, but death in the most humiliating and cruel form? Yes. He gave Himself even to the torture and ridicule that went along with that kind of death. It is embarrassing to think how disobedient I am, even in easy things.

When I compare my attitude to that of Jesus, I am ashamed. I think I better make an attitude adjustment.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray today that you may develop an attitude like Jesus.

- Lori

October 1

God's Welfare System

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 2:19-30

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.” (Philippians 2:20)

How are we to minister? Is it to be primarily spiritual? Or should we first meet physical needs? Or how about we address mental issues within and without the Church today – depression, worry, fear, and anxiety? Where should our focus be? Paul describes his disciples, Timothy and Epaphroditus (whom he hopes to send to the Philippians) as men who are thoughtful of the complete and total welfare of God’s people.

Wherever they find the interests of Jesus Christ (v. 21) needing fulfillment, they work. Spiritual needs are first on the list and determine the “who, what, when, where, and why” of other needs. Epaphroditus is also quick to understand and empathize with folk’s mental state. He doesn’t want them to be distressed about the physical illness he’s been suffering and wants to bring them an assurance of his well-being. But it was through this illness that Epaphroditus continued to see to physical needs of Paul, serving him faithfully, even as an extension of the physical service of the Philippians to Paul. (v. 30)

How shall we serve the body of Christ and our community at large? Shall it be in spiritual, physical, or mental ways? Paul says, “Yes! All of the above!” Serve the welfare of people wherever you find need in the name of Jesus Christ!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for open eyes to truly see needs about you today.

- Greg

October 2

Heavenly Citizenship

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 3

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: 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 heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:12-14)

Fireworks are going off all around my home as I sit here writing. We are currently celebrating the end of one year and the beginning of another.

During the past week, the ads started pushing us to “start over”. We were urged to seize the opportunity to reset our lives. Weight-loss companies hired the big names to entice us to try their shake, meal plan, or exercise program “guaranteed to help you lose “10 pounds in 4 weeks”. Financial organizations took to social media to remind us to grab control of our finances and prepare for the future.

So many goals! So many voices pulling us to make their goals, our goals! And these are not bad things to strive towards, at all. God wants us to be healthy in all aspects

of our lives. However, when a physical, financial, or other goal becomes *the* goal, we need to reevaluate.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Have concerns for your spiritual health taken a back seat? Ask God to show you the areas you need to reprioritize.

- Kristin

October 3

Anxiety

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 4

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7)

Anxiety (a feeling of worry or extreme apprehension) often fuels anger and fear in our hearts. Sometimes we feel we have a right to be worried, but do we really?

Whenever I get anxious, I know I have quit trusting God. If, and that is a big “if”, I trust that God is handling whatever situation I have encountered, then I have no right to worry, be angry, or fear. I only have a responsibility to rely on Him. I learned a long time ago that “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” (Galatians 2:20a) Therefore, Jesus’ question in Matthew 6:28 is quite valid, “And why do you worry?”

I wish I could say I have mastered this, but I haven’t. Every once and a while I feel anxious. I lose the peace that God provides when I don’t give my problems to Him. Overwhelming peace is waiting for me if I will release my burdens and trust fully in His promises.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Go to the Father “casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7)

- Beth

October 4

This Is Going to Be a Great Day!

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 1:1-20

VERSE FOR TODAY: “May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Colossians 1:11-14)

What a great way to start our day, thinking about the strength and power that is in us because of the “glorious might” of our Father in Heaven! We can face whatever comes our way with patient endurance and, yes, even joy, because we are no longer citizens of the dark country known as “this world”. God has brought us into the Kingdom of His Son, which is full of light. Also, we face our day as one of the redeemed (renovated, reclaimed, refurbished, restored), through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Don’t go about your day with a “sigh of sadness” but with a “song of gladness” because the Creator of the Universe has forgiven your sins and given you the power to accomplish whatever tasks are before you today. Go to it, Christian, and go to it with joy!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for strength to face another day and joy which no one can take away.

- Tom

October 5

Doctrine Matters!

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 1:21-2:7

VERSE FOR TODAY: “I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.” (Colossians 2:4)

I have heard people say, “It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you believe in Jesus”, or “We are all heading to the same place, just on different roads”. Of late, I have even heard some “Christian” teachers say, “Because God loves us so much, and because He is so full of mercy, He will ultimately reconcile us (even without our repentance) to Himself”. Those statements are appealing, fine-sounding, and... wrong.

Paul wants his readers to know Christ so that they will recognize the counterfeit, even when it is fine-sounding! Many of you are familiar with the example of a banker being so in tune with what an authentic bill looks like, that a counterfeit will jump out at him when he sees it. That's not just a good illustration, it's the truth! I was a teller for several years. One day when I was counting 1's, I was jolted out of the monotony by a funny looking bill. As it turned out, it wasn't counterfeit, but an old Silver Certificate bill. Nevertheless, I wasn't familiar with it and I knew something didn't look right.

The same holds true for doctrine. Know what you believe, people. It matters!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time praying for the wisdom to see truth because of God's Word and a relationship with Christ.

- Lori

October 6

Let God Do His Work

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 2:8-23

VERSE FOR TODAY: "having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead." (Colossians 2:12)

"Must I be baptized?"

It is a question I've been asked many times; yet, it is a question that is never asked in scripture. In the New Testament, people only ask *to* be baptized. (Acts 8:36) The question only comes from one who wants to avoid the death of himself and the work of God.

Regardless of whether or not you believe baptism to be a necessity for salvation, one cannot argue the fact that immersion in water is part of a new beginning for anyone who would follow as the disciple of Jesus. From some of the parting words of Jesus in the first gospel listed in the New Testament all the way through to the first epistle of Peter, baptism is exemplified, taught, and commanded. The "Must I?" question can only rise in disobedience. The avoidance of baptism says a lot about the heart of a man.

Paul clearly states here that baptism contains a "powerful working of God". Why would anyone want to avoid God's work in his life? I'll leave the conjecture on that point to you – and the decision about obeying in it.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray that you would be open to the work of God in *all* His commands today.

- Greg

October 7

In Jesus' Name

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 3:1-17

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” (Colossians 3:17)

Ever since I can remember, I have heard people, and was taught as a child, to end our prayers with the words, “in Jesus name”. That’s important, right? I mean, Jesus said, “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do....” (John 14:13) So, you had better say it!

But while it is necessary to “pray in Jesus’ name” (and saying the words can certainly be a good reminder of what that means), it isn’t the magic “abracadabra” words that “make all our prayers come true”. To pray in Jesus’ name means to pray by the authority He gives and *for* the things He would ask.

Apply that idea to this verse! Was everything you did today (or yesterday) – “in word or deed” – that which Jesus would have done or said? He has given us a great privilege and authority to act and speak on His behalf as a literal part of His body! Let’s not abuse and waste our privilege and opportunity. Remember, we have died; it is Christ who lives in us! (Galatians 2:20)

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray that the Holy Spirit will remind you to do and say what Jesus would and give you a “nudge” to remind you not to do or say what He wouldn’t.

- Greg

October 8

Daily Witness

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 3:18-4:18

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men.” (Colossians 3:17, 23)

As an employee at a bank and volunteer at church, there were days I really needed to remember these two verses! I am, after all, an Ambassador for Christ. People are judging Him because of the way I live my life. If I am lazy, only working when the boss is around or when I feel like it, I am not being a good witness.

A very precious saint named Wanda shared this with me years ago. She had a somewhat difficult job working with the public. These verses helped her do her job well,

especially when she was having a difficult day. She was not only a good employee, but she was also a true Ambassador for Christ.

It helps me get through every day when I remember that I am serving Jesus, first and foremost, so I can bring others to Him through a heart of genuine service. “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” (2 Corinthians 5:20)

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to make you the best servant and witness for Him that you can be.

- Beth

October 9

No Cheap Imitations

SCRIPTURE: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-2:12

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.” (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7)

Have you ever bought a cheap imitation of the real thing? Growing up in the 60’s and 70’s and working in the Five & Dime Store where my Dad was the manager, I saw a lot of good, well-made merchandise, but we also sold our share of cheap imitations. The one that most readily comes to mind was the “console stereo”. The “real deal” sold for around a thousand dollars and was solid wood, while the ones we sold at the Sterling Five & Dime were made with wood veneer and sold for about a hundred dollars. We sold a lot of those cheap stereos, but my Dad went somewhere else and bought the real thing himself. Dad knew that cheap imitations didn’t last. He was right; Mom still had her stereo well into the new millennium.

Paul was no cheap imitation; he was the real thing. He truly imitated (copied the behavior or actions) of his Lord Jesus Christ and commended others who did the same.

There are a lot of “cheap imitation Christians” in the world today; they won’t last. Make sure you are the “real deal”.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for sending His Son (the Real Deal) to live as our example and to die as our Savior.

- Tom

October 10

Who Is Your Glory and Joy?

SCRIPTURE: 1 Thessalonians 2:13-3:13

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.” (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20)

If you are a grandparent, you probably understand when I say that my granddaughters are my joy. They both came to my house last week for a visit, and my grocery budget was blown! One likes bananas; another might need some baby wash. Both might enjoy some bath toys, and the older will love blowing bubbles on the patio. One had diaper rash a couple weeks ago, so I better get some cream. And on and on it went. Why? Because those girls are my joy; they are a part of me. I am invested in their lives.

Paul had the same attitude toward the Thessalonians. He had spent time with them, watched them grow in Christ, and was overjoyed at the thought of hearing of their progress and someday visiting them again. He knew that when Jesus returns, those people would be with him for eternity. That is the prize he was looking forward to, and the crown he would enjoy wearing.

Who is your “joy” in Christ? Who have you invested in? Who, because of your time and effort, will spend eternity with you in heaven?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: If you cannot name someone who is your “joy” in Christ, pray that God will lead you to that person today!

- Lori

October 11

Be Encouraged!

SCRIPTURE: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-5:11

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Therefore, encourage one another with these words.” (1 Thessalonians 4:18)

“You know, we’re living in the last days.”

I get informed of this a lot – as if it is new revelation given by a televangelist, predicted by a *New York Times* best-seller, or revealed by a geo-political event. But Peter

proclaimed the arrival of the last days early in the first century.” (Acts 2:16ff) What is my usual response?

“Jesus’ return is getting closer every day.”

The “last days discussion” can annoy me because it generally leads people into discussions ignorant of scripture. It causes people to argue and divide based on their favorite preacher or author’s words. It causes worry, fear, and confusion over interpreting, or possibly missing, “signs of the times”.

By all means - study the subject (from the Bible itself)! But understand; the Bible writers’ discussion of the end of all earthly history and the return of Jesus is *never* used to frighten, confuse, or divide believers. It is *always* intended to *encourage*. If your Bible study of the subject, personal or congregational, ever becomes anything more than encouraging to you – you’ve missed the boat! Back up and read it for all the encouragement that it can give you.

Regardless of how it all comes to pass, here is the message: Jesus comes back, God rights all wrongs, and those who know Jesus live forever with Him!

Now *that* is encouraging!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for His encouraging promises.

- Greg

October 12

“The Will of God...for You”

SCRIPTURE: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

“How do I know God’s will for me?”

I could not begin to number the times I have been asked this question and my answer is always the same, “Open your Bible and read!” Throughout God’s Word we find His will for us, but in our text today, He gets downright specific!

“Rejoice always.”

When you are happy – certainly, when your heart overflows with the blessings of God – absolutely, but also when you are going through the dark valleys of life – “Count it

all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.” (James 1:2-3)

“Pray without ceasing”.

Not just when we are in the valley of despair and needing God’s help, but also when we are on the mountain top of joy. Remember, God wants to help, but He always loves to celebrate. (Luke 15)

“Give thanks in all circumstances”.

No matter how bad life may seem at the moment, we always have cause to celebrate. Jesus died for us when we did not deserve it. We have hope and a future because of the blood of Christ.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray all day, rejoicing in your challenges and giving thanks for our Lord Jesus Christ. “For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

- Tom

October 13

So the Lord Jesus Will Be Glorified

SCRIPTURE: 2 Thessalonians 1

VERSE FOR TODAY: “To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12)

One of many blessings we have received from traveling for Rock Solid Ministries is that we get to visit different churches and meet so many wonderful Christians. After just four or five days with a congregation, we come to love the people and know we are leaving friends. As years go by and we make multiple visits to a congregation, we get to know one another even better. We share about the struggles and the riches we have as fellow laborers in the Kingdom and pray for each other’s needs.

Encouragement from these brothers and sisters helps me continue to strive to be worthy of my calling and to glorify God no matter what may come. I pray that my encouragement does the same for them.

I’m thankful for our many brothers and sisters all over the United States and Canada that continue to keep us in their prayers so that “our Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified”.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for those who encourage and lift you up in prayer and list (by name) some who need God's strength today.

- Beth

October 14

Your Man of Lawlessness

SCRIPTURE: 2 Thessalonians 2

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God." (2 Thessalonians 2:13-15)

My good friend Dr. James Spannati of Portsmouth, Ohio, is the author of a number of excellent Biblical commentaries. In his commentary on Second Thessalonians, Dr. Jim points out that whenever the Apostle Paul speaks about the Temple of God, he is never referring to the Temple in Jerusalem, but to the Temple of the Spirit - which is the physical body of the believer. An outstanding observation!

Taking this approach to today's reading, we can only conclude that the "man of lawlessness (or sin)" mentioned in this passage is not a political or religious leader, but rather the "old man" that we once were - taking control of our lives again and putting himself on the throne of our personal Temple in place of our Father God.

Question to ponder: Do you live your life for Christ in such a way that you would know if the "man of lawlessness" resealed himself on the throne of your life?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to do whatever needs to be done to remain on the throne in your Temple of the Holy Spirit.

- Tom

October 15

Family Rules

SCRIPTURE: 2 Thessalonians 3

VERSE FOR TODAY: "As for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right." (2 Thessalonians 3:13)

The book of 2 Thessalonians can be summed up in a few short sentences:

1. You have hope because Jesus is coming back.
2. Satan will try to deceive you.
3. Stand firm.
4. Do the right thing and work hard.

I have a canvas hanging in my living room with “Family Rules” printed on it. It started out as a reminder to my 3 children (when they lived at home) of some things or actions we expected of them as part of our family. It accomplished its purpose. Every once-in-a-while one of the kids would say, “Remember rule number three!”

It was interesting to me that my Family Rules sign came to mind as I was reading today’s scripture. Some of the same rules that are on my canvas are mentioned in this passage! (“Do the right thing” and “Work hard”, for example.) Paul was letting the Thessalonians know that there are a few things that are expected of them as part of God’s family.

The very last rule on my canvas says: “Remember *whose* you are”. I think Paul had the same sentiment in mind as he encouraged the readers to stand firm, work hard, and never get tired of doing what is right. After all, if they remembered to Whom they belonged and that He was coming back, they would have the strength to endure to the end.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray your fellow believers remember to Whom they belong.

- Lori

October 16

Why?

SCRIPTURE: 1 Timothy 1

VERSE FOR TODAY: “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” (1 Timothy 1:5)

Many people have the wrong motivation for teaching, preaching, or leading in God’s Church. They want to “lord it over” others, seeking to be an authority figure in one place because they are “low on the totem pole” in another. Others want to gain respect they feel will come with a position or title. Some want to police the lives of others with a nose sort of spiritual instruction they are unwilling to apply to their own lives.

But why did Paul preach? What was to be the purpose of Timothy’s instruction to the Ephesians? What is to be our motivation for anything done in the name of Jesus today? Love.

It is love that motivated Jesus. It was a love for those who were so entrapped in sin that there was no way out with their very lives. It was a love demonstrated in purity, perfection, and sincerity. He asks for no other motivation and source than this in our lives for both the lost and found of His creation.

Why do you do what you do? Do you truly love others?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to reveal your motivations today. If your service is not born of love, ask God to purify your heart, cleanse your conscience, and make your faith sincere.

- Greg

October 17

Praying for Leaders

SCRIPTURE: 1 Timothy 2

VERSE FOR TODAY: “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” (1 Timothy 2:1-2)

I'm really frustrated today with just about everyone who is “in high positions” - particularly within government. I was frustrated last week too, and I have no reason to believe that I won't still be frustrated next week and right into next month! I think it would be safe to say that there is just about no one of my acquaintance who is *not* frustrated. So, what are we going to do about it?

As Christians, we have the responsibility to pray for our leaders, both national and local. Every four years in the United States, we pin all of our hope for the future on the outcome of elections – this is just wrong. We must realize that no change can be made for the betterment of our Country until first a change has been made in the hearts of its leaders. In our churches, in our prayer closets, and around our dinner tables, let us become a people who regularly pray for the hearts of those who lead us.

May our Nation be led, not by *smarter* politicians, but by *godlier* ones!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for our President, Congress, the Supreme Court, and then add to your list as more names or positions come to mind.

- Tom

October 18

Elders and Deacons

SCRIPTURE: 1 Timothy 3

VERSE FOR TODAY: “I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.” (1 Timothy 3:14-15)

It’s wonderful that God always provides guidance for us as individuals and as congregations of believers. Sometimes we struggle with His directions for the elders and deacons. God lays out perfectly the kind of men He wants to lead the local church. These are not perfect men, by any means, but men who strive to be what God wants them to be. They are men who are willing to accept hardship and make personal sacrifices for the body of Christ.

Occasionally, we chose not to listen to God’s advice, and we have elders and deacons who are not suitable for the job. This can harm them, their families, and the Church. It’s a real shame and brings about disorder, discontent, and chaos within the congregation - leaving us spiritually weak and unable to fulfill the roll God has chosen for us as a group of believers.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you encourage those who have been chosen to serve as leaders in your congregation and to always seek His direction through His Word.

- Beth

October 19

Training for Life

SCRIPTURE: 1 Timothy 4

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” (1 Timothy 4:7-8)

Paul is telling Timothy that our physical bodies last only a lifetime, whereas our spirits will live forever. With this in mind, we should not be wasting our time studying or discussing irreverent or silly ideas. Get to the “meat” of the Word and be sure to apply what you read.

I exercise at least six mornings a week, starting as early as five a.m. during the summer months to beat the Mississippi heat (“bodily training is of some value”). I do this because I realize that I could easily go back to being the overweight-to-obese person that I was several years ago, and I want to stay in good physical shape. I walk or ride my bike and try not to waste my time with silly exercises that will do me no good.

I study my Bible every morning for basically the same reason, I want to stay in good spiritual shape, and I try not to waste my time chasing silly ideas. Eternity is in the balance. Let’s heed Paul’s instruction to this young evangelist and train our spirits for eternal life!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for His Training Manual and show your thanks by reading and applying it to your life today.

- Tom

October 20

Priorities

SCRIPTURE: I Timothy 5

VERSE FOR TODAY: “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For Scripture says, ‘Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,’ and ‘The worker deserves his wages.’” (1 Timothy 5:17-18)

I have an observation to share. Many (most?) preachers are not well-compensated financially. Many have the same level of education as software engineers and are “on call” like emergency room doctors. However, their pay compares to dish washers and theater ushers. Why is that?

I read an article recently that said, “It may reveal what we value the most and what we value the least in society as to who are the best paid and who are the worst paid professionals in the U.S..”

As Christ followers, shouldn’t the teaching of sound doctrine and evangelistic leadership be valued above all? Shouldn’t we make certain that our preacher is paid enough not to be distracted by financial worries? A fellow preacher’s wife said to me once, “Wouldn’t it be nice to just go to the grocery store without a calculator?”

Not every church is financially capable of doing any more for their preacher. However, if we just aren’t interested in providing for them, then God may need to rearrange our priorities.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray today that you put spiritual things at the top of your priority list. Pray that you can encourage others in the church to do the same.

- *Lori*

October 21

Content

SCRIPTURE: 1 Timothy 6

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But godliness with contentment is great gain,” (1 Timothy 6:6)

How did you read the title of today’s devotion? Did you read it “CONtent” or “conTENT”? Maybe it depends on what you are seeking.

Paul says that some folks are only into godliness because they think they can gain from it in a materialistic kind of way. They are like people I’ve known that only show up at church services to rub shoulders with potential business clients. They see church as a place to network. They are faking godliness so that they might find gain and contentment.

Other folks I suppose seem already content without God or spiritual values. They have what they want and don’t feel they need God interposing His ideas on their lifestyle. After all, what would God have them do with their wealth and their things if they let Him in? They are not really content at all, but seeking to keep hold of all they can.

Paul says that if you want a life of “gain” – if you want to get through life having acquired something important – it takes both godliness and contentment. Godliness says He will provide all we need and make us all He wants. Contentment believes it.

Are you conTENT with the CONtent of your life? Is there enough godliness to assure you that you are winning at life?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God for peace and contentment in your life today.

- *Greg*

October 22

Practice, Practice, Practice

SCRIPTURE: 2 Timothy 1

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands,” (2 Timothy 1:6)

Once in a great while, I get the opportunity to hang out with a *really* good guitar player. It is always a bitter-sweet moment when we swap “axes” for part of our jam. I am amazed that I hear such incredible stuff coming out of *my guitar*! It never plays that way for me! To see the same instrument in the hands of an experienced person reminds me of the importance of “practice, practice, practice”!

It is very much the same with the gifts God bestows upon us as believers in Jesus. Timothy, it seems, got some extra, special gift(s) with the laying on of Paul’s hands, yet Paul said that even those needed to be practiced or used to become effective tools. How much more the simple gift of the Holy Spirit by which all Christians are supposed to live? If you have ever been in awe of how much God accomplishes through someone else – if you have ever marveled at someone’s commitment or faith – realize that *you too* have the same basic abilities and opportunities. You too have the same Spirit of power, love, and self-control. But you must “practice, practice, practice” living by His leading.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to show you the areas of your life that need more spiritual practice.

- Greg

October 23

Soldiers and Athletes

SCRIPTURE: 2 Timothy 2

VERSE FOR TODAY: “No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules.” (2 Timothy 2:4-5)

Discipline: that’s what soldiers and athletes have in common. If you are training to serve as a soldier or preparing to run a race, you must follow a strict regimen that builds up your body and mind. The same is true for Christians. We must be disciplined in our prayers and Bible study so that we can stay the course and witnesses to the world. Paul encouraged Timothy to be strong, to study, to prepare, and to always be ready for whatever spiritual challenges he would face as a young man.

I have never been a soldier or an athlete (in the physical sense); anyone who knows me is not surprised at that. However, I am a wife, mother, grandmother, cook, housekeeper - and most of all - a Christian. All these things require discipline and preparation, but Christ must come first.

We are all soldiers of the Cross and athletes on God's team. We must do all we can to prepare ourselves for victory.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to use your devotional time as a training camp for your Christian life.

- Beth

October 24

Standing Strong in Evil Days

SCRIPTURE: 2 Timothy 3

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed." (2 Timothy 3:12-14a)

In all my life, I have never seen so much evil in our world as I see today. Not only is there evil in the world but also evil in the church in the form of Christian "impostors" who are deceived and deceiving. And it all seems to be "going from bad to worse".

As the persecution of the godly ramps up all around the world, what will we do? We will "continue in what (we) have learned and have firmly believed". We will devote ourselves "to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42) We will "be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace." (2 Peter 3:14b) We will "be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong." (1 Corinthians 16:13)

Take courage my friend; this world is not your home, but by faith, you can see it from here. In the end, God wins, which means *we* win as well!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God for the courage and strength to stand strong on His Word in these evil days.

- Tom

October 25

Do Your Job

SCRIPTURE: 2 Timothy 4

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.” (2 Timothy 4:5)

In a culture where truth and the things of God are no longer valued, sometimes we lose focus. Our scripture points out that the world around us will abandon sound doctrine. They will turn away to something that makes them feel better about themselves. It saddens me.

I know a woman who, after exploring several religions, decided to reinterpret the New Testament through the “Holy Spirit’s” guidance. She claims to have received messages through visions and dreams and opening her mind to “type without thinking”. She admits to “high mystical experiences” and receiving messages from an Indian sage that died in 1950.

Wow! In light of God’s Word (which clearly condemns such practices), that is scary! But guess what? She has followers from all over the world because her writings appeal to their desires. They have gathered around themselves teachers who say what they want to hear.

What about us? What are we to do about it? Paul says to keep your head, endure hardships that will most definitely come, and do your job. God gave you spiritual gifts; use them! God gave you a message in His word; tell it! God gave you a Savior; share Him!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for the world around you that has left truth behind, and pray for your own faithfulness to ministry.

- Lori

October 26

Intestinal Fortitude

SCRIPTURE: Titus 1

VERSE FOR TODAY: “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” (Titus 1:9)

One Sunday, my dad got up and lead all four of us out of our church to never again return as members. This was not the first time the preacher had set biblical doctrine aside, but it was the last time my father could take it.

Years later, when visiting the congregation, one of the elders apologized to my dad. He said, “I should have stood with the other elders that day, asked you to sit back down, and asked that preacher to leave!”

Yes. In fact, he *should have* done something along those lines.

Elders are not men chosen to sit in board meetings, hear reports, and decide congregational budgets. They are not men who sit aside the communion table during the Lord’s Supper. They are, among other things, to be guardians of Church doctrine. They are to know it so well that they can sniff false teaching immediately – as well as have the intestinal fortitude (good ol’ guts) to challenge it and eradicate it!

If you are an elder, be loving – but bold. If you are not an elder, pray daily for the elders of your church and support them in their quest to hold the Church fast to biblical doctrine.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for your elders to be men with guts.

- Greg

October 27

A Legacy of Integrity

SCRIPTURE: Titus 2

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.” (Titus 2:6-8)

After graduating college, one of my first jobs allowed me to work with a group of Christian women that were 15–20 years my senior. As I formed friendships with each woman, I found myself listening closely when they would reminisce about choices they had made. I would ask follow-up questions to see if they would repeat the decision or change it in any way.

I was learning from their experiences. I had found a group of women that had “been there, done that”, and I soaked up every bit of their wisdom. They may not know it, but those ladies made a huge impact in my life. They were a source of encouragement to me during the early years of my marriage and after having our first child. Some of the

biggest decisions of my life were based off information I heard around the water cooler.

As Christians, we are to set an example to those that are younger. They are always watching and listening – and our responses can shape the course of their lives. In simply living life with integrity, we help the next generation live with integrity.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: If your integrity was solely responsible for shaping the next generation, what could we expect?

- Kristin

October 28

Good Deeds

SCRIPTURE: Titus 3

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful.” (Titus 3:14)

The song “*A Beautiful Life*” written by William M. Golden in 1918 captures this verse so well. It’s a beautiful song with wonderful harmony that I remember singing as a child.

*Each day I’ll do a golden deed, by helping those who are in need;
My life on earth is but a span, and so I’ll do the best I can.
Life’s evening sun is sinking low, a few more days and I must go
To meet the deeds that I have done, where there will be no setting sun.*

It goes on to speak about helping others as we travel though this world.

We must be fruitful as Christians by showing the world kindness, gentleness and respect. This thought is repeated often in Scripture. The Good Samaritan is a good example of helping someone that others have passed by. Meeting needs, offering a cup of water (Matthew 10:42), visiting the sick and lonely, being particularly observant of the struggles of others, and seeking to lift someone else’s burdens - what a beautiful life it is when we engage “in good deeds to meet pressing needs” in the name of Jesus!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you be more observant of the needs of those around you and more prepared to share with them “good deeds” in Jesus name.

- Beth

October 29

Faithful Saints

SCRIPTURE: Philemon

VERSE FOR TODAY: “I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints.” (Philemon 1:4-5)

“Thank you Lord, for the Christian brothers and sisters Beth and I have met all over North America.” I pray this often.

Beth and I have discussed this blessing many times. She is fond of saying; “Because of this ministry, I will know so many more people in Heaven than I ever thought possible!”

It’s wonderful getting to know so many kind and loving brothers and sisters in the United States and Canada. The faith of these blessed saints, and often their persistence in difficult circumstances, has been an inspiration to me and a motivator to greater heights of love and service for Christ. Some of these people I may never see again this side of heaven, but, most certainly, I shall never forget them.

A question for us all to ponder: “Would the way we live our lives cause anyone to thank God for the love and faith we have toward the Lord Jesus?” Not only our words but actions as well must always point the way to Jesus!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for those in your life who have always been an example of faith and love. Ask the Father for His guidance so you also will radiate the character of Christ in all you do.

- Tom

October 30

Represent!

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 1

VERSE FOR TODAY: “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.” (Hebrews 1:3)

If I had a nickel for every time I heard, “He looks just like his daddy,” we would be retired by now. Our middle child does, indeed, look just like my husband. They even have similar personality traits. Now, that wouldn’t surprise most people. I mean, after all, he is his son! It’s only natural. But, would I say that our son is the “exact representation” of his dad? No! There are differences in their looks, their personality, and their thinking. They are not the same person.

The verse for today says that the Son (Jesus), is the exact representation of our Heavenly Father. How can that be since one is the Father and one is the Son? In John 1:1, it says, “the Word was God.” Then in verse 14, “The Word became flesh.” Jesus is the exact representation of God the Father because Jesus is God Himself! They are one in the same.

What about me? Will I be an “exact representation” of my Father? No, sadly, I make mistakes and do things that disgrace Him. However, I hope I act enough like Jesus that people can see the family resemblance.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time praying that God will make you into the best possible representation of Him. Be willing to make the changes needed.

- Lori

October 31

At Present

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 2

VERSE FOR TODAY: “‘putting everything in subjection under His feet.’ Now in putting everything in subjection to Him, He left nothing outside His control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to Him.” (Hebrews 2:8)

Especially on Halloween – a day that is devoted to ghoulish sights and thoughts – we can despair in the godlessness of our world. It certainly seems that the devil gains ground in the hearts and minds of men on a minute-by-minute basis. But rest assured; according to this verse, looks can be deceiving.

Things are not as they seem. Jesus overwhelmingly won the war at Calvary. We live in the age of God’s triumphant Church, even as mop-up operations and battles are still taking place. During this time, God is patiently allowing folks to surrender, lay down arms, and walk away from the influence of the enemy. Only when His patience is exhausted will we see and understand how completely subject to Jesus all of creation really is.

The choice remains for us to do one of two things: join in the parade of triumphant souls – who often look ragged and defeated until they are changed by the

saving arrival of the victorious General - or stubbornly refuse to see the ultimate outcome and stay in the parade of human pride with the devil leading the march.

Which side will you choose?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray today for courage to walk by faith in a world that looks dark and despairing.

- Greg

November 1

Encourage One Another

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 3

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” (Hebrews 3:13)

Verse thirteen is sandwiched between two very telling verses.

In verse twelve the Hebrew writer tells Christians that we need to be careful not to develop an “evil, unbelieving heart” which could cause us to “fall away” from our Lord, and verse fourteen tells us that we “share in Christ” *if* in fact we “hold... firm to the end”.

These are just two among many verses in the New Testament that warn Christians about falling away and possibly losing their “share in Christ”. But along with these warnings comes the verse in the middle, verse thirteen. Verse thirteen gives us advice on how to keep sin from hardening our hearts.

“Exhort (encourage) one another.” Spend time with other Christians. Private devotional time and time spent in our “prayer closet” is all well and good – and needed. But we *must* fellowship with the Body of Christ. They need us, and we need them! A burning coal removed from the pile soon loses its glow and turns cold. Likewise, a Christian removed from the warm glow of the Body will turn cold and be more apt to be “hardened by the deceitfulness of sin”.

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.” (Ephesians 6:10)
This is my prayer for you, dear reader.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to make you an encourager of the saints.

- Tom

November 2

Wonderful Grace

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 4

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16)

I remember when the thought of being able to approach the throne of grace became real for me. I had been a Christian for several years and had spent much time praying but never realized that I was actually approaching the throne of grace. I hadn't understood that when I spent time talking with God, I was there only because of the grace bestowed upon me through Jesus.

Grace: unmerited favor. Nothing I have done or could do would wipe my past clean. Only the death of Jesus could make grace real for me.

It was hard for me to comprehend. I understood rules – “do this”, “don't do that”; just give me a list! But Jesus already did “this” and did “that”. I just needed to accept that I couldn't earn His love; I already have it. I do need to follow His commands to be saved, but His love for me, His death for me, was unconditional.

Now, because of what He has done, I am invited to approach His throne of unmerited favor with confidence. What a burden lifted; what a joy; what wonderful grace!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Approach God's throne with confidence and thank Him for His wonderful grace.

- Beth

November 3

I Can't Believe You're Going to Preach That at a Revival!

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 5

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food.” (Hebrews 5:12)

I have a sermon that I have subtitled “The Simplest Sermon I Have Ever Preached at a Revival”. It's a message on God's plan of salvation. When I first told Beth I was

going to add it to a new topical revival series, her reaction was incredulous (see title of this devotion).

“This is something you would preach in seventh grade church camp,” she remarked. She was, of course, correct. The response when I preach it is quite different; though it does not make me happy.

“Why, I never knew that.”

“That was wonderful!”

I have also had folks get angry with me because their congregation had been preaching falsely on the subject for years, and they preferred that to sound Biblical teaching.

The Hebrew writer was correct; “solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.” (v. 14) Too many Christians have never grown beyond their “milk” feeding, and they just don’t know how to “distinguish good from evil”.

Isn’t it time to study the Word more deeply so you can move on to “solid food”?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for His patience with us all and then enjoy a solid meal with Jesus.

- Tom

November 4

Get Diggin’

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 6

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.” (Hebrew 6:1-2)

Recently, I was visiting with a friend about Hebrews 6. I had asked his thoughts in preparation for writing this devotion. I had read and re-read this chapter. It’s not that there isn’t anything “good” to learn. It’s the exact opposite! There is so much stuff, really deep stuff

My friend, pointed out something interesting. He said, “The first paragraph [of the chapter] always gets me. He’s talking about not going over basic things again, but some

of those things (for me) are pretty deep and hard to understand. I kind of wish he would go over them again. But he doesn't, he just walked past them and dives into deeper stuff.”

Isn't that the truth? We are much like these poor people. We are so content to scratch the surface of things we ought to know inside and out. We study the same stuff over and over and never really learn anything new. Part of that may be our teacher's or preacher's fault, but let's face it...the fault is our own. We lack the desire to dig deeper. I'm ashamed of myself. How about you?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for the desire to dig deep into the truths in God's Word.

- *Lori*

November 5

Above and Beyond

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 7:1-10

VERSE FOR TODAY: “**But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises.**” (Hebrews 7:6)

It might seem that one “who had the promises” of God would be beyond blessing! But yet, the Hebrew writer shows us something important. Jesus is not God of the Hebrews in the sense that He is made great *by* the promises of Abraham. Jesus is the God of the Hebrews in the sense that He is above and beyond them. He is not only God of the Hebrews but the rest of the world as well. Jesus wasn't a Hebrew priest, but one of the Order of Melchizedek. He wasn't just the fulfillment of the promises, but the *giver* of the promises as well. Jesus is everything altogether. The Jews thought Messiah was great because He was of them. When really they were important because they were of Him!

Let's not think more highly of ourselves that we ought as Christians. Jesus is not great because of us. The Church is important because of Him. Yes, we are the salt and light; yes, we are the gathered body. But Jesus desires to be the God of many who have not yet heard His voice. He is above and beyond our personal kingdoms! Proclaim Him that way and throw open the door to the world that all might enter the Kingdom!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray that God would help you think of the world around you as more important than yourself and give you eyes to see yourself as His servant.

- *Greg*

November 6

Indestructible

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 7:11-28

VERSE FOR TODAY: “This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest not on the basis of legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life.” (Hebrews 7:15-16)

Most of us grew up enjoying the feats of superheroes in comic books, cartoons, or TV shows. Everyone, I suppose, has their favorite, but when it comes to sheer power, no one matches Superman. Nothing on this earth can defeat Superman! He is indestructible! Only a mineral from his home planet – a piece of kryptonite – can render him defenseless. Indestructibility is its own greatest power.

That’s why Jesus is greater than anyone who has ever lived. It’s why His greatness as Prophet, Priest, and King surpasses anyone else’s. His “indestructible life” is why only He can save us. No power, not even one from “another world”, could stop Him. Even when life ebbed from His mortal body, His own Spirit raised Him to life again. Like the example of Melchizedek in history, He walks in Prophet, Priest, and King and He leaves the same.

Even better is this fact: the same Spirit Who raised Jesus Christ lives in every Christian and can give life to our mortal bodies! (Romans 8:11) Praise God for “the power of an indestructible life”!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for the life the Spirit gives and pray that we will live accordingly.

- Greg

November 7

And I Will Be Their God

SCRIPTURE: Hebrew 8

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (Hebrews 8:10)

“And I will be their God.” Now isn’t that something? He chose us before we even considered choosing Him. He goes on to say, “and they shall be my people”.

Here’s something to ponder: are we *really* His people, and have we allowed Him to actually *be* our God?

This is not a question of church membership and attendance; it’s a question of mind and heart. Is God’s law in your mind and heart? Have you changed your mind from earthly thinking to heavenly thinking? Has your heart really been transformed from old to new? Don’t go dig out your baptismal certificate and Sunday School attendance awards. You won’t find the answers there.

Look deep into your heart and consider the way you are living - what you think about and how you speak. Now look deep into the eyes of Jesus. Is He really your God?

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”
(Romans 12:2a)

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for choosing you, then be sure to live like one of His people.

- Tom

November 8

The Greater Sacrifice

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 9:1-10

VERSE FOR TODAY: “These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.” (Hebrews 9:6-7)

Chapters 8-10 of the Hebrew letter show us that God has given us a greater covenant (or agreement) through Jesus Christ than that which He gave to the Jews through Abraham. He has also given us a greater sacrifice – His Son.

Under the Old Covenant, the High Priest (and the High Priest only) went into the Holy of Holies once a year with the blood of animals to atone for the sins of the people. Under the New Covenant, the blood of our High Priest Jesus has been given once-and-for-all for the sins of all mankind, and we can now approach the “throne of grace [and] receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16) All Christians are priests (Revelation 1:5-6) and serve under our High Priest, Jesus. (Hebrews 4:14)

I'm so grateful for the greater sacrifice of Jesus! Because He shed His blood as the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29), no more sacrifices have to be made for me. I am redeemed! I am free from the guilt of my past! I am saved to live eternally with my God!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for the greater sacrifice of Jesus.

- Tom

November 9

Horribly Beautiful

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 9:11-28

VERSE FOR TODAY: "In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." (Hebrews 9:22)

If you browse through a hymnal, or listen to a Christian radio station, you will find some beautifully written songs about the blood of Jesus. Gorgeous chords and eloquent lyrics are blended into such attractive sounding music. One of my favorites says this,

*"O the blood of Jesus washes me,
O the blood of Jesus shed for me,
What a sacrifice that saved my life,
Yes the blood, it is my victory..."*

It is lovely, don't you think?

Our verse for today says that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness". The shedding of blood. That's not pretty. We forget the horror and anguish that was required for Jesus' shedding of blood to cleanse us. We live in a society that when blood is being shed, we do everything we can to stop it. We apply pressure as we hurry to the emergency room to have it stitched up. But what about Jesus' blood? It was allowed to freely flow. It was the only way for us to receive the forgiveness we don't even deserve.

It was indeed horrible...and necessary...and beautiful.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Remind yourself of the awful events that took place in order for Jesus to shed His blood for your forgiveness. Then, thank the Lord for His willingness to allow His son to shed His blood, and for the forgiveness He freely gives.

- Lori

November 10

The Dootabees

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 10:1-18

VERSE FOR TODAY: “then he adds, ‘I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.’ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.” (Hebrews 10:17-18)

I heard a Christian speaker say that many Christians suffer from a real malady. They have a severe case of the “dootabees”. They are constantly doing things they think will make them pleasing to God. They “do-to-be”. This verse proclaims that Christians suffering from the “dootabees” have life all wrong. There is no way to make ourselves any more acceptable to God than to have our sins forgiven!

Now someone will surely say along with James in the second chapter of his epistle, “Surely, faith that is living is active!”

That is true. Faithful people “do”! Yet, the offering of our very selves as a living sacrifice is not an attempt to make up for our past. Such sacrifice is misguided. We don’t “do-to-be” holy; we “do” because Jesus has proclaimed that we are *already* holy upon our baptism into Him!

Such an understanding makes all the difference in our outlook on life and the joy we will experience. No longer are we discouraged in our efforts – trying to undue a mountain of mess before God. We live free to serve Christ because the chains are already gone.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray that God will remind you today not to “do-to-be”, but do out of what you already are – forgiven!

- Greg

November 11

He Is Faithful

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 10:19-39

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.” (Hebrews 10:23)

My family recently moved. We exchanged the beautiful changing leaves of East Tennessee and a continual chorus of “Rocky Top” for the swaying palm trees and beaches of Florida.

To soften the pain of the move, my husband Ryan and I promised our two girls a trip to the coast at the earliest possible moment. We keep looking for a sliver of free time when we can grab our gear and drive to the closest beach. For two little ones missing many friends, the prospect of feeling waves crash against their legs has dried several rounds of tears and brought smiles to their faces for the past few weeks. My children trust us and have no reason to doubt that we will keep our promise to them. We have given them every reason to believe we will keep our word.

God is much more faithful to keep His promises. As His children, we are trusting in Him to supply our needs on earth and to prepare an eternal home for us. He is our Provider, our Healer, and our Hope! We are thankful for His promises and the confidence we have in Him for the future.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: How have you seen God’s faithfulness in your life - both in recent memory and distant? Give thanks for all the ways He has provided.

- Kristin

November 12

“Hebrews Eleven” Faith

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:1-16

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” (Hebrews 11:6)

Hebrews chapter eleven inspires us with so many great examples of faith: Able and his sacrifice which, even “though he is dead”, still speaks to us today; Enoch, who “walked with God”; Noah, who spent 120 years building an Ark – day after day hammering, sawing and trusting; and Abraham, who left home just because God told him to, not even knowing where he was going! Let’s not forget Sarah who considered God faithful in His promise even though she was well beyond childbearing age.

Faith has never been easy, and it certainly isn’t accomplished in one mental decision. Our faith must be alive, active, and growing. It takes a whole lifetime of following God in the good times and in the bad, allowing Him to refine us through the fire. If the men and women of old could trust God, before Jesus came into the world, then I know we can too!

The last verses in this text says that “God is not ashamed to be called their God” and has prepared a city for them. May He never be ashamed of us as we prepare to meet them, and Him, in that great city!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to give you a Hebrews eleven kind of faith.

- Beth

November 13

Active Faith

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:17-31

VERSE FOR TODAY: “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.” (Hebrews 11:17-19)

I love the eleventh chapter of Hebrews! It teaches us that real faith is not passive; real faith is not just intellectual assent; real faith is active.

“But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” (James 2:18)

Some say they know they are Christians because they believe in God. “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!” (James 2:19)

To be a Christian, my faith must be active. To believe in Christ, I must actively accept who He is. To confess that belief, I must actively speak His name. To repent of my sins, I must actively turn away from my ungodly lifestyle. To be baptized, I must actively step into the water. And to live the Christian life, I must actively walk with Jesus daily.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to activate - or re-activate - your faith so you can serve Him with a Hebrews eleven confidence.

- Tom

November 14

Therefore

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:32-12:13

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily

entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” (Hebrews 12:1)

For a long time, I never thought much about the first word in Hebrews 12. It is just another introductory word, right? Wrong! When you see the word “therefore” it means “because of what was just said” (I’m paraphrasing, of course). So, what was just said prior to chapter 12? All of chapter 11 is a huge list of Heroes of Faith. These people were absolutely incredible! They were people who, because of their faith, were adventurous, obedient, hard-working, brave, compassionate, daring and even persecuted.

Then, there is chapter 12.

“Therefore...”

Since all these people are watching and cheering us on, what are we to do? If we quit now, it would be disgraceful, not only to them, but to the God who saw them through it all. The Hebrew writer says throw off anything that would hinder us and run! Run full speed ahead into a life of faith! Run as fast as you can toward the life God has planned for you! Don’t let anything stop you! And, whatever you do, don’t disgrace those who have run ahead of you by quitting.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today thanking God for the examples of faith He has given us. Then, pray for endurance in your life of faith.

- Lori

November 15

Our God Is an Awesome God

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12:14-29

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.” (Hebrews 12:28-29)

It seems like it was somewhere in the 1980’s that the word “awesome” began being used as common slang. No longer was it reserved for something that was truly awe-inspiring, but it was thrown about as a word to replace other over-used slang adjectives like “neat-o”, “cool”, etc.

It’s really too bad because “awesome” is one of few words that, while still falling hopelessly short of all-encompassing, truly can be used of God. God does inspire awe. He is more than the smoke-and-mirrors imitation gods the world offers. He’s not some small man behind a curtain (Pay no attention to those!). He is One who has always demanded respect, lived up to every promise (of blessing or of cursing), and has still been able to

show Himself as the most deeply loving being - one who loves you beyond your imagination.

This is the awesome God that deserves our thanks, our worship, and our reverence. Let your life bow before Him today. Let Him consume your every fiber. He is worthy!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray to be given just a glimpse of God today, for just a glimpse will be awesome enough!

- Greg

November 16

No Lasting City

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 13

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.” (Hebrews 13:14)

Selmer, Tennessee; Clarksville and Gould, Arkansas; Burlington and Sterling Colorado; Collinsville, Oklahoma; Murfreesboro, Arkansas; Lexington, Tennessee; and Corinth, Mississippi. In chronological order, these are the communities where Beth and I have lived during our 40 years of marriage and because we are in a ministry that keeps us on the road most of the time, we have actually “lived” in Corinth for only about 4 of the 11 years that we have owned a home here. The words of our text are very real to us.

In our travels, we have met many Christians (preachers included), who tell us they want to serve Jesus with all their heart, but they don’t want to move more than 50 miles from their children, grandchildren, parents, or where they have lived most of their lives.

Brothers and Sisters, when we set our heart on serving the God of the Universe, we must be willing to go anywhere in the world that He desires to send us. We cannot become so attached to people, possessions, or geographical locations that we refuse the Lord’s direction. Everything and everyplace on this old earth will one day melt away (2 Peter 3:12), so let’s give it up now.

Remember the words of the old hymn, “This world is not my home, I’m just a-passin’ through.”

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for God’s direction in your life and be prepared to follow.

- Tom

November 17

“Mirror, Mirror”

SCRIPTURE: James 1:1-25

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For if anyone is a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.” (James 1:23-24)

“Mirror, Mirror on the wall” - a phrase we remember from childhood. How often do you really look at yourself in the mirror and judge what you see? This scripture tells us that our actions are louder than our words. It is easy to forget the Word of God when we do not act on what we hear.

You are known for your actions. Your friends and family will be more likely to believe what they see you doing than what they hear you saying. You can fool yourself for a time, but eventually you must go look in the spiritual mirror to see what kind of person you really are.

This passage makes me think of the time I spend each week at the communion table. If I haven't taken time all week to look deep into my spiritual mirror, I do it then. I don't always like what I see, but, with God's help, I will not forget it; and with His Word working in my life, I will make necessary changes.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to use His Word to help you look deep into the spiritual mirror of your heart and change your reflection to His.

- Beth

November 18

Pure and Undeclared

SCRIPTURE: James 1:26-2:13

VERSE FOR TODAY: “If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undeclared before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” (James 1:26-27)

“I am a Christian and very religious, but I believe faith is something personal so I keep it to myself.” I've heard this statement (or versions of this statement) many times. Right away I know this person knows very little of the “religion” they claim.

Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations....” (Matthew 28:19) James said, “visit orphans and widows.” So, I’m thinking that a very “religious” Christian does not sit silently at home! No, they are in the world serving in the name of Jesus.

People and Governments of this world are telling us that our religion belongs in our homes or the church house but nowhere else. When we accept this lie of the devil, we allow ourselves to be “stained” by the world.

To “bridle” our tongue is not to silence it, but to give it direction. Direct your tongue to speak only the “pure and undefiled” Word of God to your friends, neighbors, relatives, and coworkers. Now is not the time to be silent!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to help you make your Christian “religion” “pure and undefiled” before Him.

- Tom

November 19

The Overflow of the Heart

SCRIPTURE: James 2:14-3:12

VERSE FOR TODAY: “With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.” (James 3:9-10)

Much to my own embarrassment, I can think of many times that I was the living example of the verse for today. I have praised. I have cursed.

I think it comes down to the condition of my heart. James says that no man can control the tongue, but God can. If I am living a spirit-controlled life, then my heart - and therefore, my tongue - can be controlled. The Bible speaks in many places about guarding our hearts. What is in my heart determines what comes out of my mouth. It’s that simple. Oh, sure, I can fake it for a while. I can be careful to speak only certain things, but eventually, the overflow of my heart will come out of my mouth. Luke talks about that in chapter 6 of his gospel account.

God wants to change me from the inside out. He can start with my heart, which will, in turn, change my speech. Why don’t we encourage each other to surrender both to God?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray today that as you surrender your whole self to God, and that He will bring about changes that will not only change your heart, but your speech as well.

- Lori

November 20

An “Iffy” Book

SCRIPTURE: James 3:13-4:17

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will exalt you.” (James 3:7-8a, 10)

People make a mistake when they equate the unconditional love of God with His promises, thereby attempting to make them unconditional as well. Yet, all through the Bible, God makes promises to His people that are conditional upon their obedience (Exodus 19:5; 2 Chronicles 7:14; John 8:51). As one Bible student wrote, “The Bible is an ‘iffy’ book!” God will always love us, but His promises can only work in our lives when we operate by faith.

Today’s passage is no exception to that rule. Do you experience trouble with temptations? Try just *fleeing* from them. God always promises a way out of temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13), but usually it doesn’t come from some miraculous intervention; it just comes by us making a *choice*. The best way to escape the temptation to eat is to step away from the fridge! Would you like to be closer to God? He promises you can be – *if* you step toward Him. He’ll meet you half way. He came all the way from heaven, but the next move is yours.

Are you short-circuiting the promises of God in your life through inaction or disobedience?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to show you where you are failing to let His promises take effect.

- Greg

November 21

Freedom

SCRIPTURE: James 5

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” (James 5:16)

At my last ministry, we had a process that, when used properly, would allow a person to walk through all areas of their life with another individual and verbally confess and repent of anything that the Lord brought to mind during the meeting.

You would think that people would be afraid to confess all their sins to anyone (friend or stranger), and typically, they were very nervous as they entered our office building. However, when they left, there was a difference – a peace. What they felt, when they entered the building was shame and embarrassment. When they left, they knew they were free. The enemy could no longer hold those embarrassing secrets over them because they had been confessed. They knew they were forgiven, and the enemy had no power now that the past was in the light, repented of, and prayed over.

It wasn't until I had an appointment that I finally understood the importance of confession. For years, I had needlessly held on to shame that wasn't required. God doesn't want us to live in guilt of the past; we should confess it and move on...God already has.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Are there any sins from your past that haunt you? Confess them, get them into the light, and move forward in freedom. Do not be hindered in your walk by a voice of shame or guilt.

- Kristin

November 22

Rejoice! Really?

SCRIPTURE: 1 Peter 1:1-12

VERSE FOR TODAY: “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1:6-7)

How many times in the middle of a bad situation have you stopped to think, “Hey! This is great! I get to face a trial!”? I doubt that anybody gets really happy about hard times!

I remember several times in my life that have been very stressful, and I felt that one more crisis would surely destroy me, but they didn't, and I grew. I came through the fire and was able to give “praise and glory and honor” to Jesus Christ when it was revealed how He upheld me in my time of need. Those difficulties that seemed like mountains to climb, in retrospect, now only seem to have been speed bumps. I realize that I would not be the person I am today had I not faced those struggles head-on with Jesus.

We don't have to be happy when we are facing trials, but we can rejoice in knowing that God will bring us through, and we will be better for having walked through the fire with Him.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to make you stronger as you face your trials hand-in-hand with Him.

- Beth

November 23

Race Relations

SCRIPTURE: 1 Peter 1:13-2:10

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (1 Peter 2:9-10)

Seems like you can't view any form of media today without hearing or reading something about “race relations”. All this hype has spilled over into the church. Many of the major denominations have spent much time and energy discussing how they can improve these relations within their churches. Sad how the world influences the Church rather than the other way around.

You see, I know for a fact that if we would just read and believe the Bible, these discussions would never need to take place among Christians. When we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we become one race (a chosen race) with all other Christians - no matter our color or culture. Our concern is no longer race relations but family relations. We are one Family, one race (Christian), one royal priesthood, and one holy nation. Let's accept this truth from our one Father in heaven as together we proclaim the glories of our God who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God that among Christians there is but one race and ask Him to remind you of that daily.

- Tom

November 24

Weaker Vessel

SCRIPTURE: 1 Peter 2:11-3:7

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.” (1 Peter 3:7)

Even though the verse for today is addressed to husbands, I think a lot of women get hung up on it. I have heard women say that it's offensive that they should be considered the weaker partner, or as some versions state, the "weaker vessel". They don't want to be seen as inferior. If you (as a man or a woman) hold this view, I think you have it all wrong.

I like the versions of the Bible that read "weaker vessel". The word vessel was associated with pottery, and the husband was told to treat it with respect. So, how do the two relate – pottery and respect? Well, think of it this way. If you had a heavy stoneware mug, would you treat it the same as you would a fine china teacup? No way! The china teacup has value worthy of delicate care and honor. It's a work of art, and it should be treated as such. It makes me look at this verse in a whole new light.

I am valuable in God's eyes. He wants my husband to see me and treat me in the same way – with respect, care, and honor.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today thanking God for the value He puts on our lives.

- Lori

November 25

"Giv'em Heaven!"

SCRIPTURE: 1 Peter 3:8-4:6

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called; that you may obtain a blessing." (1 Peter 3:9)

When I was in college, one of my professors led a small group of us in kind of a mentoring relationship. At the end of each week's meeting, he closed with the words, "Now, get out there and give'em heaven!"

But what if they're not nice to you?

I'm not sure there is anything more contrary to human nature than Jesus' admonition to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. When we are hurt, it's natural to want to lash out and protect ourselves. But we are to no longer be natural, but "supernatural". Our calling is to bless others by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Being a blessing is to bring real joy and happiness to others' lives through fulfillment. Blessing others is filling a void. It's replacing the fear that causes inconsistency in relationships with unconditional love. It's filling the loneliness that

produces a bitter attitude with friendship. It's relieving pain that causes anger with the comfort of grace.

What's the really great part? When we bless others, we become blessed because our calling is fulfilled; we become whole.

Resist the urge to fight back. Get out there and give'em heaven!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for the Holy Spirit to quickly remind you to bless others today when you may be tempted to lash back at others.

- Greg

November 26

Target Practice

SCRIPTURE: 1 Peter 4:7-5:14

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7)

Have you ever felt like throwing something? I mean, you feel stress or tension, you have that uneasiness deep within yourself, and you just can't deal with it anymore. You think to yourself, "If something doesn't give, I'm just going to throw something....hard."

Well...go ahead. What are you waiting for?

We are told to cast all our anxiety on Him. To "cast" means to "throw something forcefully in a specified direction". There you go! God says, "Go ahead, I can take it. Make Me your target! Throw your stress, tension, anxiety, and worries. Throw them hard...and aim for Me!"

I think at times we read this verse and think what a nice sentiment it is. We think of serenely coming before the Lord, laying down our anxiety at His feet, and peacefully strolling off into the sunset. Well, ok. We can do that, but what Peter says here is a little different. I'm a little dramatic at times (so humor me, if you will), and I can just picture myself gathering up all my anxieties, putting them in a big pile, throwing them one by one, as hard as I can at my Father who is waiting to catch them. I throw them with all the strength I have, until they are gone. He has them all. Then, and only then, can I collapse in relief...because He cares for me.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time casting your cares on Him in prayer.

- Lori

November 27

A Growing Process

SCRIPTURE: 2 Peter 1

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.” (2 Peter 1:5-7)

Moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love - I thought all I had to do was believe, repent, and be baptized! Now I find out God wants me to learn, keep myself morally pure, keep on keeping on when the road is rough, and be kind and loving etc... Ugh, I'm not sure about all this. I thought this was a free gift, and now it sounds like work.

“Faith without works is dead.” (James 2:26b)

If you are not growing by adding these virtues, than you are dying and will eventually fall away from Christ. Being a Christian is a growing process; there is always something new to learn and changes that need to be made. We are a work in progress, never fully reaching our goal until we get to heaven.

We must never stop growing as Christians; there is always another step to take. When we decide we are old enough to quit growing, then we have not reached maturity; we have reached self-righteousness.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to plant, deep inside your heart, a real desire for personal, spiritual growth.

- Beth

November 28

Remember the Master

SCRIPTURE: 2 Peter 2

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.” (2 Peter 2:1)

Years ago, I came across a televangelist talk show. I tuned in at just the right moment to hear the “evangelist” say something that made my jaw drop. I had never listened to more than two or three seconds of this man’s show before, so I wasn’t sure if this was normal for him. He berated another televangelist who had said something derogatory about him and then, turning directly to the camera, shouted that he had built his empire (or words to that effect) and the other fellow should just go out and build his own if he wanted one. It was not long before the man was indicted and lost his empire as well as his family. A false teacher who denied the Master and brought “swift destruction” upon himself.

Peter wraps up this portion of his letter by telling us, “For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.” (v. 21)

We need to remember Who we serve and why!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Give God the glory for who He is and what He is doing in your life.

- Tom

November 29

Do Your Job

SCRIPTURE: 2 Peter 3

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.” (2 Peter 3:11-12)

Have you ever thought about what Peter meant when he wrote that we should live holy, godly lives, look forward to the day of God, and “speed its coming”? Speed it’s coming? Really? Do we have that kind of influence on God Almighty that we could convince Him to return sooner? Well, in a sense, yes.

This chapter is about the return of the Lord. It is full of reminders. It’s going to happen; others may refuse to acknowledge it; live accordingly. If you look at verse 9, it indicates that the Lord is not just being “slow” in returning. He has a reason for the delay. He loves the people of this world so much that He can’t bear the thought of them not coming to repentance, and therefore being able to join in the great celebration that will occur. He is patient. He wants them to be included.

So, how can we “speed its coming”? Tell, everybody you know! Spread the word! Encourage people to get ready, to repent, to believe! He’s waiting, not just on them to repent, but on us to do our job!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray today that you will have the courage and patience to tell everyone you know about His return!

- Lori

November 30

Complete Joy

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 1

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.” (1 John 1:4)

Unless we allow the Holy Spirit to involve us in the discipleship process, we will never experience the complete joy of the Christian life. After having seen and physically touched Jesus, after having experienced what it is to know Him, John cannot help but tell others. He has so deeply enjoyed the fellowship that comes with knowing Jesus, that he longs for others to know it as well. In turn, when we as individuals have fellowship with God, we then have a deep fellowship with one another.

Often in marital counseling, we use a pyramid illustration. With God at the top of the pyramid, one spouse at one bottom corner, and the other at the third corner – as each person moves closer to God, they cannot help but move closer to one another. The same holds true for all followers of Jesus. As we draw near to Him, we will draw nearer to one another. The discipleship of others makes a greater and greater fellowship of the redeemed. It is that fellowship that is so joyful in the Church. It’s why office parties are dreaded, and congregational dinners are loved. It’s not just the pie, it’s the fellowship that comes from being disciples of Jesus together.

Is your joy complete?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God for someone to disciple and then keep your eyes open for that opportunity.

- Greg

December 1

Walk This Way

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 2:1-17

VERSE FOR TODAY: “By this we may know that we are in Him: whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked.” (1 John 2:5b-6)

People of my generation might remember one of the funny sight-gags in an old comedy called *Young Frankenstein*. Having invited visitors inside Dr. Frankenstein's castle, the doctor's assistant, Igor, says, "Walk this way." He then turns and, being maimed in some way, hobbles away dragging one foot behind him. The guests look at one another, shrug their shoulders, and follow Igor – literally walking as he did, dragging one foot behind them.

We don't know how Jesus literally "walked". But John's point is clear enough. Those who are truly followers of Jesus will have such a "gait" about them that the imitation is clear to those around them. They will be noticed as Jesus' disciples.

Priests of the old covenant were ordained with blood on their right earlobes, thumbs, and big toes. Consecrated by bloody sacrifice to hear the commands of God, do His works, and go His way. We are now the priests consecrated by the blood of the lamb – dipped in it – covered by it in immersion. We are just as committed to walking "in the same way which He walked."

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to remind you of the day you were consecrated to walk as Jesus. And, if you've not been immersed, ask God to help you make that decision today!

- Greg

December 2

Great Love

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 2:18-3:6

VERSE FOR TODAY: "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him." (1 John 3:1)

Do you recall the song from church camp based on this verse (King James Version)?

*"Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us,
that we should be called the sons of God"* (sung in rounds).

It was a great reminder to the kids in camp (and the rest of us) that God loves us, and we are blessed to be called His children.

The verse ends by reminding us that the world did not know Jesus, and therefore does not know (or understand) us. He was rejected, and so are we. Christians are laughed at, mocked, and sometimes die just because they will not deny Christ.

Why is Jesus so offensive to people? Why are Christians so offensive? One of many reasons is that Christ and His followers are light in a dark world. (John 8:12; Matthew 4:14) Darkness hates light. (John 3:19)

The hate of the world will never deter me from serving Christ because I know how great a love the Father has bestowed upon me. I am His child!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for His great love bestowed upon you through His Son Jesus.

- Beth

December 3

Don't Be Deceived

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 3:7-24

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” (1 John 3:7-8)

The first words of the Charles Dickens classic *Tale of Two Cities*:

*“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,
it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness,
it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity,
it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness,
it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair,
we had everything before us, we had nothing before us,
we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct
the other way ...”*

Sounds to me like the people of Dickens' day were just as confused as people today! There is so much knowledge that man has become foolish. Folks who practice sin believe they are right (righteous) before our holy God and that everyone will eventually arrive safely in Heaven.

John reminds us not to be fooled by the world's standards. If you practice sin, you are of the devil, and Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil.

Make sure you are living by the light of Christ in this world of darkness.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for the Light.

- Tom

December 4

Power

SCRIPTURE: I John 4

VERSE FOR TODAY: “You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” (1 John 4:4)

I recently heard a wise Bible teacher say, “I don’t think the church realizes the power that we have [in the Holy Spirit].” The more I thought about that, the more I agreed. If you read through the Bible, there were many powerful and miraculous things that took place. The power of God created the universe, sustained life, healed sickness, forgave sin, defeated death, and conquered the grave. We acknowledge those powerful events, but we seldom acknowledge that the same power living in us! Whoa! Think about that!

John, in this chapter, has been discussing the false prophets that have gone out into the world and spirits who are not from God and therefore, antichrist. But don’t worry, they are already defeated and just don’t know it! How? Because the same power that was used to defeat sin and death and the grave has already won! All they had to do was allow it to work through them. What about us? Do we allow the power of the God of the universe to work through us as individuals or even as a church body?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Spend some time today acknowledging God’s power and asking Him to work through you and your congregation.

- Lori

December 5

I Don’t Know!

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 5

VERSE FOR TODAY: “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.” (1 John 5:13)

One of the elders of our congregation in Southaven, Mississippi, always said, “The more you know, the more you know you don’t know.”

That’s certainly true. With seemingly more truth (and lies) revealed every day, it can be enough to make us proclaim, “I don’t know!”

Yet, here in John 5, John says there is something we *can* know (the assurance of our salvation) and seven things in verses 18-20 we *do* know. John says you can take these things to the bank.

1. We *know* Christians don't live sinful lives. (v. 18a) Judge yourself accordingly!
2. We *know* Christians are protected by Jesus. (v. 18b) So, why worry?
3. We *know* we are "from God". (v. 19a) No need to have a haughty attitude, but we truly are God's gift to His world – if we are His humble servants.
4. We *know* the world is under the power of Satan. (v. 19b) So quit dismaying at what's going on out there!
5. We *know* Jesus has come (v. 20a) (and will come again!).
6. We *know* Jesus has given us understanding to know and be in Him (v. 20b), so quit looking elsewhere for it.
7. We *know* Jesus is deity. (v. 20c) He is in control.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God today for these assurances, and pray that He will remind you of them throughout your day.

- Greg

December 6

Loving Jesus

SCRIPTURE: 2 John

VERSE FOR TODAY: "And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it." (2 John 1:6)

Do we really love the Lord? Do we? Do we even know His commands? There are dozens of "Jesus commands" in the Bible; I'm going to list just a few here for the purpose of self-examination.

- Repent. (Matthew 4:17)
- Rejoice when persecuted. (Matthew 5:11-12)
- Let your light shine. (Matthew 5:16)
- Be reconciled to your brother. (Matthew 5:23-25)
- Do not lust. (Matthew 5:28-30)
- Turn the other cheek. (Matthew 5:38-42)
- Love your enemies. (Matthew 5:44-46)
- Lay up your treasures in heaven. (Matthew 6:19-21)
- Seek God's Kingdom first. (Matthew 6:33)
- Do unto others. (Matthew 7:12)
- Choose the narrow way. (Matthew 7:15-16)

- Pray for laborers. (Matthew 9:37-38)
- Honor your parents. (Matthew 15:4)
- Deny yourself. (Luke 9:23-25)
- Forgive offenders. (Matthew 18:21-22)
- Honor marriage. (Matthew 19:4-6)
- Be a servant. (Matthew 20:26-28)
- Love God. (Matthew 22:37-38)
- Love your neighbor. (Matthew 22:39-40)
- Be born again. (John 3:5-7)
- Keep My commandments. (John 14:15)
- Make disciples. (Matthew 28:19-20)

“This is love, that we walk according to His commandments.”

So, are you walking according to His commandments? Do you really love Jesus? Is there room for improvement?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to make you aware of His commands and obedient to them all.

- Tom

December 7

Faithful Joy

SCRIPTURE: 3 John

VERSE FOR TODAY: “For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth. Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers.” (3 John 1:3-5)

What a blessing for John to know that his fellow servants had been faithful to his teaching and were still walking in the truth. They were his spiritual children, and like any good parent he had taught them and tried to make sure that they had all they needed to succeed as followers of Jesus Christ.

We all love to hear that our brothers and sisters in Christ are doing well and staying true to the Gospel. We are blessed beyond measure when we know that our children, both physical and spiritual, are remaining faithful to Christ. How wonderful to see the continuing fruit of our labors through the years!

It's important to remember that others are encouraged by our faithfulness. When was the last time you thanked the person most responsible for your conversion or growth in the Lord? Perhaps you could do that this week. What joy we bring to each other when we stand strong in the truth of Christ.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for your Spiritual parent(s) and the faithfulness of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

- Beth

December 8

Give God the Glory!

SCRIPTURE: Jude

VERSE FOR TODAY: "But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, 'In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.' It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit." (Jude 1:17-19)

"Do you think we're in the 'Last Days'?" I've heard that a lot! My answer?

"Yes, we are, and we have been for the last two-thousand years".

You see, when Jesus Christ died for our sins, rose from the grave, and ascended back to heaven, He ushered in the last age of man upon this tired, old earth. I'm pretty happy about that.

"And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil." (John 3:19) Evil men hate and harass followers of Jesus Christ because they are "devoid of the Spirit" and cannot stand the fact that the righteous know how wicked they are and refuse to participate in, (or at least vindicate), their sin.

Take heart my friend, this world is not your home, but you can see it from here! "But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life." (Jude 1:20-21)

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Give God the glory because you know the end of the story!

- Tom

Trustworthy

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 1

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of Him. Even so. Amen.” (Revelation 1:7)

We usually jump to the “end-of-the-world” understanding of this verse, but I think the real thrust of the verse is more than that. John has told us in the first verse that this prophecy is about things that “must soon take place”. This letter would have very little application to the seven congregations to which it was written if we interpret it as has become popular by today’s fiction writers.

More likely, John uses prophetic language to describe the Kingdom’s victory over the Roman empire. He not only uses the prophetic “cloud language” of Isaiah (Isaiah 19:1) to describe the judgement, but also gives a description of how the victory over Rome would be understood. Rome and her leaders would recognize the power of the Church. In the meantime, God’s people – though triumphant in the end – would be caught in the middle. It’s the whole revelation in a verse.

The take-away for today’s Church is this: no matter what happens, we can trust God. Even in today’s pain there is hope – an expectation – of victory tomorrow. And *everyone* will eventually know it! (Philippians 2:10) That kind of trust allows even us to say, “Even so. Amen.”

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for patient endurance in times of trial and that the Holy Spirit would make you ever-mindful of our Father’s trustworthy past.

- Greg

December 10

Preachers!

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 2:1-17

VERSE FOR TODAY: “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.’” (Revelation 2:1)

An “angel” literally is a “messenger”. That is how first century folks would have read this revelation. John is writing these letters to be delivered to the preachers of Asia

Minor. As he does so, notice both a comforting thought and an uncomfortable assessment.

First, John says Jesus holds these preachers in His right hand as He walks among His Church. Take heart, preacher! Jesus holds you in His mighty hand. Through all the discouragement, through the criticisms, in persecutions, in trials – nothing happens to us that doesn't first pass through His hands. He is present in your congregation, and He knows all.

That leads to an assessment that may hold true for many of us (preachers and pew-sitters alike) today. In all we go through, Jesus has also noticed that we do an awful lot *for* Him without really taking time to *love* Him. The best intentions and motivations can be squelched by busy-ness, the pressure of the clock, and the expectations of others.

Preachers, listen! Slow down! Listen to and fall back in love with Jesus, and notice the renewal that comes to your soul!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray today to fall back in love with Jesus. If you're not a preacher, pray earnestly that your minister is able to spend adequate time with God to be refreshed and able to lead you.

- Greg

December 11

Living A Christian Life

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 2:18 – 3:6

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.” (Revelation 3:3)

When we teach children's church and help kids memorize the 5 Steps to Salvation (Believe, Repent, Confess, be Baptized, and Live a Christian Life), we spend a LOT of time on the last one. It is the hardest one – no matter how old you are or how long you have been a Christian.

Remembering what we have heard and keeping in step with the Spirit is where we all get tripped up. Add to that an enemy that is assessing our weak spots and preying on us when we are at our most vulnerable – many will fall away completely. The world is hard. Well-known preachers are watering down the Gospel or teaching “truths” not even found in Scripture!

Today's passage can serve as a solemn reminder that we must be alert as we await the Lord's return. We must remain vigilant in our personal walk - fact checking Scriptures for ourselves, reaching others for Christ, and discipling them.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Are you ready for Christ to return today? Be determined to “live the Christian life” each day.

-Kristin

December 12

Dinner with Jesus

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 3:7-22

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.” (Revelation 3:20)

I'm sure you've seen the painting of Jesus standing at a door knocking. The artist, Warner Sallman, titled the painting “*Christ at Heart's Door*”. There is no latch visible on the outside of the door. Jesus knocks and then waits. Each one of us must open our own heart from the inside; Jesus will not pry it open or break in; He wants to be invited, and then He will fellowship with us.

Take a moment and paint a new picture in your imagination, one that goes beyond the door. Can you imagine how awesome it would be to have a painting of Jesus sitting down to dinner with you? How beautiful, how peaceful, how reassuring! In the portrait, you are having a causal meal with a good friend who discusses today's blessings and struggles with you and gives you confidence for tomorrow.

This picture will never be painted if you send Jesus off to the guest bedroom like an unwanted visitor. The dinner table is the heart of the home. There is no better way to get to know someone than to share a meal together. Jesus must have a place at our table.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for coming through your heart's door and invite Him to break bread with you every day.

- Beth

Time to Worship

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 4

VERSE FOR TODAY: “At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.” (Revelation 4:2)

Beautiful! Magnificent! Glorious! There are not enough adjectives in the English language to describe this scene from the throne room of God. Twenty-four elders seated on thrones around The Throne, white garments, golden crowns, flashes of lightning, peals of thunder, a sea of glass, not to mention all the living creatures with wings and “full of eyes”. A different picture of Heaven than Hollywood has ever given us!

Then there is the worship - constant worship: the creatures crying out, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (verse 9), and the elders casting their crowns as they say, “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.” (verse 11)

There are a lot of fine Christians who spend much time in Bible study and “going to church”. Nothing wrong with that. But here are some questions that beg an answer: How often do we really worship God? When was the last time you acknowledged God’s holiness to Him? When have you ever felt so overcome with love for your God that you cast everything at His feet because you knew He is worthy?

Think it’s time for some real worship? Yeah, me too.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Let’s worship God constantly with prayer and praise.

- Tom

Ain’t Nothin’ Free

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 5

VERSE FOR TODAY: “and You have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” (Revelation 5:10)

An elder in our congregation told me one time, “My Daddy always said, ‘Ain’t nothin’ free that didn’t cost somebody somethin’.”

I find that to be quite true.

The encouragement of today's verse is astounding. We as God's people have been made into a Kingdom (one that – as this revelation shows – stands above all and is eternal), and have been put in a high position of power. Maybe the most incredible thing is that we did nothing to earn such standing! Maybe never considering how we came to have that standing is why we don't live like kingly priests! Our standing may not have cost us anything, but "Ain't nothin' free that didn't cost somebody somethin'!"

Verse 10 tells us we came to power by the blood of the Lamb. It was by the work of Jesus on the cross that we were ransomed from the scrap heap – headed for destruction – to come to a place of not only freedom but power. It may not cost us much, but it cost Jesus His life.

As seen on a church sign across from my house this week, "Is the life you live worth the death Jesus died?"

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray that God will show you how to more fully live the life you are called to as a priest of His Kingdom.

- Greg

December 15

How Long?

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 6

VERSE FOR TODAY: "They cried out with a loud voice, 'O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been." (Revelation 6:10-11)

Imagine the distress of being a Christian in the first century under Roman persecution. Who will be next to face the gladiators or the lions?

Jesus gives John a peek behind the curtains of heaven to show those who've already been killed asking, "How long until our deaths are avenged?" Following the question are some comforting thoughts for those who suffered under the Romans and for those who are suffering today.

God hears. Their cries do not go unnoticed. There is a response.

God rewards. They are honored with white robes and given rest as they wait.

God plans. Maybe most comforting of all is that none of this has escaped God because it is all part of His plan. He knows the people; each one *is* one. Each horrendous death is one life closer to the completeness of their enemy's downfall.

Fear not! God has everything – even that which seems senseless – under control.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for those who are suffering persecution around the world, and thank God for His plan and assurances.

- Greg

December 16

A Privilege and Pleasure

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 7

VERSE FOR TODAY: “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God.” (Revelation 7:9-11)

This passage causes me to believe that those who come before God's throne - be it angels or the blood-bought, white-robed multitude gathered from all nations - will find great pleasure in serving and worshipping the One Who has created us all. Worship and service should be our desire rather than our duty.

There is a well-known fast food franchise that trains its employees to respond to guests, who voice their appreciation to the friendly service, with a smile and the words, “My pleasure”. I like that! It's nice to know that they deem it a privilege and pleasure to serve me. It's not just a duty required by their job so they will receive a paycheck.

Our worship and service is not a required duty that results in an eternal paycheck, but rather a privilege and pleasure because the blood of the Lamb has redeemed us.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for the privilege of worship.

- Tom

Silence

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 8:1-13

VERSE FOR TODAY: “When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.” (Revelation 8:1)

“Silence in heaven for about half an hour.” The following twelve verses of our passage give us a good indication as to why there was silence. All of heaven understands the awesome power of God. All of heaven understands that God created everything. All of heaven understands that God is *the* Final Word and *the* Final Authority - *period!* When you understand all of this, there are no words - only silence.

We live in a very loud world where everyone wants to have the last word, and if they can't have the last word, they will at least have the *loudest* word. People shout at each other, and they shout at God – even when they don't believe in Him. We don't listen as others speak to us because we are too busy thinking about what we are going to say next. We treat God the same way. We want the last word or the loudest word, and we are so busy talking that we can't hear God.

Perhaps we should take our cue from heaven today. Recognize the awesomeness of God, stop talking, shut out the noise, find time to be silent for about half an hour, and listen for God's commands.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Keep your Bible open, let God know you're listening, and be quiet (for about half an hour).

- Tom

The Seal of God

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 9

VERSE FOR TODAY: “They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.” (Revelation 9:4)

I've known people who will argue eschatology (the study of end times) with you until they are “blue in the face”. They will get quite angry if you don't hold to their millennial view. I'm not one of them. Oh, I have my view of the end times, but I don't have the time, space, or inclination to share it with you today.

I've always believed it to be my calling to tell folks that Jesus came to die for their sins, and if they accept Him as Savior and Lord He will come back to take them home with Him. Doesn't matter how He is going to come back; we just need to be ready. (2 Peter 3:11-14)

When we believe, confess Christ, repent, and are baptized, we receive the "gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38) Paul reminded the Ephesian Christians, "In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit." (Ephesians 1:13)

Thank God for His Seal – the Holy Spirit! For when we have received the indwelling Spirit, we know we are ready for whatever God's future holds.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life.

- Tom

December 19

A Bitter-Sweet End

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 10

VERSE FOR TODAY: "So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, 'Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.'" (Revelation 10:9)

While Jesus' revelation is directly about the Kingdom and Rome, it's also a picture of the way things *always* happen. We see in the seven seals what the process of worldly persecution followed by God's judgement and wrath look like from the Church's perspective. The seven trumpets give us an idea of what it's like to suffer such things *without* Jesus.

As humans, we look forward to a "Day of Reckoning". The evil and corruption of governments, and the injustices and inequalities of society, cause us to say, "I can't wait." But the revelation should cause us to ponder how terrible that judgment will be for those without Jesus. Some people who do not know Him we call "good people". They are our friends, neighbors, relatives – maybe even children, parents, or spouses.

So, when I digest this bit of God's Word, I'm kinda like John. At first, the words may be quite sweet! But, yet, so bitter are they. If the thought of the unsaved suffering and dying without Jesus doesn't cause our stomachs to turn – even just a little - we need a new attitude.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray that God increases your heart's burden for those who do not know Jesus and leads you to do something about it.

- Greg

December 20

Reign, King Jesus!

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 11

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever... We give thanks to You, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign.'" (Revelation 11:15, 17)

John must have been excited as the seventh trumpet blew. He must have known that, with the seventh, the perfect cycle would be complete. He might not have imagined how wonderful the news, though. God's Church would defeat the Roman Empire. Jesus was indeed going to reign!

Still today, the Roman republic stands as the epitome of strength, civilization, and dignity gone awry into disgraceful degradation and evil oppression. The names on the map and the specifics may change, but Rome was no less powerful or twisted than any governments or nations we now see. Can the Church still stand victorious against modern Rome?

The answer is an unequivocal, "Yes!" Jesus has taken His power "and begun to reign"! Do we see *all* the world in subjection yet? No. But His Kingdom gains ground every day in the hearts of men surrendering to the Father's patient call to repentance.

Take heart, Church! The seemingly impossible is on the way!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for Jesus' reign in the world and pray that you can be used today to help His Kingdom gain ground in the hearts of men.

- Greg

The Clock's Ticking

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 12:1-13:1a

VERSE FOR TODAY: “But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!” (Revelation 12:12b)

My wife said I could never enjoy a vacation. Usually it was because I was thinking:

“I only have 7 more days of vacation.”

“Only 6 more days before I have to be back in the office.”

“In 5 days I have to leave the beach.”

“Tomorrow...”

Time always seemed too short. I missed a lot of good things thinking about how little time I had to enjoy myself. And that's why the devil is mad. There's just not enough time to do all he wants. He is furiously doing what he can to hurt God and us because he sees his time coming to a close.

Could I make an observation? The devil – who thinks his time is *short* – has been doing this for *thousands* of years! If the devil thinks that is too short, how long is our time? How long are the eighty-some (if we're lucky?) years of man? Or how long are the 50, 40, 10, or maybe 5 years *you* have? And not a one of us are even assured of tomorrow!

Don't put off the calling God has placed on your life. Whether it is to serve Him or receive Jesus as Savior – “time is short”.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God to place a sense of urgency in your heart for the things He calls you to do.

- Greg

Marked

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 13:1b-18

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name.” (Revelation 13:8)

Two hundred and fifty words (fifteen more or less) is what we are given to write each devotion; not near enough space to launch into an eschatological rant on what I believe these verses mean. I’ll leave that to “experts” (or those who think they are experts) in end-time studies. I’m less concerned about being marked with the name or number of a “beast” than I am with being marked with Jesus.

Ephesians 1:13 (NIV) says, “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.”

When I “believed”, I quickly repented of my sins and was baptized. By Christ’s death and my response to His love I have been assured of the forgiveness of my sins and the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)

I will not fear the present or the future for I have been “marked” by the blood of Jesus and sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for marking you in the blood of His Son.

- Tom

Blessed Indeed

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 14

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Blessed indeed,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!’” (Revelation 14:12-13)

Rest! What a wonderful thought! What a wonderful word! I remember years ago hearing older Christians talking about going to their heavenly home and the glory that

awaited them. They were tired from a lifetime of struggles and weary of a world full of hate, fear, and anger. I didn't understand that so much when I was a young man, but now I do.

We have a GPS in our van. Our travels with Rock Solid Ministries usually take us on the road for one to eight weeks at a time. Each day as we prepare for another drive, we type in the information for the town where we will be staying that evening and within a few seconds we are given the fastest route to our motel. But as much as I enjoy this traveling ministry, nothing thrills me more than pressing one simple button on the GPS: "Go Home". Something about that word "home" just gives me peace.

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Blessed indeed," says the Spirit." Yes, blessed indeed.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Thank God for His promise of final rest.

- Tom

December 24

Dismayed

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 15

**VERSE FOR TODAY: "Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name?..."
(Revelation 15:4)**

People who have put their faith in Jesus, find it inconceivable that not all do. Christians see the power, love, and creativity of God everywhere, and times of extreme trial cause them to rest even more upon the hope of their faith. I've heard Christians say many times at funerals and in tragedy, "I don't know how people without Jesus go through this!"

The need for God seems palpable in tribulation. Yet, the worshipful question of this multitude has already been answered in the revelation.

"The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts." (9:20-21)

It seems that people who've once – and finally – rejected Jesus cannot see their way back to the idea of faith. Once we completely rule out faith in the I Am as a lifestyle – even if we have once declared Jesus Lord (2 Peter 2:20) – the only answer is a further slide into sinful depravity. Don't be dismayed when the world does not believe!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for the opportunity to reach those who've not yet ruled out faith in Jesus, and a stronger faith of your own.

- Greg

December 25

Are You Ready?

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 16

VERSE FOR TODAY: "Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed." (Revelation 16:15)

Many a young child has stayed up as late as possible on Christmas Eve – if not to try and catch a glimpse of the jolly, old elf - to attempt a guess about what might be awaiting them under the tree in the morning. Pajamas on, ready to race in at dawn's first light, they are prepared for what is coming!

At Jesus' first coming, the world was caught sleeping. Only some avid scholars from far east of Bethlehem and a few shepherds cued-in by the angels looked for the Savior's birth.

Jesus warns everyone here in this passage of His figurative coming against Rome. As the "sixth bowl catastrophe" ends, the trumpet shall sound for the seventh bowl ushering in the complete annihilation of Roman rule. Would His followers be found still faithful?

What about us? When Jesus physically returns on the last day (John 11:24), when the trumpet sounds to announce His final coming and awaken the bodies of those coming with Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:16) - will we be taken unaware? Don't let the awe-inspiring wonder of His first coming that we celebrate today make you forget about the final one!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray that as you celebrate Jesus birth you will do so with an eye to His coming! Perhaps it will be today!

- Greg

Devoured

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 17

VERSE FOR TODAY: “And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire.” (Revelation 17:16)

This chapter is a parody of what we have seen earlier. In chapter twelve, there’s a picture of God’s faithful (a woman with a crown of twelve stars) bringing the ruler of all nations into the world (that’s Jesus). Both are trying to keep from being devoured by a beast. Here we see a stark contrast. A prostitute (always God’s picture of *unfaithfulness*) is happily *riding* the beast. She has seemingly tamed it to do her bidding, and she is drunk on her sins.

So, it may come as a surprise that, in the end, it is the beast that devours the prostitute! The beast that had given her power. The beast she thought she’d tamed to do her bidding. It was the very thing that was her undoing.

There is so much for us here today, Brethren! Understand what this prophetic judgment on the long-since-gone Rome says to us today! Western governments of our day may allow – or even encourage – people to ride gaily along in Satan’s program of Kingdom suppression, marginalization, or even persecution. But “the thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy,” Jesus said. Any nation’s people who choose to “ride a beast” will eventually O.D. on their own satanic vice of choice. We must repent or suffer the same consequences from within!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for your country, your congregation, and the Church at large today.

- Greg

December 27

Come Out!

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 18

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, ‘Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues’” (Revelation 18:4)

Jesus reiterates Jeremiah's sermon preached concerning the first and original Babylon. As the New Babylon is coming to its prophetic end, Jesus calls His people to make sure they "stand back". Don't get caught up in the sinfulness of this nation – or you will reap its punishment.

Part of the revelation's message – and the reason Rome's downfall is unfolded over and over (in seals and trumpets and bowls) - is to give different perspectives on the same events. While we see the people of God suffering under Roman rule, it is evident that the *ungodly* suffer as much or more – especially in the nation's downfall. The only way to minister to a hurting world – and escape its final punishment – is to "come out".

Jesus still calls His people out today. The "Church" is so named because the word is rooted in Greek culture. In ancient Greece, the people of the town were "called out" by a crier of sorts to come to the *ecclesia* – the meeting of those who were called out – to do the business of the town. The Church, the body of Christ, is the gathering of His called-out people to do Kingdom business. This is not just on Sunday morning, but we are called out to do His bidding daily.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for the wisdom to see where we should be involved in culture - for Kingdom purposes - and where to "stand back".

- Greg

December 28

Hallelujah! It's Supper Time!

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 19

VERSE FOR TODAY: "And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are the true words of God.'" (Revelation 19:9)

The first part of this chapter is a "Hallelujah Chorus". In verses one, three, and six a great multitude cries out "Hallelujah". In verse four the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures worship God saying, "Amen. Hallelujah". All of this leads up to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

We can certainly understand why this word, Hallelujah, (meaning "Praise the Lord") is repeated so many times in our reading today. Jesus, the Lamb of God who gave His life for His Bride, the Church, now calls us to our Wedding Supper. Supper is good anytime, but a marriage supper is special; it is a time of great joy, and this is the greatest marriage ever! We will dine with the Groom – our Creator, our Savior.

The aroma of Mom's cooking (including fatback frying in an iron skillet) drifted into the yard where we played. She only had to call us to supper once, and with shouts of joy, we came running.

I can almost smell the food as it is prepared for that great and final day. I anticipate the call of my Lord when I will once again shout for joy and come running. "Hallelujah! It's supper time"!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Give a shout of "Hallelujah!" and thank God for what He is preparing.

- Tom

December 29

Time to Act

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 20

VERSE FOR TODAY: "And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years." (Revelation 20:2)

Scripture states it over and again!

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:" (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

"...lift up your eyes and see the fields are white for harvest." (John 4:35)

"making the best use of the time, because the days are evil." (Ephesians 5:16)

The Church must strike while the iron is hot! The time to do the Lord's work is now! The devil is bound. While people still continually *choose* to believe his deceptions when they are carried away by their own desires (James 1:14), Satan's work and power has been curtailed and King Jesus reigns as the Church carries out the mop-up operations of Calvary's victory. The devil will only be fully released again for his final punishment on the Day of the Lord. (20:7-10)

We don't know how long this window of opportunity will last. Only that, as John has given it the number of "a thousand years" that it is a complete and definite time. God started the clock, and only He knows when the time is up. As we've previously seen, we may not win *everyone* to Christ. But it is our responsibility to take the opportunity we've been given to allow "whosoever will" to come!

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray that God will help you order your days in the coming year to His fullest for the sake of His Kingdom.

- Greg

December 30

New

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 21

VERSE FOR TODAY: “Behold, I am making all things new.” (Revelation 21:5)

New.

A short word, but so powerful. New offers hope. New products, new starts, new methods, new realizations, new information – we are ready to put away the old and grab onto all that is new.

Or are we?

I suppose that is the heart of the question when it comes to making the choice to follow Jesus. Are we ready to put away our past for His future? Are we ready to release our old for His new? When we consider the revelation’s end, we might think such a question silly. Yet Jesus asked such a question to a lame man in John’s gospel.

“Do you want to be healed?” (John 5:6)

Of course he wanted to be healed! He explained to Jesus that he waited there often. He desperately wanted healing, and he accepted it. But many will not. Many are content to hold on to their hurt. Many are tight-fisted with their ways of doing things. Why? Their hurt is *their* hurt. Their ways are *their* ways. It is quite sad.

We read this passage in Revelation 21 and *say* that we “long for the day”. But when we stubbornly refuse to repent of the old in the “here and now” – do we really want the new “there and then”?

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Pray for the wisdom to let go of your old and accept Jesus’ new.

- Greg

Finally, Brothers

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 22

VERSE FOR TODAY: “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll. He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.” (Revelation 22:18-21)

Another year is in the books, and we prepare to begin the New Year with healthy goals and desires for our next chapter. In this moment, we have the opportunity to reflect on our recent history and set a new course. Let us continue to pray for revival in our personal lives and intentionally walk forward with a refreshed spirit and renewed hope for the Lord’s return.

Even as we continue to hope, we must remember to spread the good news to the world. There remain many unsaved, both at home and far away, and we must help reach them where we are able.

Today’s final passage reminds us that Jesus is coming soon. May we intentionally set an example “in our speech, conduct, love, faith and purity” to those with whom we come in contact, until the Lord returns.

PRAYER THOUGHTS: Ask God for guidance as you set your resolutions for the New Year. Be sure to prioritize your spiritual walk.

- Kristin