



Devoted Hearts: Holiday Quiet Time Series

December 17, 2012—January 5, 2013



Devoted Hearts!

***Devoted:** It is the very first word to describe the very first response of the very first church upon hearing the message of the cross for the very first time. Devoted is more than an action and more than a mindset, it is an expression of the heart. To be devoted to God is synonymous with giving God all your heart. This has been the theme and primary goal of the DCC for 2012. We have heard lessons, studied Scriptures, prayed prayers and encouraged one another, all to help us become more devoted to God. It has been inspiring to see scores of people begin their devotion by being baptized into Christ, or rediscover their devotion by being restored to the Body of Christ, or to continue to grow in their devotion by remaining faithful to Christ. What better way is there to close out 2012 and usher in 2013 than for all of us to spend special time with God every day, yearning to give Him truly devoted hearts?*

It is to this end that this holiday quiet time series has been written by the ministry staff of the Rocky Mountain Churches. I want to urge you to make these daily devotionals a priority in your heart and your schedule. Read the articles, look up the Scriptures, pray the prayers, remember the "Thoughts for the Day," and share your insights with other disciples. It is so encouraging and unifying to consider that nearly a thousand brothers and sisters throughout the Rocky Mountain Region will be having the same daily, spiritual focus during the holidays. Let's give this series and our awesome God all of our hearts. To him be glory and devotion!

I consider it a true joy and honor to be your servant in the Lord. You are all in my prayers. Happy Holidays!

*Much Love,
John Lusk
Lead Evangelist, Denver Church of Christ*

Reflection

Before you begin the series, take a few minutes to reflect on this past year by considering the following:

1. What have been the three greatest miracles you saw in 2012?

2. What have been the three greatest lessons you've learned or changes you've made in 2012?

3. What three personal areas do you want to change the most in 2013?

A Fully Committed Heart

Monday, December 17

~ by Barri Lusk

Scriptures to Read

2 Chronicles 16:9; Matthew 22:34-40; Luke 10:38-42

Insights

The greatest command in all of God's word is to love Him with all you've got! God really wants a heart-to-heart relationship with each one of us. He does not want half of your heart - He wants it all. In 2 Chronicles 16:9, the Bible says God is searching for a heart that is fully committed to Him, so that He can strengthen that heart. As God's eyes search the world, do they stop at your heart? Is your heart fully committed or divided by love for other things, such as: money, possessions, a person, your "things to do" list, or some sin? The story of Mary and Martha in **Luke 10:38-42** is so relatable. Martha's "things to do" list was extra long on the day Jesus came into town. She was doing so much for Jesus, but she was not with Jesus. Her heart was divided. She gave up a great opportunity to sit at Jesus' feet and grow spiritually. Mary on the other hand, made the better choice - to be with Jesus. Her heart was fully committed and was definitely strengthened that day.

Reflections

Imagine if you were asked to describe your quiet time from yesterday. What would you say? Which of the two sisters are you more like? The busy holiday season is in full swing. It affects every area of our lives - our homes, schools, offices, schedules, and even our hearts. Every year at this time, hundreds of disciples get caught up in all the busyness and activities and get a divided, distracted heart toward the Lord. Many lose their passion for God, and some even fall away from God's grace. I won't forget my first Christmas break as a disciple. I had so many great plans for my time with God. Without my studies or work, I would have so much extra time for the Lord. The first day I woke up early, but instead of going to my Bible and prayer, I read the newspaper. Then my mom was up cooking one of her famous breakfasts. Of course, I couldn't resist that! After cleaning up breakfast dishes, it was time to go shopping at the mall. In the afternoon, we visited family friends. All the while, I thought, "it's ok, I'll just have my quiet time later." When we got home, the whole family gathered around the TV to watch our favorite show. I fell asleep on the sofa and woke up at 3:00am. The whole

Seek God with All Your Heart

Tuesday, December 18

~ by Chris Clawson

Scripture to Read

Hebrews 5:7 *“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.”*

Insights

What would you say to a people trying to persevere spiritually through a lifetime of human experience? Seek God with all your heart like Jesus did! “Fix your thoughts, confidence, hope, eyes on Jesus”, says the Holy Spirit through the author of Hebrews (3:1,11; 6:19-20; 12:3) and you will see how. You will discover the constant effort with which He sought God. You will see the daily desperation and dependency of someone looking forward to graduating beyond this earthly life. Jesus knew that being saved was not a one time achievement won on good behavior, but a fundamental state of living in a body. And so, *“during the days of His life of earth”*, He sought God with all of His heart, *“offering up prayers, begging and pleading with loud cries and tears in humble, reverent, devoted submission.”*

Reflections

Life has an endpoint. It is unchanging and inevitable. But reaching that endpoint is achieved by taking a journey that is still unknown and uncharted to us. I would never have been able to script the life I am living. In all sincerity, experiencing the things that have turned out as I hoped and prayed, are often baffling, wonderful, and sometimes overwhelming. Marriage, parenting, friendship, health and ministry are constantly lifting me to mountaintops and bringing me to my knees. Each day I wake up to a new question that my children have or a test of patience and training that pushes me to God. Yesterday’s connection to God will no longer do for today. Therefore, like Jesus, the need to desperately seek God daily is like needing oxygen to breathe! What a profound reality that at nowhere along this journey does seeking God become secondary, past tense or fully achieved. Can you relate? Jesus can.

Application

1. When in your journey have you most desperately sought God like Jesus?
2. What sin, hard-heartedness has/is/could turn you away from seeking God? (Hebrews 3:12-14)
3. What needs to change for you to seek God with all your heart like Jesus?
4. Sing #218 “I Need Your Love” and meditate on the words.
5. For additional study, read Hebrews asking the question “How should I seek God?”.

Prayer

Father, I need you today, more than ever before. You are the anchor for my soul. You are the source of my confidence and hope. You are my life’s guide and goal. Help me to see you the way that Jesus did everyday of His life. Show me what sin and hard heartedness is keeping me from seeking you like Him. Please soften my heart, make me sensitive and bring me near to you again. You alone can save me from the daily battles of this human life until my journey is finished. I WILL SEEK YOU WITH ALL MY HEART! I will seek you during the days of my life here on earth the way my LORD Jesus did. In whose name I know you will answer me! Amen.

Thought For the Day

Today is the day I need God the most!

Notes:

Trust God with All Your Heart

Wednesday, December 19

~ by Becky Clawson

Scriptures to Read

Isaiah 55:8-9, Psalm 37:3-7, Jeremiah 17:5-9

Proverbs 3:5-6 *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”*

Insights

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart...”

Is there any other way to trust in God? I cannot find a single scripture that calls for half hearted trust in God. He calls for total surrender! The phrase “all your heart” is used in the Bible over 40 times! God makes it clear that there is no half hearted way to trust in him! The Hebrew word for “trust” in this verse means: to rely on, to be confident in, to depend on and to feel secure in. We are to apply “all our heart” to trusting God in this way. Think about each of these statements: Rely on the Lord with all your heart. Be confident in the Lord with all your heart. Depend on the Lord with all your heart. Feel secure in the Lord with all your heart.

“Lean not on your own understanding...”

The Hebrew word for “lean” in this verse means: to lean oneself upon, rely on, depend on. Leaning has the sense of putting your whole weight on something, resting on it. This scripture says not to depend, rely, or “put your weight on” your own understanding or perspective.

“In all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”

This word “submit” in Hebrew means to acknowledge or to know intimately. In ALL OUR ways we are to seek to know him and acknowledge who he is. He is LORD. When our hearts and minds are surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus, he is able to make our paths straight, no matter how twisted up or bumpy they seem. To know God is greater than knowing the answer to our problem or the outcome we desire for our lives. Trusting God is the result of knowing him, and the more intimately we know the Lord the more we will put our trust in him!

Reflections

The world teaches us not to “put all our eggs in one basket,” but that is the very thing God is calling us to do in our relationship with him! He says “trust me! Put your whole life in my hands! I will straighten everything out for you, leave it to me!” We cannot know how God will straighten our paths (ie: how our lives will turn out) unless we first

choose to trust and surrender to him.

I love to pray on Flagstaff Mountain overlooking Boulder. The view from the top of the mountain gives me a powerful reminder that God sees my life from a much higher vantage point. While I am living out the experiences and challenges right in front of me, God is seeing not only my present but my past and future. He understands perfectly what is currently happening. He is concerned and deeply invested in bringing about what is best for me, my family, my friends and ministry. Knowing that He has this vantage point and His heart for my life makes trusting him during the day to day much easier! Instead of fighting Him for control and trying to give Him the directions for my life's path, which completely overwhelms me, I can submit! I don't have to know all that's ahead. I don't have to lean on my own understanding! I don't have to have it all figured out! God is watching over my life and drawing a straight path for me to follow. Honestly, what a relief!

Application

1. Which part of this passage most challenges you? Trusting? Not leaning on self? Submitting?
2. What are some "view from the top" scriptures that help you trust God's perspective in these areas?
3. Do you have a place you go to get reminded of God's vantage point?
4. What areas of your life are you currently fighting to let God lead you?

Prayer

Pray through: Psalm 121:1-8.

Heavenly Father, "I lift my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you. The Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm— he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore." Amen

Thought For the Day

God has the best view of my life!

Fear God with All Your Heart

Thursday, December 20

~by Brian Campbell

Scriptures to Read

Genesis 22:1—18. Focus verse: Genesis 22:12 *“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”*

Insights

Like Abraham, God tests our hearts to see if we sincerely fear him. In Abraham’s case God tested his fear of the LORD by asking him to sacrifice and surrender what he valued most, his son Isaac.

To truly fear God with all your heart is to take the very things you value most and surrender them to God. God decided to give Abraham back his son. This, however, is not the norm. To fear God is to surrender all to him and to submit ourselves to his will, whether or not that means we receive what we sacrificed back.

Imagine giving up your control and surrendering your jurisdiction of what you love most to God... Wow, that is a scary thought, hence what it means to fear God! To fear God is also to obey him even when we don’t want to or when it doesn’t always make sense.

Reflections

This winter I am undergoing surgery on my right shoulder. The recovery includes six weeks in a sling and a six-month full recovery. This event brings many fears and insecurities to the surface in my life because I find a lot of worth and joy in life by being active, playing sports, and enjoying the outdoors.

In order to fear God in this recovery process I will have to surrender my desire to push myself to be active and fight instead to heal and follow all the proper recovery instructions. I will have to choose to fear God and surrender my fears and insecurities to him and really live life to the full during my six-month recovery. I foresee this surgery bringing me closer to God and closer to the people in my life.

Please Him in Every Way

Friday, December 21

~ by Kristina Campbell

Scripture to Read

Colossians 1:3—12

Insights

Paul and Timothy prayed for the disciples in Colosse to be filled with the knowledge of God's will through spiritual wisdom and understanding. There was a point to this prayer for the people... So that they could live to please the Lord in every way. I believe we all want to live a life worthy of the Lord and to please him. Even so, we often get focused on the wrong things. Paul here says that a pleasing life to God is one in which we bear fruit in every good work, grow in the knowledge of God, and find our strength in God so that we can have patience and endurance and be joyful in our gratitude to God. (vv. 10-12).

Paul said this had been their prayer because they had already heard of the faith and love that the brothers in Colosse had. (vv. 3-4). The prayer was that this faith and love would increase their knowledge of God and add to their faith so that they could please him in every way. These actions that show a pleasing life to God are important because they are all centered around God. A pleasing life to God bears fruit for God, grows in knowledge of God, finds strength in God and is thankful for the blessings from God. This kind of life is centered around God and pleasing him rather than being centered around pleasing ourselves or others.

Reflections

Growing up in the kingdom I have had to spend a lot of time figuring out who I'm trying to please in the moment. I have always desired to live a life that pleased God but I can often get it confused with a life that makes every one happy with me and pleasing the people around me thinking that was what would please God too. But this scripture reminds me that my life should be a life totally centered on God. He wants me to fight to bear fruit, to please him in spreading more seeds of his gospel. This scripture shows me that my relationship with him, knowledge of him and strength in him is something to fight for. Putting God first and fighting to be close to him is so important in pleasing him with all your heart! When your heart is filled with God, it will always please God. This helps me to be so grateful for all that he has done and be patient as I fight through this life trying to please him!

The Blessing of Obedience

Saturday, December 22

~ by Doug Baity

Scriptures to Read

Philippians 2:5-12; John 8:51; John 14:23; 1 Peter 2:13, Matthew 28:18-20
Joshua 1:6-7 *“Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them. Be strong and very courageous. **Be careful to obey** all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.”*

Insights

On this day Joshua was blessed to receive a great vision. He was going to lead God’s people to the greatest victory they had ever experienced. The keys to victory were simple. Be strong, be courageous and be careful to fully obey the law God had given him. A similar principle applies in our life. Jesus stated in Luke 11:28 *“Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”*

“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority...” (1 Peter 2:13). The blessing that comes from obedience is one that God is seeking to impart to us from the moment that we are born. We are given parents, teachers, coaches, bosses, church and ministry leaders and others in order to impart to us this important life principle. We are meant to submit to their authority.

The word “submit” isn’t a favorite of ours. We live in a culture that does not think this way. Our nation was founded on rejecting unjust authority and we have celebrated that quality ever since. There aren’t too many holidays lifting up the virtues of obeying the law and paying our taxes! In addition it grates against our pride. We often feel deep down that we have a better way and a better answer. This type of thinking is a significant obstacle in realizing God’s dreams for us.

Reflections

My father retired from the military when I was in the second grade. He had come from a broken home and it was his dream to give his children the guidance and attention that he had longed for as a child. His vehicle to accomplish this was my grandfather’s eighteen acre farm in Pueblo and so he purchased it and moved us there. We knew nothing about farming but my father was very determined. Most days began at sunrise with the sound of his very loud and commanding voice instructing myself and my two brothers to get up and begin working. There was much to be done-none of it was fun. He seemed to revel in the difficulty of it. One of his favorite expressions was “Doug, it’s all downhill from here, you’ll never have it tougher than this.” By and large he was right. Throughout the day he would

pepper our work with pithy sayings that he deeply believed in: “a day’s work for a day’s pay”; “a champion stays a little longer and works a little harder”; “There are three parts to a job: plan it, complete it and clean up”; “a man’s word is his bond”; “you only have one family.” On and on it would go. I would groan inwardly as he said these things. In the summer I would often see my friends ride by on their bicycles off on an adventure. I longed to join them but rarely asked. I questioned if he was too hard and demanding and looked forward to being out from underneath his authority. I write these words with tears as I consider how right he was. I am deeply grateful how much my brothers and sister benefitted from his strong but loving leadership. We learned from him honesty and hard work. We learned about discipline and character. We learned from him the love of family and devotion. The blessings that he brought to our family have been many. Amazingly, none of my siblings have ever had to suffer through a divorce. My parents 65 year marriage has been an inspiration to us. Although my father dropped out of high school, he and my mother inspired all of us to value education. We all graduated from college, several from graduate school. The generational problems of alcoholism that had plagued his family and caused his parent’s divorce were never passed on to us. My brothers and sister have been able to live healthy lives as a result. Our lives are much better and far richer and I am deeply thankful for that.

Application

1. Are there areas of your life that are not in obedience to God’s word?
2. How easy is it to give you feedback? Would you describe yourself as teachable?
3. How often do you express gratitude to those people God has led into your life to help you obey?
4. How do you feel about authority?
5. Do you believe God has a great plan for your life?

Prayer

Father, thank you for your Word that is meant to guide my life. Thank you for the many blessings that have come into my life through obedience. Please help me to open my eyes to any areas that I have not obeyed. I confess them now. Help me to recognize and appreciate the people that you have led into my life. Amen.

Thought For the Day

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” ~ Jeremiah 29:11

Forgive God with All Your Heart

Sunday, December 23

~ by Suzanne Baity

Scriptures to Read

Matthew 11:1-6, Isaiah 45:9-12, Isaiah 55:7-8, Romans 8:28

Insights

We often do not understand God. We know that we are called to love God and obey God but perhaps somewhere in our spirit, we feel hurt. We can be angry with God. We can feel bitter about certain things in our lives. We can feel disappointed with God or our Christian experience. Have you ever felt that way?

In **Matthew 11: 1-6**, we read about a time where John is in prison and he is questioning if Jesus is the Messiah. Just a few passages earlier we see John baptizing Jesus and acknowledging Christ's pre-eminence. What happened to his faith? John was hurting. He was in prison and in grave danger. He had probably imagined that the coming of the Messiah would look differently. He probably thought that his own service and faith would have lead to a more glorious place; a place of victory, blessing and fruit, but instead he was in prison. Jesus answers John's inquiry by saying, "*blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me*" (vs 6). The word for "fall away" is the Greek word, skandalizo. It is often translated "offend". Literally, Jesus says that we are blessed when we are not "offended" by Him. The Greek word carries with it the idea of being trapped or snared. Being "offended" or "hurt" can literally ensnare our hearts. Can you relate? I can think of many times in my life when I have felt my heart ensnared by hurt – hurt from God or from people. Have you ever felt offended by God or by the circumstances in your life?

In **Isaiah 45:9-12**, God says clearly that he is the potter and we are the clay. This is an intense verse as it challenges us not to argue with God, but to surrender to God's design for our life. Are you arguing with God about anything in your life? Certainly God welcomes dialogue and calls us to pour out our hearts to Him in the midst of trials. There are many intense challenges in life and we will struggle, but the call is in this verse to get to a place of surrender and trust.

Reflections

Our hearts can be offended/snared by the things that God allows to happen in our lives. I know in my life there have been many times when I have had to dig deep in my relationship with God to understand His

choices for my life. In becoming a Christian, I had to resolve with God the loss of both of my parents, my mom's suicide and an overall loss of trust. Through the past 30 years, there have been some dark days. I have felt "offended" by God, angry with God, disappointed with God. The biggest thing that has helped me "to forgive" God, is to surrender my will and to trust that His ways are higher than my ways. At the heart of working through suffering and hurt is a determination to surrender to God's plan and to trust Him, knowing that He is completely trustworthy.

Application

1. Do you hold any bitterness or disappointment toward God? If so, write out the situations where you feel hurt. Write down the positive things you have learned through these trials or ways God has drawn you closer to Him through these struggles.
2. Take the time to dream of how God may be using these challenges to help you minister to others.

Prayer

Dear Father, I am grateful that your ways are higher than my ways and your thoughts are higher than my thoughts. Please help me to let go of disappointment, hurt and anger I have toward you. Please help me to trust you and your plans for my life. Help me to see the good you have worked in my life. Please help me to surrender and to remember that you are good. You bought me at a price and I am precious to you. In Jesus' holy name. Amen!

Thought For the Day

God is good and he is molding me as He sees fit!

Notes:

A Heart For Your Family

Monday, December 24

~ by Rob Ferry

Scriptures to Read

Matthew 3:17, Mark 9:7

Insights

We do many things for our children, we *experience* many fun times together with our them and our kids are constantly watching what we *do*. But have you ever stopped to think, ‘What do our children need to *HEAR* from us?’ What words are the most impactful for them? What words do children need to hear in abundance? This is an essential question. So much so, that of the few times in scripture where we have a record of God audibly speaking, he is speaking to his son words that Jesus himself needed to hear. And those words are oh, so powerful!

In **Mathew 3:17**, we read of God’s words to Jesus following His baptism, in an audible voice from heaven: *“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”* Here God shows us powerful, life-giving words that our children need to hear from their parents. First, ‘I love you’. Our children need to hear that we love them; frequently, abundantly, repeatedly. Its not enough for them to just ‘know’ that mom and dad love them. Second, ‘I am proud of you’. Our children need our affirmations, our proclamations that we are proud of them; what they do well, who they are, who they are becoming.

In **Mark 9:7**, we have another example of a parent-to-child interaction of God the Father and Jesus. Again, in an audible voice from heaven, God says; *“This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”* In this passage, God reiterates the importance of letting his son know that he loves him. But He also adds something new; ‘Listen to him!’ Why might that be? I believe God commands the people around Jesus to listen to him because Jesus is good at what he is doing; God is affirming Jesus. I believe our children desperately need these affirmations as well. Son, you are good at... Daughter, you are amazing at ...

Just as the Father spoke these very words to his son Jesus to encourage him, I likewise believe these three things are critical for parents to communicate to their children:

I love you
I am proud of you
You are good at...

Reflections

I cannot overemphasize the importance of our children hearing those words—these expressions of our hearts—regularly, often, time and again. From our recent Mens' 33 session, several men in the group shared that they did not get these verbal encouragements from their dad. One even wished that his deceased father could return just to say these things to him. Words, or lack of them, carry a great deal of weight.

Sometimes with our children, it's easy to skip giving these life-giving words of encouragement and instead get in to 'correction mode'. Just this week, my son shared, 'Dad, this week the only time you have talked with me was when you were correcting me or I was doing something wrong.' Ugh! That cut me to the heart! I realized I had been way too heavily focused on the negative and not nearly focused enough on expressions of love and affirmation. I quickly repented by sharing the three things God shared with his son Jesus, asked for my son's forgiveness, and we 'made up' with a giant bear hug.

Application

As parents we play many roles with our children - provider, scheduler, cleaner, taxi-cab driver and more; but nothing is more powerful than eyeball-to-eyeball, soul-to-soul, heart-to-heart expressions!

1. What words do your kids hear from you?
2. How often do you tell your kids you are proud of them?
3. When is the last time you looked your son or daughter in the eye and told them what they are really good at doing?
4. Lastly, don't just rely on your perception. Do an inventory and ask each of your kids how often you communicate these three vital things to them and which things they would like to hear more often from you.

Prayer

Dear heavenly Father, I am proud of my kids. I sometimes may struggle to put it in to words, but I want to do better. Help me to express my pride as clearly as You did for Your Son. Help me to be like you in this way. Help me to avoid unhealthy criticism and give me the wisdom to focus on constructive encouragement. Help me to be as patient with my children as I know you are patient with me. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Thought For the Day

I love you. I am proud of you. You are good at...

A Thankful Heart

Tuesday, December 25

~ by Dawn Ferry

Scriptures to Read

Romans 1:18-32, Psalm 16, Psalm 100, 1 Corinthians 15:57, 2 Corinthians 2:14, 2 Corinthians 9:15, 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Philippians 4:6

Insights

The Lord chooses to identify ingratitude as the root of much of our sinful nature (**Romans 1:21**). Gratitude is also the very quality that flows naturally in response to the victory offered us through the risen Christ (**1 Corinthians 15:17**). Thanks be to God! A thankful heart is a heart that pleases God. God feels so strongly about our heart of gratitude that he specifically instructs us to “*give thanks in ALL circumstances*” (**1 Thessalonians 5:18**). Gratitude, even in tough times when nothing seems to make sense, guards our hearts as we humble ourselves before the Lord, confessing our trust in and dependence on him. How refreshing is David’s heart of gratitude in **Psalm 16** and the Psalm writer’s in **Psalm 100**. Let us imitate their hearts of thanksgiving!

Reflections

I find that a grateful heart is the opposite of a complaining heart. I cannot possibly grumble or complain AND have a grateful heart simultaneously. Rather, a grateful heart is the antidote for grumbling and complaining. It’s not a wonder why God insists that we give up one and relish the other.

Recently, I was forwarded the challenge to have a “Complaint-Free Day” during Thanksgiving week. Seemed simple enough! I was proud of myself when the clock hit 12n and I hadn’t complained, at least knowingly. Then, however, various challenges began to pile up. Despite expecting 20+ people the next day for Thanksgiving, the oven refused to work at any temperature other than 350 degrees. I thought that I had finished all of my shopping for our large meal, only to find that I needed an additional run to the store... then another. I realized then that complaining is like fasting: I don’t realize how accustomed I am to it (complaining, food... whatever the “it” is) until I vow to refrain from it. Later that day, I was screaming on the inside when we were caught in traffic, turning a 30-minute drive into one that lasted well over an hour. I think it was then that I complained about not being able to complain that day. Surely, I need God’s grace for my ungrateful heart!

Application

1. I encourage you to take on the challenge to have a “Complaint Free Day” sometime soon.
2. Do I have a complaining or a grateful spirit? On the outside? How about on the inside? Do I grumble on the inside even when I don’t on the outside?
3. How often do I express gratitude to those that surround me? To my spouse and children? Not only for things that they DO for me, but for who they are TO us, regardless of their performance or accomplishments?
4. Do I still feel grateful for God’s church? Do I have the same awe and amazement for His Kingdom as I did when I first became a Christian?
5. Am I able to thank God for my challenges and struggles as well as for my victories and blessings? Do I believe that sometimes God’s greatest blessings are found in prayers in which he answers with a “no” or a “not now”? Pray for a heart to trust God even in the tough times, knowing that God is faithful, in good times and in dark times.

Prayer

God, I know that I see only a glimmer of who you are and still I shutter in amazement when I consider your power, your holiness, and your heart to pursue me. Thank you for your humility, your initiation in our relationship, and your heart’s desire to hold me close to your heart, now and for eternity. Thank you for the gift of salvation, of the Holy Spirit that dwells within my heart, of your church and people that are committed to my well-being in every area of my life. Thank you for my family and for the example of unconditional love they are to me. Help me to see even my struggles as blessings and to believe that you ALWAYS work for the good of those who love you. Thank you that you are the Lord of my life and I am not. Thank you that you see me as you see Jesus, clothed in his blood and righteousness. Thank you that your mercies are never-failing. Thank you that this is who you are. Help me to simply live in awe of you, with a humble and thankful heart. Amen.

Thought For the Day

“What if you awoke today with only the things you thanked God for yesterday?” –Anonymous

A Heart to Persevere

Wednesday, December 26

~by Wade Cook

Scriptures to Read

Luke 18:1-8, Galatians 6:9, 1 Corinthians 15:58, Joshua 14:6-14

Insights

“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up”. It seems funny to be speaking of perseverance so soon after Christmas. After all we have just enjoyed a great celebration of Jesus coming to the world bringing peace, love and tranquility to all man right? Unfortunately, what Christ came to initiate has not come to the fruition that he had hoped. In large part, this is because the forces of evil and the sin in men’s hearts remained. Perhaps that is why Jesus was intentional in instructing his disciples that a key element in anyone who aspires to maturity in the faith is learning the lesson of perseverance.

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up”. Inspirational stories abound about perseverance. One particular story stands out from a friend who went to CU. In his freshman year, Tom and another friend would meet to run and work out together. They had a set time each day that they would meet and on one occasion, a very heavy set girl who lived on their floor approached them asking if she could join them to work out. They both agreed thinking this was going to be a short lived agreement. The girl met them the next day for a run and in her terrible condition, was able only to walk/jog/ walk ONCE around the track. She was done for the night. To Tom’s surprise, there she was the next day, ready to go for workout #2. She made it a whole 200 yards further that day which marked the end of that workout. Day after she would show up and in time Tom and his friend lost track of her. Four years later, on a warm May afternoon, Tom was standing around after graduation and a very fit, attractive lady approached him asking if he remembered her? He could not recall ever having met her and it turned out that she was that very girl from his freshman year! She had kept going to the gym, day in and out and had that year qualified for the New York City Marathon!!

Never quit! Don’t stop! Whoever gives up on God, gives up too soon! It is hard to hang on to these thoughts when you are wrestling with your faith. Maybe you are discouraged and are thinking about falling away. Maybe you are personally doing all right, but are waning in your belief that a friend who is studying the bible will make it. Maybe a dear friend has recently fallen away or you have “fallen again” into that same old sin. Maybe this holiday season has only proved to be a reminder of how what holes are in your marriage, your finances, your education or your professional direction.

Whatever the challenge, you must begin to face it anew with the conviction that stopping is not an option! **DO NOT GROW WEARY IN DOING GOOD.** Jesus promises that there is a reason and a return for our efforts!

Reflections

What have you learned from your trials? What wisdom and depth of conviction have come from your steadfastness in difficult times? I was recently lifting weights with a brother and we got to talking about his wife, his kids and other things going on in his life. He is wrestling with some heavy sin, but is serious about overcoming. After some discussion, he asked me a very important question. "How does one stay strong over the years?" The answer I believe is to be found Romans 5:1-8 "... *suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.*" Read this entire passage. What do you see? The call to "hang in there with rejoicing?"; that the way to true hope and perseverance in Christ starts in suffering of some kind. I believe the real power of this scripture is not just highlighting our faithfulness to God, but instead his faithfulness to us! Read again verses 6-8. "*You see at just the right time... Christ died for us.*" Have you ever stopped to consider just how much faith and trust God has in you? Knowing we would blow it; knowing that we would rebel and fall back into sin again and again. Although he knew that instead of welcoming Jesus mankind would kill him, God sent him anyway. And while on this point, let me point out God's timing, It is always perfect! As the old gospel song says, "HE MIGHT NOT COME WHEN YOU WANT HIM, BUT HE'S ALWAYS RIGHT ON TIME!"

Application

1. List 3 people you respect for their tenacity and strength of character. Maybe you are aware of some very difficult times in their lives, or they have seen you through some rough situations.
2. Write down two areas in your life you really want to see change in the coming year.
3. Make it a point to contact those people whom you listed in question #1 and get their input on how you might realize that change and bring them to reality in the coming year!

Prayer

Pray through Psalm 27. Read a verse and then pray about the practical application to your life. For example, read verse 1 and thank God for his light in our lives. Thank him that we do not need to fear anyone or anything as he is the stronghold of our lives. But lift up to him those you fear, or every situation that is discouraging your faith. Read verse 2 and pray about how specifically applies to your life. Rinse and Repeat! Let David's heart become your own and imitate his strength and joy as if these words were your own.

Thought For the Day

Labor in the Lord is never in vain.

A Room Just For You

Thursday, December 27

~by Debbie Cook

Scriptures to Read

John 14:1-4; Revelation 21:1-7; Luke 10:20; Matthew 13:44-45

Insights

What do you imagine Heaven will be like? Do you envision an angelic choir singing with the most amazing music? Are you looking forward to meeting all of the saints that have gone before you? What do you think you will do when you meet Jesus face to face? God's room for you in Heaven will be far beyond your wildest imagination. Heaven is not a myth or a fairytale for children. It is a promise written about in the Holy Word of God (**Rev 21:5**). Heaven is for real! In fact, the Bible says it will be God's paradise (**Rev. 2:7**). If God's glory revealed throughout the universe already renders us speechless, how might five minutes of Heaven take your breath away?

It takes a true mental discipline to shift our view of the physical circumstances and surroundings we see, to that of the spiritual and eternal world. Too often our thoughts are preoccupied in the middle of the after-Christmas crunch with things on our "To Do" list. Take a few deep breaths right now, close your eyes and focus your heart for a moment on dwelling for all eternity with God in paradise. Ahhh... don't you feel a touch more peaceful already? This week is bound to be stressful as you are likely out of your normal routine. We all need to elevate our minds and our hearts to things above (**Col 3:1-2**).

Amazing as it seems, God wants an intimate relationship with you forever. Your walk with God as a disciple is the beginning of that special bond. Jesus also says that we "know the way" to this place. If you have repented and been baptized for the forgiveness of your sins, and are doing your best to live a life that imitates Jesus... you've already found the way! It is the amazing message of the Cross in **Acts 2:38-39!** If you have not yet made that commitment... *what on earth are you waiting for?!*

Heaven actually is one of the most talked about subjects in the New Testament and could be a very interesting Bible study topic for a rainy (or snowy) day in Colorado. Unfortunately, we will have trials and pain in this lifetime. I have certainly cried my fair share of tears in pain and grief. But in Heaven, my tears will be turned to laughter! There will be no sin, no sickness, no messed-up relationships, no stress, no bills and no regrets (**Rev 21:4!**) The kingdom of Heaven is worth everything that you have given up and everything that you still need to give up to get there (**Matthew 13**).

Reflections

Throughout generations, great poets, painters and songwriters have tried to help us see Heaven more clearly. What is your favorite song about Heaven? Let me remind you of a few: *I Can Only Imagine; There Will Be a Day; Don't You Want To Go; I'm Comin' Up Lord; Lo! What A Glorious Sight Appears; No Tears in Heaven; The Glory Land Way; Mansion Over The Hilltop; When The Roll Is Called Up*

Yonder; and When We All Get To Heaven. Don't you just smile thinking of the words? I bet you even began to sing the titles as you were reading, huh?

Take a few minutes now to Rejoice! (YAY!) Rejoice because your name is written in Heaven. It is written with Jesus' blood so it can never be erased! Yesterday you might not have done everything right. Chances are today you won't do everything like Jesus either. But, your name **is** still written in Heaven! (**Lk 10:20**) Don't believe Satan's schemes of guilt and lies that you are not good enough. Heaven is a gift of God's grace. We can never earn it, but we can never lose it either.

As for me when I imagine Heaven, I bet there will be amazing new colors that our physical eyes have never even seen; there are gates made of pearls that our iridescent spirits float through like bubbles; light laughter fills the air. I imagine a royal and majestic throne room and King Jesus being worshipped day and night. I am in awe as he turns to smile at me. There will be a table with the most delicious food and chocolate for dessert. (Of course there are no calories in Heaven!) Everything will taste and smell incredible! There will be sweet music that fills the air and my senses will be flooded with peace and tranquility. Paradise. Won't it be worth our light and momentary struggles? (**2 Cor 4:17**). You can bet your life on it!

Application

1. Do you rejoice that your name is written in Heaven even when you are going through many trials? What pain is not worth enduring in order to be with God for all Eternity?
2. In what one way will you imitate Jesus today to stay on the path toward Heaven?
3. Sing 1 or 2 of your favorite songs about Heaven.
4. Check out Google Images and consider what your personal vision of Heaven looks like.
5. Make it a goal that each day for the rest of your holiday break, you will meditate for five minutes about the invisible realm vs. the visible realm; the eternal world vs. the temporal world we live in now.

Prayer

Thank you God for creating a place where we can live together forever! Help me to remember that you are making a special room just for me! Help me to give up everything I treasure here on earth in order to have treasure stored away with you. Help me to focus everyday on the spiritual world instead of seeing the problems of the physical world around me. Remind me to slow down and Rejoice not only in the birth of Jesus this holiday season, but in your promise of paradise as well. Help my heart to be at peace, knowing that your grace is my passport into Heaven. I love you Father! I praise you Father! I look forward to the day when we will finally see one another face to face. In the Holy name of Jesus I pray. Amen!

Thought For the Day

My name is written in Heaven!

A Heart to Serve

Friday, December 28 ~ by Josh & Stacy Peterson

Scriptures to Read

Genesis 29:20, Exodus 18:13, Numbers 1:32, Numbers 3:10, Numbers 4:3, Deuteronomy 10:12, Mark 10:45, 1 Peter 4:10, Ephesians 6:7

Insights

To Serve—to render assistance; be of use; help.

The word “serve” appears about 279 times in NIV vs. “disciple” about 293 times in the NIV. Serving is a crucial element to Christianity/Discipleship.

From the beginning of time God has called his people to serve:

- Jacob served for 7 years to marry Rachel (**Genesis 29:20**)
- Moses served as judge for the people (**Exodus 18:13**)
- Men served in the army (**Numbers 1:32**)
- Aarons sons served as priests (**Numbers 3:10**)
- Men served in the work of the tent of meeting (**Numbers 4:3**)
- **Deuteronomy 10:12** reminds us to serve the Lord our God.

All throughout the Bible men and women are called to serve God and each other. Most importantly, Jesus calls us to be like him, a servant:

*“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but **to serve**, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* **Mark 10:45**

The thing about serving is that you can and should do it if you are striving to be like Jesus. You don’t have to have a special talent.

*“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to **serve** others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.”* **1 Peter 4:10**

Serving is God’s design to utilize the gifts He has given us! The challenge with serving is it can be done without the right heart. Like all things in our lives we need to serve with the right heart, the heart that wants to please and glorify God. Serving, or lack thereof exposes our hearts.

“Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men,”
Ephesians 6:7

A Humble Heart

Saturday, December 29

~ by JJ Griffin

Scripture to Read

Philippians 2:3-8

Insights

What does it mean to be humble? The word humble is defined as lowering one's self or putting one self below others. In **Philippians 2:5-8**, we see that Jesus is the ultimate example of humility! As humans we can get so caught up in our own interests: our hobbies, school, careers, sports, the people we are interested, money, worldly things, what we do with our time, the friends we have, etc. We can become consumed in our own selfish ambition that we lose sight of our brothers, sisters and all those who are lost around us. Jesus, the Lord of Lords and King of Kings, left paradise to come down to this world and died on the cross for us! There is no better example of putting others above yourself!

What can Jesus teach us about humility in relationships? First we must take our eyes off of ourselves and put them on Jesus! We must conform our minds to think like Christ and truly consider those around us as above us!

When I was a kid, I decided to take a stand against my parents! We were going to lunch on a Sunday afternoon and my parents decided we were going to a steak house that I did not approve of. After throwing a tantrum and shedding tears, I could not persuade them to change their minds! My dad gave me the choice to come in and eat with them and enjoy a delicious meal or sit in the car in the Texas heat and watch them eat through the window! To protest their decision, I chose the latter. Not only was I starving and sweating outside, but my pride had caused me to be separated from my family during that lunch. I was literally on the outside looking in at my mom and dad having a great lunch together without me!

About half way through the meal my dad came out to offer me terms of peace. He said, "if you come in now and eat with us, there will not be any consequences for your actions." Rather than take the amazing offer, I refused and was later grounded. My rebuttal to my father was, "I shouldn't be in trouble, you gave me the choice to sit in the car." In response, he added, "JJ, it was your actions that determined your outcome, not mine."

This is just an example of how my lack of humility landed me in a place that I did not want to end up in. If I would have just denied my own

desires that day and listened to and obeyed my father, I would have been able to enjoy the reward of a great steak and time with family that day.

Spiritually, if we will listen to and obey our father, we will be able to enjoy the rewards he wants to give us! If we do not, then we will find ourselves suffering from the consequences. A lack of humility can separate us from the ones we love.

Reflections

As we prepare for 2013 and look back on 2012 what were your victories? Failures? What areas did you grow in? Which ones were you complacent in? How will you become more like Jesus in the year to come? Overall, would you say that you have a humble heart or a prideful heart?

Application

1. How does Jesus' example impact or convict you to be more humble?
2. Meditate on Proverbs 11:2, 12:15, 15:32, 18:12.
 - What have you learned in the past year?
 - How have you grown?
 - How much advice do you get in your life?
 - How well do you respond to those who point out areas you can grow in?
 - What areas have you felt honored in and which ones have you fallen in? What needs to change?
3. Give one practical example from your life of how you can be more humble this year? Who will you share this with?

Prayer

Father, without you I am nothing! My heart can be so sinful at times and I am forever grateful of your unconditional love. Jesus is known as humble in heart so I pray that you mold my heart to be like his! God, help me to make your thoughts my thoughts and guide me and direct me in your paths. Thank you so much for being my father and bringing me through the dark spots in my life! Please make my heart as soft as possible so that I will always be receptive to your Word and instruction! Help me to always love others with the same kind of that Jesus Christ showed for us when he died for my sins. I love you! Amen!

Thought For the Day

True Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.

One Step At a Time

Sunday, December 30

~ by David Berndt

Scriptures to Read

John 15:7 *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”*

Psalms 119:103-105 *“... Your word is a lamp to my feet & a light for my path.”*

Insights

Do you remember the first time God’s Word was revealed to you? What was your reaction? What would it have been like to be a part of a church in the first century upon receiving your first letter from Paul? Has reading the Bible become more of a chore rather than a joy? Have we forgotten the power in the word? Without proper nurturing and Attention, we can rob the power of the Holy Scriptures, thereby, minimizing them to mere life suggestions. Regarding our study of the scriptures, first century Christian Theonas of Alexandria wrote, “Never cast off the habit of reading in the Holy Scriptures. For nothing feeds the soul and enriches the mind as much as those sacred studies do.” With that in mind, let’s look at a few scriptures to help us rekindle a love for God’s Word.

John 15:7 summarizes the power of God’s Word. In John 15, Christ states that He is the vine and we are the branches. We derive our nourishment from him and his word. It is no coincidence then, that when we go even a few days without delving into the scriptures, we begin to lose our strength. I have long wrestled with a legalistic mentality on this subject. We are all aware of the dreaded “checklist” mindset. My rebellious sinful nature has led me to make nearly every excuse in the book not to read the Bible such as “I will read on my own time,” “I prefer to read spiritual books for inspiration,” and “I already know what it has to say.” In the end, all of those excuses lead me into a spiritual rut. Realizing that my mind, body and spirit are enriched when I am close to the vine has helped me to cut down on excuses and increase my frequency of Bible study.

Psalms 119:103-105 summarizes the purpose of God’s Word. Christians are generally well versed in the uses of the Bible to help others (teaching, rebuking, correcting, training in righteousness, etc.) But what about how the Bible transforms your life? Where would we be without a lamp for our feet and a light for our path? Keeping the narrow nature of our path in mind it sure seems important that our spiritual guiding lights are supplied with batteries that last for eternity. Simply put, the Bible keeps us on the narrow path and out of the darkness.

Reflections

Understanding the power and the purpose of God's Word is merely the beginning stage in our journey to know God more deeply. Each of us is on a spiritual journey that is to be respected. While in college a friend used the story of "The Tortoise and the Hare" to illustrate the fact that the end result of making it to heaven is vastly more important than how fast I make it there compared to my peers.

At times I can feel like I am taking a tortoise's pace in my personal Bible study and walk with God. While on the other hand, it seems as if my peers are racing past me with long prayer walks and in-depth analysis of the scriptures. My take away from that conversation and analogy was that God is not worried about the speed we maintain on our journey to him.

In fact, God has no concept of time as we know it. The key is that each day we move forward. For some, that might mean reading the entire Bible in a day. For others, that may simply amount to opening the Bible again for the first time in ages. Either way when we find our way back to the vine, God will give us what we need to make it to the finish line.

Application

1. Take a personal step forward today in your Bible study. Remember, God wants to have an individual relationship with each of his children.
2. Try something new. Don't be afraid to change things up in your relationship with God. Reading a Bible commentary along with scriptures is often a great way to gain new insight on previously "mastered" verses.
3. Try something old. At times, all you need to do is revisit some of your favorite scriptures and remind yourself of the power they once held in your life.

Prayer

Pray with James 1:5 in mind, asking God for wisdom is a great place to start as you rediscover the scriptures. Pray that God will open your mind to new perspectives on passages you have read many times in the past. The Holy Scriptures are like an onion, in that they have many layers that often lead to tears of joy.

Thought For the Day

No step is too small in the eyes of the Lord.

One Step At a Time

Monday, December 31

~ by Brittany Clouse

Scriptures to Read

Matthew 8:5-13, Matthew 14: 25-33, John 11:40, James 1:6

Hebrews 11:6 *“And without faith, it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”*

Insights

The scriptures speak over and over again about the necessity of faith in God in order for God to be able to work and move in our lives. Jesus states in **John 11:40** that if we simply believe, we will see the glory of God. Through successes and failures, changes and stagnation- it all should come from our confidence, certainty and trust in God’s power.

Both scriptures in Matthew listed above demonstrate that with faith and belief, there’s the power of God. When you look through the gospels, it’s amazing to observe how Jesus highlights the same thing over and over again- faith in God. Therefore, everything hinges on our faith! It’s what excited Jesus most about some people and what frustrated him about others.

In **Matthew 8**, Jesus was amazed by the Centurion’s humility and deep faith. He considered himself unworthy and undeserving to have Jesus come into his home, so he plainly asked Jesus to heal his servant, *“But say the word, and my servant will be healed.”* What astonishing faith the centurion had, never once seeing, only hearing and believing.

In contrast to this one man’s incredible faith, in **Matthew 14** is an instance when Jesus is clearly saddened by one of his apostle’s lack of faith. Peter had enough faith to get out of the boat, but not enough faith to complete the walk Jesus called him on. He took his eyes off Jesus and allowed himself to get wrapped up in the situation, diminishing Jesus’ sustaining power.

Reflections

Faith is such a broad topic that we could spend several weeks if not years studying out, but let's reflect on a small simple segment for the day. Throughout my years as a Christian, I've found true faith as discussed in God's word, to be an extremely challenging topic that drives our everyday activities. Throughout the gospels, you see the apostles even while walking with Jesus demonstrate doubt. So, let us have an honest reflection on our lives. What do you do by faith day in and day out? In what areas does doubt manifest in your life? Why do you doubt? Satan uses many tools to stagger our faith. One that resonates with me is fear—fear of incompetency, fear of failure driven from insecurities in the talents God has given me, etc. The question I've had to consistently analyze is 'Am I letting fear devour my faith?' I've come to understand faith as more of an intellectual decision, not controlled by emotion; just like we can choose to doubt, we can choose to believe. We need to let go of our fears, doubts and insecurities that suffocate our faith, fix our eyes on Jesus and choose to trust in God.

Application

1. Write out the areas you see your faith waver. What can you change today? Act upon it.
2. What will help you build true Biblical belief as the scriptures demonstrate above? Reflect on what helps you personally come closer to God and develop true faith.
3. Do you believe with all your heart in God's promises?
4. Write out three answered prayers of ways you've seen God work in your life recently. Think about these throughout the day and thank Him.

Prayer

Pray as you read through Psalm 73. For example, read verse 1 and thank God for all the good he has specifically done in your life. Thank him for the victorious life we now get to live because of his Son. Allow David's heart to reflect your own. Let his honesty and sincerity mirror yours as David concludes with how good it is to have our God so near to us.

Thought For the Day

Let us consider what God asks of us in **James 1:6** and not be tossed back and forth by the changing winds of life, but rather CHOOSE TO BELIEVE.

Dare to Dream

Tuesday, January 1

~by K-Sam & Bri Perkins

Scriptures to Read

Numbers 13:17-31; 14:1-10, 28-31. Excerpts: *When Moses sent them to explore Canaan, he said, "Go up through the Negev and on into the hill country. See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many, etc. So they went up and explored the land. They cut off a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes. Two of them carried it on a pole between them, along with some pomegranates and figs. They came back to Moses and Aaron. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly, "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it."*

Insights

The hill country, Canaan, was Israel's for the taking. It was like no land they had seen before, flowing with milk and honey. The fruit was abundant and plentiful, and yet the Israelites couldn't wrap their minds around having something so great when they stood opposed to giants of such strength and power. They not only doubted themselves, but they doubted God as well. Two men, however, had the courage to dream. They dreamed that this land was theirs for the taking. Their faith made it a reality.

Reflections

The thought of meeting my wife (dream girl) at 15 years old never crossed my mind until it happened. It was something everyone said could never be.

"You're too young to think about a godly wife."

"Young couples don't stay together."

"It'll never work."

These were the things I heard from countless people when voicing my interest in Bri. But I knew that with a little bit of courage and faith in God's power, she just might come to church. After months of a friendship being built, Bible studies with the sisters, and constant prayer, Bri became a Christian and eventually, my girlfriend. She's the only girl I've dated and the only woman I've loved since I was 15 years

old. We've been married for 2 ½ years and have a beautiful son named Uriah. It's amazing what God can do when we simply dare to dream.

Caleb and Joshua were the only Israelites to receive the blessing. It's because they dared to dream. Do not be afraid of the "giants" in your life that oppose your dreams. The Lord is with you and he will grant you more than you could ever imagine.

Application

1. What blinded the Israelites to the glory that God had set forth for them? Fear? Pride? Reminiscing the past? What blinds you?
2. What are your daring dreams? Are there dreams you won't allow yourself to imagine? Do you have dreams for others but not for yourself? What keeps you from dreaming big?
3. What makes it hard for you to trust when you know his promises are good?
4. How can you let God motivate you to dream?

Prayer

God in Heaven, I marvel at your creativity and imagination. Forgive me for the times I have been weak in seeing your glory. I thank you for providing me with an unshakeable hope in you that acknowledges all things are possible because you are God. I ask that you give me the faith to dream. Give me the courage to dream dreams that are unfathomable without you. Grant me a heart that yearns to dream vast dreams and that is confident in your power. In your son Christ's name I pray, Amen.

Thought For the Day

God can do *immeasurably more* than your biggest dream...
(Ephesians 3:20)

Notes:

Only God Can Give Me a Pure Heart

Wednesday, January 2

~by Hans Rasmussen

Scriptures to Read

Psalm 51:1-19; v. 10 “*Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*”

Insights

Psalm 51 is one of the few Psalms that gives us the historical background. We know what happened and why it was written. David had added to his sin of adultery with Bathsheba. After she became pregnant, he had her husband murdered to cover up his own sin. The whole story is in 2 Samuel 10 if you are unfamiliar with it.

One thing that really stands out to me is that David records this sin for us. That must have been particularly embarrassing since he was the king and the Lord’s anointed leader. He wasn’t too proud to deal with and confess his sin. When David was confronted, he acknowledged the terrible sin he had committed. He fell on his face before God, and out of that experience of confession comes this beautiful Psalm.

Reflections

The Rocky Mountains are known for their beautiful peaks and crystal clear mountain streams. When I first visited Colorado from the flatlands of Wisconsin, I was in awe of their beauty. One of my favorite things to do is to sit by a mountain stream and hear the water flowing down stream. In that water lie some very dangerous creatures, the Giardia cysts. They are microscopic single cell organisms that can make you VERY sick. You can’t see or taste them until it’s too late. Symptoms of Giardiasis include diarrhea, gas, cramps, nausea, vomiting, and fatigue. These symptoms typically vanish then reoccur at cyclic intervals. (http://jeffco.us/jeffco/health_uploads/hplmbrochures/GIARDIA.pdf)

Gross I know, but our sinful nature can be very much like those mountain streams; everything looks great on the outside but lurking Inside, all is not well. We seem to be doing just fine and then give in to lust or impurity. We feel bad and say, “I’ll never do that again”. We have a stressful week and decide we “deserve a break” and drink too much or go shopping and spend money we don’t have. Then we feel bad and think, “I’ll do better next time”. It can be a downward cycle that never changes our heart. Only God can give me pure heart.

David knew he couldn't do it on his own, so he asks God to "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." The word for "create" in Hebrew is bara'. It means to create, shape or form always with God as subject. Bara' is the word that is used in Genesis to describe God making the heavens and the earth, the animals and Adam and Eve.

Application

Are you stuck in a sin cycle of wanting to do good, but you do bad and then try with your own power to change it?

1. Ask God to change your heart, to create in you a pure heart.
2. Just like David had to come clean and share about his sin, open up about your cycle of sin today. Maybe you aren't in the sin right now, but have never really shared about the sins that are dogging you.

Prayer

Pray David's prayer until it becomes your own. God desires to give you a pure heart and ultimately only God can give me pure heart.

Psalm 51:1-9 "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

Thought For the Day

Only God can give me pure heart!

Notes:

An Honest Heart

Thursday, January 3

~by Ann Rasmussen

Scriptures to Read

Psalm 32:2 *"Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty!"*

Proverbs 6:16-17 *"There are six things the LORD hates—no, seven things he detests: haughty eyes, a lying tongue..."*

Psalm 25:21 *"May integrity and honesty protect me, for I put my hope in you."*

Insights

I love that when we are completely honest we can be full of joy! God desires for us to be honest and doesn't want us to compromise the truth.

In **Proverbs 6:16-17**, it says God hates a lying tongue. God knows how much honesty helps our hearts and the pain that lying brings. The scripture says when we put our hope in God and we are honest and show integrity that it can protect us. What a blessing to God and others when we're honest. David had felt the pain of not being honest. He also felt the joy of being freed in his honesty, and that's reflected in these verses. You hear his joy from being honest. Our Father values an honest heart.

Reflections

Having an honest heart is pleasing to God. It's not always easy to be honest. Sometimes being honest seems to cost us something. We're afraid if we're honest, people might think less of us or we might hurt someone's feelings. We're often not honest because we don't want to make a mistake or we're afraid of the consequences if we are honest.

Satan loves for us to be fooled! He wants us to not be honest for whatever reason. Before I became a Christian, I lied a lot for all of these reasons. I lied so that I could do things my parents wouldn't have approved of. I lied at work about completing something and then ran to do it quickly. The temptations to lie don't go away. I still am tempted to lie about things when I've let someone down, but scriptures like the ones above help me remember how much God values honesty. They remind me of the joy of honesty and that's what I really want is to please God.

Lost and Found: A Heart for the Lost

Friday, January 4

~by Allen Gower

Scripture to Read

2 Corinthians 5:11-21, Matthew 5:16, Ephesians 5:10

Insights

Have you ever been lost? If you're like me, then you have. If you're a guy, you most likely hate to stop for directions. If you are a Christian though, you know this is a trick question - because we were all lost at one time!

But...thankfully we were found!!!! Thankfully, for most of us, someone took the time to stop and invite us to church, invite us into their lives and invite us to learn about Jesus.

The Christian who invited me to church could have easily walked out of my store (and my life) and never come back. But, he didn't. Thankfully, there was a guy who called me for about 2 months even though I didn't call him back! Until one night around 2am, after being out drinking and partying. Even though it was the middle of the night, he was happy to hear from me!

2 Corinthians 5:11. To fear means two things here. First – Fear is to know that it is God who holds the keys to eternity and that we will all stand before Him someday. What a fearful and amazing moment in time this will be! Second – Fear means to simply stand in awe of God. To be amazed by what He has done for us. And because of this, “we try to persuade men.”

vv 12—13. The best part about being a disciple is that God can use you no matter where you are in life. God wants your heart. Too many times, we get so wrapped up in “appearances” or the busyness of life, that we lose sight of letting God do His thing in us and through us. Paul didn't care what others thought. The Bible says he was out of his mind—not because he was crazy, but because he was crazy about God! He was fine with being thought a fool for Christ.

v. 14. I love how the Message version of the Bible says it: “Christ's love has moved me to such extremes. His love has the first and last word in everything we do.” What is it that compels you - what is it in your walk with God that compels you to keep going? Compels you to not give up and to not give in to Satan?

vv. 17—20. To Reconcile means to match up—to fit together—to Align. We are his Spokespeople—His Truth-Tellers—His Grace Revealers—His Life Changers—His Heart Healers—His Love Givers!

2 Corinthians 5 is all about what we can be through God for others. Our lives (during the good times and the not-so-good times) can be what shines in this world. God's light can shine through us (**Matthew 5:16**). God calls us to be the ones who don't shrink back and don't keep it to ourselves.

Reflections

When I was a little boy my Opa (that's 'grandfather' in German) and I would spend entire summers in a fishing camp in Northern California. Most days we would spend hours on the ocean fishing together, but one day he left me back at the trailer while he went out alone. When he got back I was nowhere to be found! At first, he wasn't really worried, because most of the time I was just off playing with friends. We would usually climb the rocks or go crabbing. It wasn't until it got dark that he started to worry. About 11:00pm, I was still missing! He had looked everywhere. Finally, he called the police and woke up all of the fishermen and their families to help search for me. Some one-hundred people and police officers spent over three hours searching for me. Fearing the worst, my Opa went back to the trailer to call my parents and give them the news. Just as he dialed the phone, he heard a noise from the back of the trailer. My Opa ran back to see what it was and to his surprise and joy, there I was, sitting on one of the bunks. I had been there the whole time, asleep, trying to get over not feeling well. When my Opa saw me, he grabbed me and started crying. He picked me up and ran outside and was yelling at the top of his voice, "I found him! I found my grandson! Here he is, I found him!" People from all over came running up, happy to see me. But no one was happier than my Opa. He just kept saying, "I found him!" "I found you! I am so happy that I found you!" I will never forget the smile on his face.

This is how God responded when we were found; by putting His arms around us and yelling at the top of His voice "I found him!" "I found her!" "Here he is!" "Here she is!" "I found you!" We can help others to know God and be "found" and experience this same response. I have no doubt that when Paul wrote the scripture in **Ephesians 5:10**, he had this in mind.

Application

1. Write a list of "Thankfullys". How do they translate into how you share your life with others, into helping others to know God?
2. There is no better time than today to "Help the Lost to be found." Who can you help today?

Prayer

Lord, as I go through my day, I pray that my life and my words will be a light for someone to want to know more about you. That I can be Jesus in the flesh for those I come in contact with. I know I have much to grow in, but please help that not to be a hindrance in sharing what you have given me in my life. I pray that for all the days I remain on this earth, I can be a light that shines in the darkest of places, that I won't shrink back and that I will shout YOU from the mountain-tops!

Thought For the Day

The church is the great "lost and found department!"

Fruit-Bearing Seeds of Our Words

Saturday, January 5

~by Laura Gower

Scriptures to Read

Proverbs 18:21; Matthew 12, Galatians 5:22-26

Insights

Do you ever feel like we humans speak as though we are God instead of His creatures? Do we enter a room or a situation with our family, brotherhood, friends, neighbors... as if we are God, instead of a person under His authority, longing to see His will fulfilled? Do we respond out of emotion - whether it is hurt, frustration, anger, insecurity or something else - instead of out of God's Word? I know I can and often do. I know I see this in my own family at times. But, praise be to God that we work on it daily—probably will until the day we die!

We live in a confusing world. Often we don't respond from the facts; but, of our interpretation of those facts. We are quick to accuse in our hearts—each other, and even God! It's a lot harder to give someone the benefit of the doubt, than it is to doubt that someone. A wise woman (a.k.a. Theresa Jackson) once told me how important it is to separate FACTS from FEELINGS. When I *feel* like my husband or someone in my spiritual family does not like me, or has treated me poorly, if I can exhibit the self-control to separate facts from feelings, I usually realize—pretty quickly—that what I am seeing is just not the case. I am better able to see where the other person is coming from—maybe my husband is having a bad day? How can I encourage him? Or, maybe I feel badly about something my sister said, or a look that she gave? I can brood, interpret and boil for days, or I can simply ask questions. Good, godly communication is always based on truth. One way to get to the truth is to ASK QUESTIONS, and to open the Bible!

Someday, we will all stand before God and have to give an account for our lives. This convicts me when I allow myself to really think about it. **Matthew 12:36** tells us that “men will have to give an account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken.” Every careless word YOU have spoken. Every careless word I have spoken. I need to beg God for the fruits of the spirit so that my words will plant fruit-bearing seed in the lives of my family, my brothers and sisters, and the lost in this world (**Galatians 5:22-26**).

Reflections

Take a moment and imagine what our lives would be like if all our words were spoken out of perfect submission to God? How different would the brotherhood/sisterhood feel? Read Matthew 12:34 again—what does this scripture say about the words that come out of our mouths? Where do our words flow from? What areas of your HEART do you need to work on in 2013? Where is your heart for the brotherhood today? Where do you want it to be?

REMEMBER, Our words belong to God! Words flow from our heart, and our hearts also must belong to God. Talk was created for His purpose, and our standards MUST measure up to His Words (found in the Bible). Take some time today for personal evaluation.

Application

1. What decisions can you make to turn your words around?
2. What heart-issues or sins do you need to be open with to ultimately affect your words?
3. Keep a prayer and list of scriptures in your pocket or purse this week to remind you to speak the words God would have you speak. There are a ton of scriptures to help you!!!
4. What brother/sister can you go see or call to ask for accountability/partnership in making it to Heaven?
5. Read Ephesians 4-6. How can you better think before you speak to the body of Christ—your brothers & sisters—in a way that is pleasing to God and loving to them? *START TODAY!*

Prayer *

That temper of mine! Forgive me, Lord – I let it get the better of me again. When will I ever learn to wait until I've heard the whole story, to respond under pressure as Christ would, to meet evil with good? I'm growing, Lord, but my growth is far too slow. Till my life—break up clods of pride, root out weeds of selfishness, plow under every vestige of stubbornness. Cultivate me and sow liberally more of the Spirit's fruit-bearing seed. Send showers and storms (if need be); shine brightly on my soul. Then I will sprout forth patience and kindness and love - and self-control - in abundance, and my tongue will learn to help and heal and praise the Name of the One through Whom I pray. Amen.

* Portions taken from the book *War on Words* by Paul David Tripp, R&R Publishing

Thought For the Day

“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 3:9-11



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