



You are from
GOD
Devotional

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Preface

The You Are From God Devotional is a 52 week devotional that was made to help God's children grow in their relationship with Him. Each week you should read the article, listen to the corresponding podcast episode, and meditate on the overarching subject along with its corresponding verses. This devotional was designed in a format to guide a person's individual study, but feel free to complete it in a way that suites you best.

The articles in this devotional were written as complementary material for the "You Are From God" podcast. The podcast is made by the West Mason Church of Christ preachers, Scott Taylor and Tyler Hall. A YouTube link will be provided at the end of each article to take you to the corresponding podcast. You can also listen to the podcast by:

1. Going to the West Mason Church of Christ YouTube page and clicking on the You Are From God playlist
2. Typing the URL <https://youarefromgod.com> and scrolling on the picture on the title page or moving the cursor over "Resources"
3. Searching You Are From God on Spotify or the podcast app you use

(note: if you are not doing this devo on a phone, tablet, or computer then keep an extra piece of paper or notebook and a writing utensil at hand, there is a question at the end of every article to help further your meditation for the week)

1. Who is Your Neighbor?

Humans like to feel accepted, comfortable, and safe. One way that we do this is by grouping together in “tribes”. Many people consider their family, their local congregation, and other groups of people who share a commonality with them as their tribe. The various reasons for grouping together are understandable, however, this turns into a problem when worldly differences become the primary focus over God’s unifying principles. Focusing on differences gives rise to partiality because of human standards. God’s children are commanded to uphold His standards above mankind’s (James 2:8-9).

God has made every soul on this Earth and cherishes them incomprehensibly. In John 3:16 we are told, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” The early church of Galatia decided to focus on the difference of physical circumcision in their church members. The church began teaching false doctrine, saying that a person must be circumcised in order to be a part of God’s church. The Galatians became overtaken by this false doctrine because it caused them to ridicule those who were not circumcised and led to division in the church (Gal. 5:7-10). Thus, Paul reminded the Galatians in a letter that Christians are to love God and their neighbor over human traditions (Gal. 5:13-26).

For anyone wondering, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus teaches the answer in the form of the Good Samaritan parable in Luke 10:25-37. In the parable a man is beaten by robbers and left for dead by the side of the road. A priest and a Levite pass the man by, leaving him to his fate. A good Samaritan passes by the man next and has compassion on him.

The good Samaritan puts his whole heart into helping this stranger heal.

The Jews in Jesus' time ostracized and felt superior to the Samaritans due to their religious beliefs. The parable told by Jesus would have been a shock to the lawyer who originally asked the question. The Good Samaritan parable shows that even the people who are looked down on can be more righteous than the people held in high regard. Jesus taught that everyone you meet can choose to be your loving neighbor, just as you have the choice to be one for them. Our neighbors are not defined by human limitations, but by God's abounding love for all mankind. Will you choose to bring glory to God by being a neighbor to others, or will you choose to let partiality divide?

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NwLIWZEH9FA&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1>

Question

Who in your life can you be a more loving neighbor toward?

2. The Value of Souls

When you look in a mirror, what do you see? Often what we see are imperfections that should be changed and improved. The outward appearance for many people is the start of their self-esteem or the value and worth that they place upon themselves. God, however, places value on the inward heart and soul of a person, instead of on outward appearances (1 Sam. 16:7). Vanity is just one example of a distraction that the devil uses in our society to distract us from God. Wealth, fame, attractiveness, professional status, politics, and other physical distractions will not lead us to salvation, “for what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul.” (Mark 8:36 ESV)

One example of applying Mark 8:36 is when a person changes their clothes to be more attractive amongst their friends. In this case, the motivation is to dress to impress your friends, rather than showing the example of Jesus’ teachings. Your friends become the ones who dress you and determine the standard of your wardrobe instead of God and His values that have been placed in your heart. Thus, it is easy to throw Jesus’ teaching of restraint to the wind, losing the person God created you to be in the process. Worldly temptations distract from the path of God and cause us to become more concerned about pleasing other people instead of God. God’s children are supposed to live solely by His standards “For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Eph. 2:10 ESV)

Due to the grace of God alone you have been saved from eternal death and given the path to eternal life. Formerly, you were separated from Christ, having no hope of peace due to the dividing wall of

hostility that separated mankind from God. Jesus broke down this wall, defeating the hostility, and giving us access to the Spirit, allowing all people to have the opportunity to be reconciled with God. Jesus' loving sacrifice on the cross gives you the choice to become unified with God in this life and the next. Whereupon choosing God, you will see the value every soul—including yourself—has to God. Every soul was beautifully created to show the love which God showed them first through their own acts of good works (1 John 4:19). These acts of good works do not save us or even renew our faith but show our obedience to God.

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gWWYKoptt5k&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=2>

Question

What is one of your biggest distractions from God?

3. The Choice of Every Child

“What do you do?” is typically one of the first things we are asked when someone wants to get to know us. Thus, when a person reflects on their identity, usually the first thing that comes to mind is work. Society has taught us that our profession is what determines our value and is the most important part of our identity. However, the soul God gave us is more valuable than our job and how much money we make.

Each person is designed by God to spread love throughout the world in her or his own unique way. Psalm 139:13-16 explains how God carefully and lovingly knitted your soul and body piece by piece. No part of you is hidden from God because you were “fearfully and wonderfully made” by Him (Ps. 139: 14). Note that the Hebrew words for “fearfully” and “wonderfully” are “yare” and “palah”. In the context of verse 139, “yare” means to be awed and “palah” means distinct. Thus, verse 14 is to be read as, “I praise you, for I am awe-inspiringly and uniquely made.” We are made in God’s image and our existence is pleasing to Him. God made all of creation and thought it was good – including you (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25-31).

As a child of God, you must ask yourself, “Am I going to live as my Father in Heaven wants me to?” God wants us to live out these two commands every day in our lives: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). We start our journey in loving God by being born again with the blood of Christ through full immersion in the waters of baptism (John 3:1-6). During baptism, the child of God is recognizing the significance behind the relationship between creation with the Creator and pledging to forever live apart from the ways of the world.

Loving your neighbor is the continuation of the love God has shown us (1 John 4:7-11). The internal worth of God's children is based on the goodness God has placed in their hearts. A person's intrinsic value has nothing to do with their professional identity or net worth. Choosing to abide in the Godly life is by no means an easy thing to do, but when our hearts are truly aligned with Him there will be no shortage of love in His world.

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyQ2cNaNWLg&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=3>

Question

What is one thing you can do to show God's love to someone else this week?

4. Loving Yourself and Others Because of God

The body is dependent on oxygen to live just as the Bible tells us that the soul requires a relationship with God to eternally live. Love, like the soul, is dependent on having a relationship with God because He is love (1 John 4:8). Thus, a person can only live with true love in their heart if they abide by Jesus' teachings (1 John 4:9-11). People are taught to recognize the images of different emergency authorities. As a result, they will know who they can turn to for help. Christians need to grow in their relationship with God. Consequently, God will be established as the authority to always seek. Having a relationship with the God who unconditionally loves you is the only way you can strive to love unconditionally.

Your relationship with God is key in loving yourself and others unconditionally because it teaches the value of each unique soul. God created you to have unique strengths when encouraging others and glorifying Him. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 compares the church to a human body. A body is made up of many different parts, just like the church is made up of many individuals (1 Cor. 12:14). A finger or foot serves the body with its own strengths in the same way you encourage others and glorify God with yours (1 Cor. 12:18-19). At the end of the chapter Paul states that the purpose of this diversity is not to cause division or pride in oneself, but to expand the love for God and one another. God intended that the section of the letter to the Corinthians which is focused on God-given diversity is used as a bridge into the portion that is focused on Godly love.

Love is often described by the world as an emotion that is created by the actions toward you by someone. This would mean that love would be reliant on imperfect beings, instead of the perfect God.

Biblical love is described as a continuous action that creates emotions, rather the other way around. 1 Peter 3:1 uses marriage as one example to show that Godly love is unconditional and brings others closer to God. Biblical love requires that you're pleasing and glorifying God above all else. Acting on Godly love doesn't involve taking abuse or disciplining harshly. Whether you are rebuking, teaching, nurturing, and correcting it should all be done in a righteous way that is a pleasing aroma to God (1 Cor. 13:4-8).

Jesus clarified the righteous way perfectly when He said to a Pharisee, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:34-40 ESV)

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FqWZTgso1D8&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=4>

Question

What talents has God given you to show love to others and feel confident?

5. Healing Hearts

Healing the human body might seem like it is only about science, but it is both a science and an art. The science is knowing the illnesses and treatments for a particular symptom. The art form of healing is in the diagnosis. A cough can indicate a mild cold, lung cancer, or anything in between to a doctor. If the doctor judges poorly, the patient might receive chemo for their cold or be told to get rest and drink fluids despite having lung cancer. In this way, treating an illness of the body is similar to guiding a soul to God. Assess a person's soul haphazardly and it can poison their heart. Measure their soul righteously, however, and the soul will be one step closer to the Great Physician—Jehovah Rapha.

In 1 Samuel 16:1-13, the Bible tells the story of how David was anointed to be the second king of Israel. Samuel was the Lord's prophet and was told to go to Bethlehem to make sacrifices to God and there he would anoint one of Jesse's sons to be king. When Saul was anointed as the first king, he was a tall and strapping man that looked like he was worthy to be a king. It is possible that Samuel assumed the next anointed king of Israel would look similar in stature because of his previous experience with Saul. 1 Samuel 16:6-7 (ESV) reads, "When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, 'Surely the Lord's anointed is before him.' But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height...man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.'"

After Jesse's sons present at the sacrifice aren't chosen by Samuel, he asks for the youngest son David to be summoned. David was anointed and one can imagine the bitterness that must have arose in Eliab. In 1 Samuel 17:28-29 one can read the contention Eliab must have held for David as he declares to know his brother's evil heart. 1

Samuel 17:50 describes the Israelite army's elated pursuit of the Philistines after David defeats Goliath. It is both marvelous and sad that David had to defeat a giant of a warrior before Eliab could begin to recognize David's potential.

As children of God, do we quickly listen to Him like Samuel or judgmentally assume like Eliab? Appearances, biases, and assumptions should not get in the way of encouraging our brothers and sisters in Christ. The adage of "it's not what you say but how you say it" rings true to us as followers of Christ. There is a difference between guidance done with Godly love versus putting down our fellow brethren.

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aY3tmJkYZ0Y&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=5>

Question

What can you do to make your speech more "seasoned with salt"?
(Colossians 4:6)

6. Having Self-Control Like Jesus

It is to no surprise that coveted roles in society tend to be charismatic or leadership type positions like the president, a CEO, or a movie star. These roles come with the temptation of being able to bend people and situations to our desires. The Bible tells us not to use our freedom and authority for control but to live at peace with all mankind (Rom. 12:18). Having self-control is not dependent on how other people or situations treat us, but on our relationship with God. Proverbs 25:28 (ESV) says, “a man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.”

Temptations squeeze through the defenses of our hearts and leave them vulnerable to the sins that will damage our relationship with God. In Matthew 4:8-11 Jesus was able to say no to the temptation of power by turning His heart to the principles God teaches. While on Earth, Jesus could have easily forced the world to obey God using His divine power. Due to Jesus’ love for His Father, however, He chose to lead using Godly love instead of force. Jesus’ God-fearing heart gave Him the strength to know that exemplifying Godly love is more influential than power. As any parent knows, the more you force a child to do something the less their heart will be eager to do it. It can be tempting to use a position of authority to bend others to your will, but Jesus’ example shows that God’s loving way is the greater way.

Love and self-control are not only to be practiced by people in authority, but by all of God’s children. Colossians 3:18-25 explains that when you have a heart that sincerely works for others you will be acting on your love for God as well. When Joseph was a servant in Potiphar’s house, he exemplified Godly attributes in his service instead of sinning against his master (Gen. 39:1-18). Even after he was thrown in jail on

false pretense, he used the situation to serve God instead of taking his frustrations out on his jailers (Gen. 39:19-23). Other people and certain situations are going to be out of our control, but how Godly we respond to them is in our control. Where in your life can you practice Godly love and self-control like Jesus?

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwXCjT39tGA&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=6>

Question

What can you do in the moment to help you calm your emotions?

7. The Mind is a Battlefield

The sound of metallic thunder rings throughout the landscape as the armies of two fierce commanders draw their battle lines. Carried by righteous warriors, a wall of shields and swords illuminate into the distant horizon. Opposite them, a shadow of darkness smothers the light it touches like a storm cloud on a sunny day. There is an eerie silence upon the battle lines, until suddenly...they cry out and charge into each other with the force of a freight train. The battle for your mind is noisy and chaotic. However, will you be too distracted by the sounds of those around you to fight effectively? Or are you going to listen for God's commands that will allow you to shout victory for Christ?

In Numbers 13, the Lord commanded the Israelites to send spies out into the land of Canaan so Israel could gain knowledge of the promised land. The Israelites sent out one spy from every tribe as the Lord commanded and they reported back that the land was fertile as God had promised (Num. 13:27). However, the Israelites' faith faltered when they heard about the inhabitants of Canaan (Num. 13:28-29). Nearly the whole Israelite nation became so focused on the enemies around them that they forgot the God who was leading them.

Instead of listening to their commander who parted the Red Sea and guided them safely through the wilderness, they listened to noise of fear around them (Num. 13: 30-14:2). Numbers 14 describes how the Israelites became so fearful of the people in the land of Canaan that they rebelled against God. They questioned in verse 3, "Why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword?...Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" The Israelites' fear convinced them it would

be better to run back to a life of tortuous slavery without God than to face the nations of Canaan with Him.

God's chosen people decided to have a worldly perspective of the challenges they would face after entering the promised land. Choosing a worldly attitude over a Godly one resulted in the people remaining in the wilderness instead of finding victory in the promised land. Proverbs 4:20-23 reminds children of God that His words of eternal life should be held tightly in their hearts. Thus, we need to be vigilant in protecting the truth that will sustain us everlasting. As a child of God, will you be listening to the noise of the world around you like the Israelites? Or will you focus your heart to the commands of God that will lead you to eternal victory?

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5Lh8GPn2Tc&list=PLLvjtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=7>

Question

What Bible verses could you turn to in times of fear to strengthen your faith?

8. Spending our Time Like Jesus and the Widow

If you could know the moment that you were going to die, would you want to know? If you chose to know, how would you spend the last week of your life? During Jesus' last week on Earth, one of the things He did was sit in the temple and watch those who were giving their offering. Jesus saw one rich person after another giving huge sums of money, but then a widow walked up and gave two copper coins. Jesus gathered His disciples together to teach them about this woman's contribution. Jesus told them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on." (Mark 12:43-44 ESV)

Watching people put coins into a treasury box seems like a very unimportant thing to do during your last week of life. However, watching someone give everything they have is a profound experience in this life. No human being knows how much time they have on this Earth. Thus, every second of life is a blessing that God has granted us. To give our all in the service of God and others is to live out the meaning of John 15:13 (ESV), "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."

Jesus exemplified this verse when He sacrificed Himself for our sake on the cross. As spiritual beings, Jesus gave His all for us to have a path back to our Heavenly home. Jesus uses the word friend in this verse as a way to represent that He had an intimate relationship with and gave His life for both God and all of His children. Likewise, we are supposed to do the same. God wants our whole heart to love Him, not just the love we can spare from the abundance He has given us. Jesus

gave His all and during His last week on Earth He watched this widow monetarily do the same. Just like the widow, you as a child of God have the opportunity right now to give all you have to God. We are not promised more time than this present moment. Will you be like the widow and use your moment to serve God?

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EdUn-ACyHtU&list=PLLvjtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=8>

Question

Where in your day to day schedule can you spend time to know or serve Christ more?

9. Self-Reflection and Our Eyes

“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:10-14 ESV)

Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector above because it is easy for us to judge others before we even think of looking at ourselves. A common temptation humans have is to make comparisons. Just as there is always someone better than you there is always someone worse, right? Not according to God. Romans 2:11 states that He shows no partiality. God views a fruitful life as living with Him eternally in righteousness. According to the Bible all sins are equal and it is worldly to think that there are sins greater than others. 1 John 3:15 compares hate to being the same as murder. Galatians 5:19-21 gives a lengthy list of sins that can separate ourselves from God. We can be quick to criticize others first because our eyes only see the outward appearances of ourselves and others. God’s eyes can see all the way to our very souls (1 Samuel 16:7).

As God’s children we should be vigilant in trying to see as God sees because each person is judged by God according to their own deeds. Romans 2:4 explains that God’s mercy and forbearance on His children should lead to repentance, not arrogance. Repentance is a

heartfelt expression of remorse to God after committing a sin. It requires praying to God for mercy, strength, and wisdom – as well as a disciplined effort to not repeat that sin. Jesus said, “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them.” (Matthew 7:12 ESV) This verse is well known as the “Golden Rule” and it is pertinent to both our actions and thoughts. The next time you go to judge someone with unrighteous eyes, remember to have God’s humility and golden rule in your heart.

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uV1b55LIE44&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=9>

Question

How can taking more time to self-reflect help you show more compassion to others?

10. There is More to Love Than Fairy Tales

Fairy tales and their romanticized version of love captivate the hearts of people around the world. Fairy tales involve grand gestures, heroic actions, happily ever after's, and many aspects of romance that bring forth the warm and fuzzies. When thinking of love, do you think of Godly love or a fairy tale's version of love? Romans 8:38-39 (NIV) describes God's powerful love when it says, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Biblical love is more than experiencing butterflies in our stomach or feeling the emotion of happiness. Godly love requires putting Him and others first through our actions. In Romans 5:8 (ESV) we are given the ultimate example of God's love for "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." The love God has for us is unconditional, selfless and sacrificial. This type of love is known in the Greek as agape love. This is the most powerful type of love because it entails giving your all—even if it isn't being reciprocated. Agape love is the love we are commanded to give to others in 1 Corinthians 13. God's love for us as His children is our motivation to show others the agape love described in 1 Corinthians 13 (1 John 4:19). A person can show the greatest of love by their deeds, but if their motivation is one of selfishness and not Godly love then it was a wasted effort. Agape love is about the unconditional spiritual motivations behind physical actions.

Another type of biblical love that has a deep rooted spiritual focus is phileos love. Phileos love is best described as a close friendship or companionship. Companion is a Latin word whose meaning comes from

the words “com” (together with) and “panis” (bread). Thus, a companion is someone you trust enough to break bread with at your own table. Jesus uses phileos companionship to describe the relationship He has with His followers in John 15:14-15. Our relationship between others and Jesus is like that of a triangle. Jesus is the top point of the triangle, we are on one side, and the other person is at the other. The more we and others strive to get closer to Jesus then the closer we are to each other. Physical actions are great contributors when building the close bonds necessary for phileos love. Yet, it is the spiritual actions that help those bonds be unbreakable.

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8wr0d2rBZU&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=10>

Question

Who is someone you can be spiritually open with, and are they at the same point in their spiritual journey as you?

11. The Shepherd and the Farmer

In Psalm 23, the relationship between the Lord and His people is compared to a shepherd who guides his sheep. Jesus in Luke 13:34 compares Himself to a mother hen who provides safety for her brood under her wing. The Bible uses these farm animals to describe God's relationship to His children and they have more in common than you might suspect.

Psalm 23:1-3 (ESV) reads, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." Both sheep and chickens are vulnerable animals who like to curiously wander off to fulfill their insatiable appetites. Thus, a farmer will make sure they do not stray out of his sight. God knows that without guidance our own desires in this world would lead us astray. Wisely He has given us the Bible to feed our souls and guide us back to Him.

The farmer will also provide a home with additional food and water to make sure his animals have everything they need to be fruitful. The more wool and eggs the animals produce the more the farmer benefits. Likewise, the more fruitful works we accomplish for God the more His glory will spread. God blesses His people with all they need in order to be spiritually and physically successful in this life (Matt. 4:4). Our responsibility is to be content with His provisions and use them to serve Him to the best of our ability. Trusting God instead of working against Him is the key to living a life deeply-rooted in righteousness.

The last three verses of Psalm 23 show the strength you can have in life while abiding with Christ. These three verses say, "Even though I

walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” The interesting thing with prey animals, like chicken and sheep, is that they know dangers exist, but many times they are too enthralled on their momentary desires to notice the predators watching them. We like to think we are smarter than these animals, but we can be the same. Often our fleeting temptations distract us from the sin that’s hurting our relationship with God. For this reason God has to rescue us from sin with His grace and forbearance—like a shepherd using his rod to fight back predators.

After defeating the enemies, a sheep or chicken farmer has the choice to either guide the lost animal back or let it succumb to future predators where it stands. We are blessed to have a God that protects and guides us back through our valleys of death. Shepherds guide by way of their staff, poultry men carry the birds themselves, and God does this for us by using the Bible. Similarly to the father of the prodigal son in Luke 15, God rejoices and prepares the table for us when we come back to Him. God wants us to remain safe at home with Him for eternity. Even if we walk away, He is willing to guide us back home—but only if we let Him. God says He is willing to be our shepherd and will make us worthy to be in His flock. As children of God, are we willing to let God watch over us? Do we listen for His voice and see all the blessings that He bestows on us in our lives?*

* Sheep recognize their shepherd by sight and sound, while chickens know their caretaker by sight.

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4S7XNGeelg&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=11>

Question

Where in your life has God protected you? (Try to even think of situations where the outcome was not what you expected)

12. Trust Rather Than Test

The biology of humans is very fragile. Any number of things can leave us not feeling well or even kill us. With Psalm 91 being a psalm themed on protection, it is no wonder many people turned to it for guidance and comfort at the start of the pandemic. When a person knows that she or he is under the Lord's protection, it can bring about an air of invincibility. This feeling comes from a relationship of trust.

Having trust in God is similar to the trust sheep have in their shepherd. Sheep that their shepherd obediently follow and work harmoniously with their shepherd in remaining vigilant for predators. Satan twists the trust we have in God and turns it into testing. Testing God is similar to sheep that still follow their shepherd, but have their face in the grass every step of the way. Instead of helping the shepherd protect them, these sheep are distracted from their shepherd. Thus, when predators come their response is, "Where was my shepherd?" and "Is our shepherd truly among us?"

After the Israelites were led out of Egypt into the wilderness they struggled with a similar doubt. In Exodus 17:2-7, the Israelites became distracted by the hardships of the wilderness and their momentary desire for water. They began longing for the miniscule comforts they had back in Egypt in comparison to the wilderness. This caused them to forget all that God was providing for them and the brutality they faced as slaves in Egypt. Forgetting about God and all that He does for His children is when our faith easily turns to doubt and a desire for proof of God's love for us. As children of God we need to do our part in maintaining our faith and trust in Him. Hebrews 11:26 explains that Moses saw a life of hardship with Christ as more valuable than the treasures of Egypt. The reason for this is because he always looked

forward with faith. The Israelites in Exodus 17:2-7 began to look at the hardships around them and the life that was behind them instead of faithfully walking forward with God.

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 (ESV) illuminates that the forward momentum can be lost when we focus on the people to the left or right of us rather than God. Verse twelve states, “make it your ambition to live a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you.” The danger can also be that we focus on other people before ourselves. Romans 2:6 says that each individual will be judged by God according to their own deeds. Before we attempt to confront others about their walk with Christ, let us first reflect and make sure that we are walking as the faithful sheep we are called to be.

Podcast Link

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLPYhpTjZ_c&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=12

Question

What blessings from God in your life tend to shift your focus away from Him?

13. Our Provider who Fills All

An individual's relationship with God can be compared to the relationship a young lion has with its mother. A young lion relies on its mother for everything. If a young lion gets separated from its mother, the circumstances equate to a death sentence. Lion cubs who actively seek and obey their mother will be supplied with all they need. In Psalm 34:10, King David tells us that God is a protecting and providing mother lion to those who seek Him. King David also describes that the disobedient will be like the young lion who struggles with hunger. The hunger that King David describes is not necessarily a physical hunger, but it is definitely a spiritual one.

A person is left with a spiritual hole in their heart if God is not present to fill it with His love. The temptation will then occur to fill this spiritual hole using worldly methods. Using these methods produces sin and James 1:14-15 points out that all sins lead to death. The only way to become victorious over death is by turning your heart over to God. Ephesians 3:14-21 states that Christ's followers have God's Holy Spirit residing in their hearts from baptism, and it allows Christ to strengthen their inner being. Christ's love can strengthen because it surpasses all human comprehension and knowledge. His love fills all and grounds all in righteous understanding.

The Scriptures help us understand that struggles are going to occur in life (Psalm 57:4). David writes in Psalm 57:1 that our souls can take refuge through the storm under the wing of the all comforting God. We can remain steadfast in hope because God hears our hearts and bears our burdens. When it feels as though we have no shelter from the pain and anguish we face, God invites us to Him and prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies (Psalm 23:5). In this way,

we can know that we are loved, being cared for, and have hope. The King of Creation is always on His throne and can be our source of refuge and provision, but only as long as we let Him. Will you rely on God as a young lion relies on its mother?

Podcast Link

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K82zxdc_lg&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=14

Question

How has God provided for you in your life?

14. Prayers of Supplication

Have you ever wondered why Jesus in Matthew 6 prayed, “thy will be done”? Despite having divine knowledge, Jesus still prayed for God’s will to be done on this Earth and not just His own. Jesus teaches us that no matter how powerful, righteous, or knowledgeable we may be, nothing is more so than God. God sits on His throne in Heaven as the ruler of all things. Being able to go before the King is an amazing opportunity and we should be making sure that we are going before Him in the proper way.

Psalm 37:4 explains that God will grant the desires of the heart to those who seek Him. Many people will take this to mean that God is like a genie or a vending machine of blessings. As long as you follow Him and say a prayer, then God will give you what you want in life. In context, however, this verse is talking about God’s people having a heart that is full of righteous desires and a mind that is focused on bringing glory to Him as our relationship grows with Him. God should always be the first priority of Christ’s followers. Romans 8:26-28 states that God’s children will be granted His Holy Spirit to help them glorify God. If their hearts are righteously focused and set on listening to the Spirit, then the Spirit will guide them on how to pray in a manner that glorifies God.

Jesus starts the Lord’s Prayer by acknowledging God’s righteous authority with “hallowed be thy name”. Going to God in prayer entails more than just telling God our struggles and making requests on behalf of ourselves and others. Prayer is focused on speaking to God in order to grow in our relationship with Him. Two people are required for growing in a relationship. God acknowledges us and we should be acknowledging Him as well. A prayer of praise is said in Jude 1:24-25.

This prayer starts off by acknowledging God's power to sanctify and ends by saying that His glory and authority is before all time. Paul in Ephesians 1:16 mentions that prayer is an opportunity to give thanks to God and remember others. However, the first thing Paul mentions is giving thanks to God. If we can remember to put God first in our prayers, then how much more will it help us put God first in other aspects of our lives.

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SO1JFVhADc&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=15>

Question

How often do you pray to God with thanks and praise compared to only requests?

15. Learning to Lean on God

I had known what is what like to be paralyzed long before I became a paraplegic. Anxiety caused me to forget who I was as a person and emotionally kept me at a standstill. Sometimes, no matter how much I screamed for my body to move in the moment, fear would physically stop me in my tracks. Have you ever felt a moment of crippling anxiety or fear? There is no need to feel ashamed when feeling these emotions. Fear and anxiety are emotions that everyone will feel at some point in their life. Satan will try to distract you from God with these emotions. He will convince you that feeling these emotions equates to hopelessness. He will try to get you to say, "I am a powerless coward because there is nothing I can do." However, this isn't true because feelings these emotions gives you the opportunity to rely on the Lord.

Courage is when you're given the strength from God to move because you're choosing to trust Him in the midst of debilitating emotions. Daniel 6 tells the story of how God's servant Daniel was cast into the lion's den due to the actions of jealous peers. These men manipulated the king into making a decree that lasted for thirty days. It said that anyone who worshipped a being other than the king himself would be cast into the pit of lions. These men knew that Daniel would disobey the decree in order to worship the Lord. Thus, Daniel was thrown into the den to spend a night with the lions. Daniel 6 only has 5 verses that mention Daniel's perspective physically and emotionally. The first instance is in Daniel 6:10-11 when Daniel goes home after the decree is signed and gives thanks and praise to God 3 times a day as he had always done. The second time is in Daniel 6:21-23 where it mentions that God sent an angel down to close the mouths of the lions so that they would not harm Daniel because he trusted in the Lord.

Daniel may or may not have felt scared in the Lion's den. Even if he was afraid, it was okay because he had more trust in God than he had fear of the lions. Daniel always prayed to God in thanks and praised Him no matter his circumstances, just like Jesus. In Mark 14:34-36, Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane prayed to God for strength with facing the brutal death that was to come.

And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." Jesus shows in these verses that it okay to be scared and anxious, because as children of God we have the ability to put everything into His loving hands. This is especially true in the moments when our feelings are too strong to bear on our own.

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9IrM91awTY&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=16>

Question

What are your biggest anxieties?

16. Courageous Trust

Let's say your father is tired of your neighbor's fence encroaching on his property. He calls you on the phone to tell you to gather your friends and march around the fence seven times for seven days while seven of your friends blow trumpets. For the first six of the seven days, your father says that you and the non-trumpeters must remain silent: no matter what the neighbor tries to do to you all. On the seventh day, you are told that when the trumpets blow you must finally let out a shout because after the final trumpet sound the fence will fall. After hearing your father's plan to destroy the fence, would you trust in your father or would you believe that you can come up with a better plan?

Humans make mistakes more often than they like to admit. Therefore, giving up control and trusting in a plan that doesn't make sense to us is never easy. God is the most powerful divine being because He is the source of truth. Psalm 18:30 (ESV) says, "This God—his way is perfect; the word of the Lord proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him." The plan to take down the wall of Jericho might not have made sense to the Israelites, but because they took refuge in Him, God brought down the walls of Jericho. Jeremiah 29:11 lets God's children know that His plans are for His children to ultimately prosper. Jericho was the first of many impediments the Israelites had to overcome in the promised land. The fact that they chose to go through their trials with the Lord, however, is ultimately why they received the land the Lord had promised (Joshua 21:43-45).

As God's children today, our obstacles are not to topple the walls of Jericho, but they can be just as daunting. Our instructions to conquer our trials can also be just as perplexing. We might question if we are supposed to love our enemies and be quick to listen to them? Yet, the

Lord tells us, “Yes!” That is exactly what we are supposed to do because that is how Jesus Christ treated us. Jesus’ flesh was sorrowful for the moments that were awaiting Him after the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus gave those emotions to God when he prayed, “if possible let this cup pass from me.” (Matt. 26:39 ESV) Then He had the courage to resolve Himself in God and finishing this prayer with “nevertheless, not as I will but as you will.” (Matt. 26:39 ESV) Later in the garden he prayed again, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” (Matt. 26:42 ESV) Jesus had the courage to trust that God had plans for His children (including Him) to spiritually prosper. That is God’s promise to His children. God keeps His promises. God rewarded the faithful Israelites with the promised land (Joshua 21:43-45) and He will reward you with the promised land of Heaven if you have the courage to trust Him.

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EAEa1U4t0pM&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=17>

Question

When in your life has God given you righteous courage?

17. Self-Deception

The battle of Cannae was Rome's greatest defeat in all of its history as an empire. Rome had been suffering military defeats at the hands of Hannibal and this time they were dedicated to squash their number one enemy for good. For the battle, Rome sent around 1/10th of its male population above the age of 17 into the battle. They mustered 80,000 men and 6,000 cavalry to face off against Hannibal's army of 40,000 men and 10,000 horsemen. Rome was defeated by Hannibal despite having superior numbers because the Romans were deceived by themselves. The Romans were overconfident in their power, thus, they unknowingly fell into a trap laid by Hannibal. Like the Romans, Children of God are at war with a deceptive enemy. The devil is trying everything he can to ensnare our hearts with sin. As we battle the devil, are we deceiving ourselves and contributing to our own spiritual demise?

An individual soldier always has women and men at their side and a commander to support them in battle. For the child of God, Christ is the commander and His church is where our fellow soldiers reside. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 explains that members of the church should encourage one another and build each other up in their spiritual health. To surround ourselves only with people and situations that aren't going to support us in our relationship with God is falling into the trap of the devil. The devil wants us to be entrapped with sin and feel like there is no way out (1 Corinthians 15:33). 1 Corinthians 10:13 describes that God is the one who can provide us with an escape from temptation.

The Romans fell to their enemy because they deceived themselves by relying on their own power and wisdom. In 1 Samuel 4, God's chosen people suffered the same fate when their wisdom told

them that the physical presence of the ark was their salvation. They brought the ark without God into battle and this led to their demise at the hand of the Philistines. As children of God, we have the opportunity to rely on a spiritual commander whose wisdom is beyond physical comprehension. The devil will use our own understanding against us, as he did with Pilate in John 19:12-16. To escape sin we must rely on an understanding that is greater than our own. Will you choose spiritual defeat or victory?

Romans 12:15 (ESV) says God's children should, "Rejoice with those who rejoice" and "weep with those who weep." This verse goes beyond simply feeling happy and saddened with our brethren. Rejoicing entails spreading the elation that we are feeling to those around us. Feeling saddened gives off an air of sympathy, but this verse is talking about empathy. Empathy is feeling an emotion so strongly that it is like the situation causing the emotion is happening to you. Rejoicing and empathy require expression as well as internalization. How can brethren rely on each other if we are unable to support each other's emotional health?

Podcast Link

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7i_tv26e7Dk&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKP_ZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=18

Question

Who could you get to know better in your life?

18. Seeing with No Partiality

If a homeless person came up to you or knocked on your house door right now what would you see? A lazy human being who should put their energy into getting a job rather than begging? Someone who you can't be bothered with or help because of the unknown danger they may present? Or, would you see this person as one of God's created souls who happens to be in a lower point of their life? Our current and past life experiences, as well as the ideals we hold in our heart are going to create snap assumptions in our mind about the people we come across. These biases will sometimes create a whole life story about someone from our perspective, before we even have the chance to get to know them. The question that remains for the child of God is: are our beliefs stemming from a worldly viewpoint, or a Godly one?

Based on Jesus' example, the Bible is going to tell us to seek out opportunities to help those that are in need or that the world sees as unworthy or beyond the point of helping. Jesus didn't seek out danger, but He did sit with tax collectors, cast out demons, heal the ill, and seek out other opportunities to love His neighbor as Himself. Jesus also never turned away those who sought His help, like the woman who touched His robe as He was on His way to heal the daughter of a synagogue leader named Jarius. In the midst of a panicking parent and disciples concerned for His safety because of the large crowd around them, Jesus stopped to hear this faithful woman's story (Mark 5:21-34). James 2:14 ESV states, "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?" The woman who was healed worked out her faith by going to Jesus and touching His robe. Jesus acted out His faith by having compassion on the woman by healing her, took the time to hear her story, and teach

her why she had been healed. As followers of Christ we should take note of Jesus' example by having compassion on our neighbors.

Our neighbors include all human beings from all walks and circumstances of life. Everyone has been given a precious soul from our God in Heaven. The Bible tells Christians that we show our devotion to God by giving Him our all and loving our neighbors as we would ourselves (Mark 12:28-33). Giving God every ounce of energy we have entails acting out Jesus' teachings and God's principles in order to spread His word. James 2:26 explains that the Godly faith without Godly action is dead. The world will come up with great excuses for us to abandon the idea of acting on our faith and to cast our neighbor's aside. Romans 2:6 emphasizes that each person will be judged by God according to their own deeds. As we stand before the Heavenly King on the day of judgement, do we want Him to embrace us because we took care of our neighbor with Godly compassion (Matthew 25:31-46)? Or would we rather God say to us, "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:23) and tell you to depart from His sight?

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XtIrOSQ8sLM&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=19>

Question

Why did Jesus sometimes keep company with tax collectors, lepers, etc.?

19. The Divine Power of Jesus (Article only Week)

A child is grasping onto the hand of their parent as they are both gingerly following the direction of the exit signs to head out of the mall. About half way out of the mall, the child turns their head and then suddenly screeches to a halt. Noticing a toy store, their eyes open wide and gleam with passion. Leaving their parent in the dust, the child excitedly runs to the store, and proceeds to smudge the glass as they glue their face to the store's window. The parent finally catches up and the child loudly proclaims, "I need that toy, I need that toy!" Knowing the tantrum that is about to ensue, the parent chucklingly responds, "You know...we have been pacing this store for a while now, if you promise to leave with me I will get you one of those mall pretzels as big as your whole face!" The child pauses, holds their gurgling tummy, then looks up smiling and says, "Okay!" The onlooking parents think to themselves, "That parent just performed a miracle."

Over the centuries, the word miracle has lost some of its original meaning. Nowadays, this term is often used to describe any situation that happens despite our belief in its improbability to occur. However, this term in the Bible is used to describe supernatural events that were performed by God, the prophets, and Jesus to focus people's attention to God (Mark 2:12). The author of the book of John refers to Jesus' miracles as signs because they encourage people to become convicted in God and seek Him through Jesus' teachings (John 20:30-31). Acts 2:22-24 expresses that Jesus' miraculous deeds on Earth attested to mankind God's compassionate plan for them. They also helped affirm Jesus' divinity and were used as God's signature on Earth.

The parent in this story left their mark on the child by guiding them back from the distraction of the toy store and providing for the

child what they truly needed. God knows our heart and will compassionately provide what we need in this life. In Matthew 14:14, the Bible states that Jesus took compassion on the crowd and fed a crowd of five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish. Before feeding the crowd, Jesus and His disciples had every excuse to turn the hungry crowd away because they were grieving John the Baptist's death, they were in a desolate place, and it was late in the day. Yet, Jesus supplied the need of the crowd in abundance. As His children, He will do the same for us, but only if we listen and rely on Him. If we are like the child who was too focused on the physical stuff in this life, then we won't be listening for His genuine providing guidance. Jesus can provide us with the things we need in abundance. His path provides the water and bread of everlasting life, the eternal home of Heaven, and infinite love of our Creator. Will you choose to take the world's path of temporary nourishment, or Christ's path that leads to unending fulfillment?

Question

What are some other words that pertain to Christ or following Him that can be used improperly?

20. Walking with Courageous Obedience

You just pulled an exhaustive all-nighter on a Friday at a library, trying to work on a report that is due the next Monday. Sadly, it was to no avail because even with wracking your brain the whole night you still made no progress. By morning you think, “A cup of coffee might be just what I need!” As you’re about ready to leave, a stranger approaches you. He exclaims that he saw your tired face and asks if you’re okay. After you explain the issue he exclaims, “Ah, I see...I can help you if you want.” Reluctantly, you let the stranger help and not only does he solve your problem, but then he teaches you knowledge beyond your understanding. After he finishes speaking he says, “Do not be afraid, from now on you will work for the benefit of mankind.” Would you leave everything to follow and begin work for this man?

The disciples recorded in Luke chapter 5 didn’t know where their money or next meal would come from but they had the courageous faith to know that the Savior would provide their daily bread. We know that these men had courageous faith to follow Jesus and not a blind faith, because Luke 5:3 explains that Jesus had taught them. Jesus teaching His disciples is important because it helps us know how much Jesus loves us. He doesn’t just see us as servants or tools to be used for his bidding, He calls us His friends. Jesus says, “You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” (John 15:14-15 ESV) Jesus wants us to have an intimate relationship with Him so that we can walk with Him in a manner that will bring glory to God.

Our relationship with God both before and after baptism is a continual growth process. It takes a courageous faith to initially and continually follow Jesus. In Matthew 14:26-33, Jesus leaves the mountain where He was praying alone to meet with his disciples who were far from land on a boat. Jesus walks on the water to His disciples' boat and reaches them by the early morning. As he approaches, they become terrified thinking He was a ghost. He responds, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." Peter is the only disciple to answer Jesus and asks to be commanded to leave the boat as proof of who He is. In this account, it is easy to focus on the fact that Peter asks Jesus to prove His identity and then begins to sink because of doubt. Yet, it is important for us as disciples to also heed Peter's example of courage. He was the only disciple to respond and be willing to turn to Jesus after being afraid.

Our baptism and subsequent walk with Jesus as God's children requires three things:

1. For us to appreciate how much we mean to God.
2. To return His love with faithful obedience.
3. Being willing to be transformed by Him because we are always seeking Him.

God doesn't ask us for perfection and He doesn't want our faith to be blind. Before getting baptized, God's children should understand that walking with Christ requires continual growth and responsibility. If you have yet to be baptized or make yourself right with Him, then what right now is keeping you from your righteous work?

Podcast Link

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZyEAa0LE58&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxK
PZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=20](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZyEAa0LE58&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=20)

Question

What does following Christ entail?

21. God Supplies in Abundance

Imagine being at an outside festival that only had one food truck with 5 fish sandwiches to feed the thousands of attendees. Would you be worried that the food would run out before they get to you? Would you want to start fighting for one of the first few spots in line to get food? These doubts, and others like them, were probably experienced by the members of the crowd that Jesus fed in Matthew 14:13-21. Jesus—by the power of God—provided 12 baskets of leftover food after everyone was satisfied, despite starting with 5 loaves and 2 fish (Matthew 14:20). God supplies us with everything we could ever need in this life. Jesus in Matthew 6:26 enlightens us to how God even feeds and shelters the birds of the air who do not accomplish any kind of labor. He then asks the rhetorical question, “are you more valuable than they?” God has and will continue to always provide for His children.

In the Old Testament, God’s chosen people were the descendants of Abraham, otherwise known as the Israelites. An example of God providing for the Israelites can be found in Exodus 16 when God fed them manna and quail in the desert wilderness. In Exodus 16, the Israelites had spent many days walking in the desert after being freed from slavery in Egypt by God. The people started to groan and complain to Moses and Aaron about having something to eat. The Lord heard the Israelite’s complaint and fed them with quails and manna from Heaven. Regarding the amount of food the Lord provided each day, Exodus 16:17-18 (ESV) says, “And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat.” God provided the manna for 40 years, till they were permitted by God to enter the land of Canaan. Since the time of the Israelites, the Lord has

been providing His people with exactly what they need to live a satisfying life.

A satisfying life also goes beyond daily bread and other physical needs that Matthew 6:25-34 tell us to not be anxious about. When Jesus prays in Matthew 6:9-13, He prays for God to forgive our sins and to deliver us from temptation and all evil. God has blessed His children with more than just an opportunity to be satisfied in our temporary lives on Earth. Through His son we have been given the opportunity to be abundantly satisfied for all eternity. Ephesians 1:1-14 teaches that God predestined mankind for adoption through the plan he set forth by Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ fulfilled this plan by willingly dying on the cross so that we can be redeemed by God for our trespasses of sin against Him. As long as we hear God's word, believe in His teachings, and fully commit ourselves to God through the waters of baptism, then the Holy Spirit—which is the guarantee of our inheritance—will reside in us till we gain possession of it. The only question that remains is, will you grumble and doubt the Lord's provision, or will you choose to have faith in God above all else?

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSYkidlcRSs&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=21>

Question

When have you asked for “quail” when God has given you “manna”?

22. Jesus Healing the Blind

When the blind man in John 9 regains his sight, we can imagine the reaction to be similar to videos we watch of people who see through corrective color blind glasses for the first time. Our hearts become flooded with empathy as we watch the teary expression of overwhelming joy. However, that teary expression of joy would have never happened, if it hadn't been for the trial of color blindness. It can be easy to forget pain and right off our trials once they are over. No one in a right mind revels in hardship or wants to suffer. Yet, Jesus couldn't have performed His miracle if the blind man had not gone through such hardship. The Pharisee's asked if sin was the reason the man was born blind. In John 9:3 (ESV) part of Jesus' reply was this, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him." Think of the blessings and biblical understanding that God's handiwork allows you to display in your life. Are the opportunities to display God's wondrous glory being seized?

There are going to be people of the world that will be like the Pharisees and try to suppress Children of God from displaying His work in their lives. The Pharisees were teachers of the Law of Moses and held a high status in Jewish society during the time of Jesus. After the news of healing the blind man's eyes had spread, we see the Pharisees found him and brought him in for questioning. Since Jesus performed His miracle on the Sabbath Day—the day of rest for the Jews—Jesus was being called a sinner. No matter how many times they asked the man how he had been healed and who by, they didn't believe. Probably feeling like they were going in circles, the Pharisees even summoned the man's parents to question them. To which the parents responded, "He is of age ask him." (John 9:23 ESV) John 9:22 tells us that the parents responded this way because they feared being kicked out of

the synagogue by the Pharisees—who had already made up their mind to do this to those who confessed Jesus to be Christ.

1 John 3:1 (ESV) says, “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” The Pharisees believed that their relationship with God was safer in their own understanding than that of the Son of God. If they truly took the time to restudy what they thought they knew then they wouldn’t have been as stubborn as to deny the miraculous power of Christ. They used their social power and influences to subjugate others to their own ideologies. The world is going to do this time and time again. Therefore, as God’s children we must be firm in our belief so that we stay true and confess the miraculous work of Christ in our lives. We should heed the example of the blind man and choose Christ over worldly gain. Sadly, the parents played into the Pharisees’ hands because even though they didn’t deny Christ outright, by saying nothing, they might as well have. Will you be like the blind man and seize every moment you can to proclaim God’s work? Or will you ultimately digress from your relationship with Christ by focusing on the physical things of this world like blind man’s parents and the Pharisees?

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXx1DEQrkiw&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=22>

Question

What moments of your spiritual journey could encourage others to know and follow Christ?

23. Are We Building or Destroying?

Two often heard children's rhyme are "sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me" and "I am rubber you are glue, whatever you say bounces off of me and sticks to you." Granted words can't cause a broken bone, but they can damage the spirit—something far more important than an arm. If you excitedly walked into a room, and then someone important to you says, "Being such a bright person, I can't believe you couldn't even handle this simple task I asked you to do. Even a monkey could do it." As a one-time occurrence, sure you might be able to shrug this comment off. You might not feel crushed by the end of the conversation. Yet, the emotional effect of what was said still lingers somewhere in the back of the brain.

The beginning of Proverbs 12:18 (NIV) says, "The words of the reckless pierce like swords." Until it was banned in 1905, China used a torture and execution technique known as "Lingchi" or death by a 1,000 cuts. James 3:5 warns that a great forest can be set ablaze by such a tiny spark. A person's spirit can be brought down in the same way. A tiny lingering of emotion can eventually grow into a great self-destroying flame. As children of God, are our words leading others toward spiritual execution? Or, are we heartfully committed to bringing others to the healing power of Christ?

God's wisdom brings healing because He is also known as Jehovah Rapha, the Lord who heals. Psalm 147:3 exclaims, "He heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds." As children of the Lord who heals, we are told to show others the healing compassion that He showed to us. The latter half of Proverbs 12:18 (NIV) states, "but the tongue of the wise brings healing." One way we do this is by building others up. Ephesians 4:29 expresses this sentiment by saying that our building up

should fit the occasion, that way our words will bring grace to those who hear. This ideal is also expressed in James 3:28-29 when it tells us to be filled with the wisdom from Heaven, and then apply that wisdom by being peace makers. The world will tell us to be peace keepers, but this is an entirely different sentiment.

Peace keeping brings about a feeling of compromise or give and take. It is saying, “I will do anything, even sacrifice or forsake God’s values for the outcome of worldly peace.” However, peacemaking is working with God and the situation to bring about Godly peace. Let’s say you overhear someone teasing another about their hair. Peacekeeping would be saying an even nastier joke to defend the one person and shame the other. A peacemaker would instead say that hair cut looks really good on the person and if you were more adventurous you might do the same. Most bullies like it when the odds of power are in their favor. By balancing or tipping the scales toward the defender’s side, you not only would have built up the victim, but you also would have made peace when the bully gives up. Even though this is a simple example, every situation has an opportunity for us to be guides to the path of God or the world. Will your tongue become a guide to the waters of eternal life or the engulfing flames of sin?

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kztVd6tOzk&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=23>

Question

When has your speech displayed Christ? When has it not?

24. God is Always Working

When facing struggles—especially the hardship of grief—it is tempting to want to feel like Naomi in the book of Ruth. In Ruth 1:20-21, Naomi tells the people of Bethlehem, “Do not call me Naomi¹; call me Mara², for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?” Naomi expresses this after her daughter-in-law Ruth vows to stay by her side.

Grief is causing Naomi to feel as though she is returning to Bethlehem empty. Yet, Ruth just told her, “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.” (Ruth 1:16-17) Naomi having Ruth’s genuine and Godly love in her life would mean she wasn’t coming back empty.

It is only natural for struggles to cause people to feel empty and search for the reasons for their pain. However, children of God should approach these feelings with caution because we want to make sure that they don’t lead us into temptation and sin. James 1:14-15 explains that a person is lured into temptation by strong temporary desires and when they come to fruition they bring about sin—which in turn leads to death.

Due to bitterness felt during grief, Naomi desired to be alone and was tempted to place blame on God. However, God wasn’t tempting

¹ The name Naomi is derived from the Hebrew word na’em, which means pleasant.

² Mara is the Hebrew word for bitterness

Naomi into bitterness because James 1:13 says, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.” 1 Corinthians 10:13 also reads, “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” God was faithful to Naomi and blessed her with her loyal and compassionate daughter-in-law Ruth as the way out of temptation.

In Bethlehem, Ruth finds work (at the risk of assault) laboring all day in the fields to feed the grieving Naomi. Due to this, it was the Lord’s will that Boaz took notice of Ruth. Boaz and Ruth’s relationship was deeper than a love at first sight or something from a romance novel. Boaz took notice of Ruth’s faithful actions because she displayed Godliness even though she was a Moabite and in grief herself (Ruth 2:11). Despite her grief, Ruth had compassion for Naomi and went above and beyond for her sake. Thus, Boaz took notice of her and became a redeemer for Naomi and Ruth. In ancient Hebrew culture a redeemer was someone who bought a widow’s land to make sure her ex-husband’s land would continue on in inheritance since she couldn’t own it herself. Also, he could also vow to provide for and essentially take the widow as his wife in order to keep the lineage of the deceased going.

Mankind was set for the path of destruction, but God spiritually insured that we would live on eternally. Similar to Boaz, God redeemed mankind when He sent His only son to the cross and shed His blood as the price of reconciliation. For a long time, mankind has struggled with the question, “Why do bad things happen—especially to me?”. Yet, no should say that God is the reason for the bad. God only provides the way to escape and endure the hardships that we suffer. Mankind has a

loving and compassionate God who cares deeply for His children. You have the opportunity today to make your relationship right with God, as well as to be baptized. Will you choose to seek God and the righteous way that He can lead you from your struggles and temptations?

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWQTXVEp6fI&list=PLLvTjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=24>

Question

What struggles have been more than you can bear? How can God help?

25. Just Do It

A host at a local restaurant is commenting on his prideful laziness to another employee saying, “Why do today what you can put off till tomorrow?” As the host says this, the boss happens to be walking by and comments, “Well my beguiling employee, yesterday’s work is today and today’s work is tomorrow.” The host stares blankly into the distance as he begin to realize the endless amount of work his approach to life has made for him. Let’s face it, many of us love a nice relaxing day full of procrastination—and sometimes taking a physical break like this is necessary—but, there can be a price for it. Physically it usually means making up some chores or work the next day. Spiritually however, the cost starts much greater.

In the beginning of Exodus eight³, Moses was commanded by the Lord to ask Pharaoh to release the nation of Israel. Pharaoh refused to let his let his slaves go, therefore the Lord sent a plague of frogs upon Egypt. In Exodus 8:8 (ESV), Pharaoh then summons Moses and Aaron saying, “Plead with the Lord to take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord.” Moses responds by telling Pharaoh to pick the time he wants them to intercede to the Lord on his behalf. Pharaoh said tomorrow. The time that Pharaoh designates is interesting because it causes us to ask, “Why

³ To give some background. God wanted Pharaoh to releases the Jewish slaves, so they could leave Egypt and worship God as a nation. Pharaoh obviously wanted to keep his slaves. At Moses and Aaron’s first meeting with Pharaoh they were asked to prove themselves and the Lord turned Aaron’s staff into a snake. Pharaoh had multiple of his sorcerers do the same to their staffs through their mystic arts. The Lord’s snake ate the rest. Then came the first plague, the water of the Nile turned to blood, and the fish died, polluting the river. The Bible says Pharaoh’s heart remained hardened as his sorcerers were able to do the same. Exodus starts with the second plague the Lord cast on Israel. The Bible says that Pharaoh’s sorcerers also made frogs come up, but notice that Pharaoh then turns to Moses and Aaron to remove the plague, not his sorcerers.

would Pharaoh suffer the plague for an extra day when he could have ended it now?”

James 4:17 (ESV) states, “So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” As a leader to the Egyptian people, the right thing would be protecting his people from the plague. Spiritually for Pharaoh, the right thing would be to not enslave God’s chosen people and to take the path of humility in regards to the Lord’s discipline. Yet, the prideful Pharaoh chose to grit his teeth and harden his heart even further. The spiritual cost of Pharaoh’s sin is his eternal soul. The physical expense of his sin came to the continued suffering of himself and his people. Procrastinating till the next day could have easily contributed to Pharaoh’s temptation to harden his heart. Had Pharaoh decided to say, “Right now I will release the Israelites and you will begin pleading on my behalf” then he would have had the ability to only do the right thing. However, deciding to wait gave Pharaoh the time to contemplate on his own desires and be tempted.

Imagine if while performing the miracles, Jesus said, “I am pretty tired guys, you can figure it out today, can’t you? I’m going to go back home and nap.” As God’s children our work is spreading God’s light into the world so that others can be saved from an eternal life of torture in Hell. Refusing to acknowledge the power of God led Pharaoh’s people to suffering from the plagues in this life and then eternally in the next due to idolatry. How wrapped up in unnecessary things must our souls be for us to potentially do the same to others. No one knows what tomorrow is going to bring for ourselves and others. If we die or Jesus comes today, we won’t be judged on what we were going to do tomorrow. All we are guaranteed is the present moment. How can you use your present moment for God?

Podcast Link

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_UFheajytk&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=25

Question

What have you wanted to do for Christ that keeps getting pushed back?

26. Intentional Service

Since 710 A.D., the Japanese practice an art of wrapping their treasured goods in a cloth known as a furoshiki or tsutsumi. The cloth wrapping can be ornately decorated or a common single colored cloth. What makes the practice different from simply tying your goods in any old cloth is the intentional care that goes into tying the cloth and the overall presentation. Nowadays, the practice of furoshiki has expanded to transporting common goods and even into giving heart felt gifts. Gift giving has become extremely significant to the Japanese culture. When giving gifts, however, the gift itself isn't the end all be all. Gift giving to them is really is all about the heart. That is why so much time and care is put into the preparation and presentation of their gifts. As children of God, are we being intentional during our service to the Lord and serving Him with care?

In Revelation chapters two and three, the angels are speaking to several early churches on behalf of the Lord. The Lord in the beginning of chapter two addresses the church of Ephesus because they left their service to God and stopped their gift of worship to Him altogether. Revelation 2:4 (ESV) reads, "But I have this against you, that have abandoned the love you had at first." The beginning of Revelations chapter three, starts off with the Lord talking to the church of Sardis. The latter half Revelation 3:1 says, "I know your works. You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead." The church of Sardis had taken great care to have their service to God look like an appealing gift, but truly it meant nothing. At the end of chapter three, the Lord is speaking with the church in Laodicea. Revelations 3:16 says, "So, because you are neither hot nor cold, I will just spit you out of my mouth." The church of Laodicea was physically doing everything they needed to, but they lacked the zeal for God in their heart. In their gift of

service, the Laodiceans had the gift ready to give, but they took no care to make it pleasing to God.

Of all the seven churches in Revelation chapters two and three, God only has praise for the church of Philadelphia. Revelation 3:8 says, “I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.” This doesn’t imply that the Philadelphians were perfect people by any means. Yet, they made sure that they followed Christ’s example when He said that everything in our relationship with God hinged on loving the Lord with our entire being and loving our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:28-34). Jesus is the pinnacle of giving His entire life as a gift of service to God. Jesus studied, knew, and taught God’s word, He talked to God through prayer many times throughout His life, and He willingly died for mankind’s sins according to God’s plan. Jesus lived His whole life with the intention of giving His entire heart, body, and soul to God. Do you live your life with the intent of giving Him your all?

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9O7vaNKzWM&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=26>

Question

When you do your work for Christ, do you think about bringing glory to Him?

27. A Willingness to Grow

In Matthew 19:16 (ESV), when Jesus is asked by a wealthy young man, “what good thing shall I do so that I may obtain eternal life?” Jesus tells the man that only God knows what is good, if you seek eternal life then you should obey His commandments. The young man exclaims that he has been following God’s commandments and wants to know what he still needs to do. Jesus then tells the man in Matthew 19:21 (ESV), “If you want to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” Matthew 19 then records that the man went away feeling sad because he highly valued his abundance of possessions.

At first glance, this story seems to express that Heaven isn’t for the rich. Depending on how an individual approaches their Earthly wealth, this can be true. However, the story holds a deep insight on how we view our salvation and the how we need to change in order to obey God fully. Jesus is essentially telling the wealthy young man, you have an abundance of Earthly treasures, but the path to eternal life cannot be attained with such things. Thus, you should give these physical riches to your less fortunate neighbors and seek spiritual treasures from God above. After hearing this, the young man walks away saddened because he is unwilling to change. He prefers the physical lifestyle his possessions offer him over the opportunity to live with God eternally. Do we view the physical change that God requires of us as a loss? Or, do we see the physical sacrifices that God requires of us as spiritual gain?

Jesus says in Mark 8:35-36 (ESV), “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?” The rich young man chose to save his current physical life over the life of his eternal soul. The apostle Paul, though, chose to do the opposite. He gave up his physical status, wealth, reputation, and life as he knew it in order to serve God. Paul compares his former life as prominent member of Jewish society to trash (Phil. 3:8-10). This is because the eternal life he can gain through Christ’s resurrection is beyond priceless. Paul saw the eternal life that is attainable through Christ as such a high value, that death after a life of serving Christ is considered a gain. Do we possess such a faith that we are willing to change for the glory of God? It is understandable that we will want to cling to all aspects of our physical existence, but we have so much more to gain in Christ. What can be gained in a few decades can’t compare to the gain of eternal life, but only if you’re willing to change and grow in your faith.

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iPv1TdUB2QE&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=27>

Question

What habits would you like to change to grow closer to God?

28. Getting Back to the Garden

Did God create the darkness in our lives? Genesis 1:1-5 says, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.” When God created the universe amidst the dark void He brought order to it by adding the light.

People might think, “Lucifer, the king of darkness was present in the garden and described as a serpent. Since God created the angel Lucifer and let Him tempt mankind in the garden, wouldn’t that mean God is the source of evil and sin in the world?” The simple answer is no. 1 John 1:15 states that God is light and there is no darkness in Him. As a creator, God does not produce darkness or cause people to sin. James 1:13 says, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.” God is the source of all the love and light in this world. God even loves His creations so much that He doesn’t force them to obey Him. He didn’t force mankind or the angels to obey Him, He let them have the choice of free will.

Jude 6 states, “And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling He has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the day of judgement.” Satan along with His supporters chose to disobey God and be cast down out of Heaven. He chose to be a permanent enemy of God and tempt

mankind. Mankind—through Adam and Eve—also chose to become an enemy of God when they sinned by eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Satan chose to become a permanent enemy of God, but humans have shown that their willingness to return to walking in His light. God found righteousness in Noah, saving him and his family from destruction. He found committed faith in the heart Abraham, thus, choosing him to be the father of Israel.

God is not a harbinger of evil or an appeaser of evil that some will claim Him to be. God is a harbinger of love and goodness. He always procures a way out of darkness for His people (1 Cor. 10:13). He loves His creation of man so much that He created a world in which we have the freedom of choice. Through Jesus we can choose to live for Him on Earth in order to live with Him in Heaven eternally when we die. When we get baptized we commit our lives to God eternally. Living a life committed to God comes from our desire to love Him, and in return for our committed love and sacrifice, we gain eternal life. Instead of asking, “Why do bad things happen?” Or, “Why is sin in the world?”, maybe we should be asking ourselves, “What am I going to do about the darkness in my life?” One thing you can do is commit yourself to a righteous way of living that will bring light to yourself and others. Will you choose to walk with God like mankind used to in the garden?

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zARzQdbhi4s&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=28>

Question

What situations in your life have caused you to think badly of God?

29. Walking Like our Father

Children desire to be adults because they equate adulthood with having more freedom and authority. Whether good or bad, a child will try to emulate an adult's behavior because they will see that as necessary to being an adult. This is similar to when lion cubs are watching and learning how their mother hunts prey. The lion cub won't have the objective reasoning to tell how truly good or bad the mother is at hunting. Therefore, the cub will use her knowledge because of her authority. As children of God, are we imitating the behavior of worldly authorities, or the source of spiritual truth?

In His sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus tells the crowds gathered around Him about the behaviors that God sees as righteous. Jesus tells the crowd about remaining unhypocritical, how they should be praying, and not being anxious for the future, to name a few (Matt. 5:21-6:4, Matt. 6:5-14, Matt. 6:25-34). Jesus' sermon on the mount focuses on how people can grow in their relationship with God, with the emphasis being placed on how they act on behalf of their faith. One thing about children is that they are always watching their parents and are even picking up the subtlest of details. Much in the same way, God's people are always being watched by the spiritually young. In Matthew 7:17-20, Jesus talks about how people recognize good or diseased trees by the fruit that they produce. If the fruit is our actions, then this would mean that others will be able to tell if we are truly walking in a relationship with God based on our them.

In Matthew 5:13 (ESV) Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet." If we as children of God lost the Godly essence behind

our actions, then how are we supposed to be able to guide others toward spiritual understanding in Jesus Christ? The only way to obtain our true lights is by turning to God, seeking His truth, and letting it transform our understanding. The apostle Peter in 1 Peter 1:21-23 reveals that being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ will cause our faith and hope to be in God. It is by the power of Jesus' divine blood that we are spiritually born again under God's grace through our actionable faith. The apostle Paul expands on this idea in Ephesians 2:9-10 (ESV) by saying, "not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." During the final judgement, will the Lord see that we lived our lives as true children of His (Matt. 7:21-23)?

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCXsCX4c45U&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=29>

Question

Have you prayed to God today and opened His word this week?

30. Heavenly Treasure

Luke 12:34 reads, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” A great literary character of collecting physical treasures is Ebenezer Scrooge from Charles Dickens book, A Christmas Carol. As a teenager and young adult, Ebenezer is a happy go lucky and compassionate fellow, who even finds love. As he gets older, however, Ebenezer starts to make more and more money. As he does, Ebenezer neglected the woman who loved him, forsook his fellow man, and became a heavy handed miser: all because his heart belonged only to the counting and amassing of greater wealth. Treasure is a word associated with monetary wealth, but anything that children of God put before Him can become our hearts treasure and sole desire.

James 1:14-15 has this to say about desire, “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.” In Numbers 16, the third son of Levi, named Korah, placed his heart into worldly treasures because he desired the title of leader more than he had wanted to obey God. Korah and his rebels said to Moses and Aaron, “You have gone too far! For all in this congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord.” God had directly appointed Moses and Aaron back in Egypt (Exodus 7). Korah and his rebels were too wrapped up in their worldly desires to notice that rebelling against Moses and Aaron meant rebelling against God Himself. Thus, their desire led them to sin with false accusations, and their sin led them to their death at the hand of God (Num. 16:32-35).

When Jesus gave His sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7), he told mankind, “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 love God and money.” Ebenezer and Korrah are two examples that help prove Jesus’ point: a heart cannot be in two places at once. If your heart is not with God, then you will end up hating Him as you pursue your desire for some type of Earthly gain. The apostle Paul is a great illustration of a person who decides to put his heart in God. In the beginning of Philippians 3, the apostle Paul talks about how he had everything a man of stature in Jewish society could desire. He was a Pharisee who could prove his lineage to the tribe of Benjamin, was circumcised on the eighth day, and was considered blameless under the law. Yet, in the latter half of Phil. 3:8 Paul writes, “For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.” Paul is perfectly content to lose everything he had gained in his life on Earth because they are temporary and fleeting, while the righteousness he gains through loving Christ will last an eternity.

Jesus says in Mark 8:34-36, “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?” Are you on a temporary path like Korrah and Ebenezer, or are you on the path to everlasting life like Paul?

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7ovSZp4szQ&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=30>

Question

What are your most important treasures in this life? How can you make God the focus of enjoying those treasures?

Ex. 1: “Too much of my focus is consumed by work. Therefore I will read my Bible to wind down before bed and won’t work on a Sunday.”

Ex. 2: “I really treasure quality time with my wife and kids. Thus, I will spend time learning about God with them.”

31. Righteous Repentance

A parent just got their dream car, and later that day his teenager starts to play basketball in the driveway. The parent warns the teen to be careful of the car because it is brand new. Ten minutes after starting, she runs inside saying, "Sorry dad, don't be mad, but the ball went out of control and made a small dent in the hood of the car." The parent thinks, "Well, it is not ideal but I can take a rubber mallet and pound out the dent, all is forgiven." Happily, the teen runs outside to start playing again. Fifteen minutes later she runs back in, "Dad my arms got tired, so I went to relax in the car and when I got up I noticed the seat was all dirty. I didn't mean to, I promise." Her dad looked slightly annoyed, but then he relaxed and said, "I have to work on the hood anyway, might as well clean the inside too. All is forgiven." She grins and runs back outside. Soon after, the daughter goes back to the dad and sheepishly explains, "I tried to move the car out of the way so I wouldn't dent the hood. When I did, I hit the mail box. It's broken and so is the taillight." As the parent, how forgiving do you think you would be as the day progressed, let alone by its end? As the teenager, how do you think you would feel as you approached your parent?

In Luke 17:3-4, Jesus tells his disciples, "Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent' you must forgive him." If a person sins against us once it can be hard to forgive them, let alone if they repeated the sin seven times in a day. By even the second repeat we might even be tempted to doubt the genuineness of the other person's repentance. People can only see the actions of others, however, God can see to the most inner depths of the heart (1 Sam. 16:4-7). Since forgiveness and repentance are matters of the heart, children of God

should rely on His understanding and not their own. Jesus and Stephen are the only two people in the Bible to pray for God to forgive the people who were killing them (Luke 23:34, Acts 7:54-60). Jesus was, the son of God and Stephen was a man whose heart was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Similar to Stephen, children of God who get baptized will be blessed with the Holy Spirit (John 1:32-33). Forgiving and repenting in a righteous manner can only be done if we turn to the King of Righteousness Himself. Proverbs 3:5-6 states, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.” Forgiveness is seeing the soul above the limitations and evil deeds. Repentance is accepting the consequences of our actions by not making excuses or passing them off, and trying to make amends in the ways we can— regardless of being forgiven. Whether we are the ones forgiving or repenting, God is the one with the ability to properly guide our hearts to have the right motivation. God can see your heart, will you trust Him to help you be forgiven of your trespasses and forgive your trespassers?

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NiiWZnll1VU&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=31>

Question

Who in your life do you need to forgive?

32. Excelsior!

The famous super hero creator Stan Lee ended his comics and articles with the phrase “Excelsior!”. Excelsior’s original meaning in Latin was “higher”, but over the centuries it has taken on an encouraging new perspective. While the world has recently embraced the encouragement this phrase implies, the feelings it expresses are by no means new. In 1 Thessalonians 4:1 (NASB) Paul encourages his fellow brethren by saying, “Finally then, brothers and sisters, we request and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received instruction from us as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel even more.”

If the Thessalonians are already walking in a manner that pleases God, then why is Paul telling them to go beyond what they’re already doing? Have you only done one thing to show your parents or your significant other that you love them? Or, have you gone out of your way, or even so far as to outdo yourself in expressing your love and appreciation? God conveyed the amount of love He has for us when He sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sake. The reason why God should be our standard for love is because He did this while we were enemies of His (Romans 5:6-8). If God has conveyed this much love and effort for us, then what are we conveying to Him?

In chapters two and three of the book of Revelation, God’s children conveyed various messages about their love for Him. Thus, Jesus encourages each church in their own way. To the churches that sinned, Jesus calls them out on their iniquities and then reminds His children that they will gain eternal life if they repent and embrace Him again. God only has no grievances with the church in Philadelphia. However, Jesus doesn’t just praise this church and leave it at that. In

Revelations 3:11, Jesus says, “I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.” Jesus does not tell the Philadelphians that they finished their good work and ran their race well. He essentially tells them to excel still the more and remain vigilant, so that nothing strays them from the path of righteousness.

To put it another way, the children of God that are currently running their individual race are like the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15). In the parable, the older brother stayed with their father as the younger brother demanded his inheritance early and left. After the younger brother came back, the older brother got angry because he felt more righteous and more deserving of the father’s excitement than the younger brother. After all, he is the one who stayed and worked while his younger brother insulted their father and squandered his inheritance away in some distant land. In the same way, the more mature children of God must not look down on the spiritually young, or feel as they are deserving of God’s love. Everyone at one point or another was spiritually immature and has sinned. With that being said, what can you do to excel still the more in your relationship with God and shine your light in the world?

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sol4YHB20PM&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=32>

Question

Have you talked with others about God this week? If no, challenge yourself to do so. If yes, challenge yourself to do it again.

33. Choosing Your Eternal Inheritance

Between cooler weather and Thanksgiving, the magic and beauty of the holidays are starting to fill the air. However, many of us nowadays can notice that the stores begin their preparation for the holidays even before Halloween. This epic emphasis for tradition and gift giving that happens around the holidays can create enormous stress around this time of year. Satan no doubt uses this stress to distract us from the fact that we have a whole year to emphasize loved ones, create family traditions, and be generous. Likewise, Christ should be something so precious to us in our hearts that we choose to remember and obey him throughout the year, rather than just a couple months.

The struggle of focusing on the present moment versus the eternal reward isn't a new one. In Genesis 25, Isaac's first son, Esau, came into the house one day feeling exhausted after working in the field. When he entered the house, he smelled the soup his brother was cooking and said, "Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!" Jacob replied, "Sell me your birthright now." Esau being caught up in momentary dramaticism exclaimed, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" Jacob then had Esau swear to him before pouring him a bowl.

Could you imagine giving up your spiritual future for a bowl of Campbell's or Progresso? Yet, we do this commonly in moments when life seems to get the better of us. The important difference is that Esau's inheritance was still physical. 1 Peter 1:4 tells mankind that the inheritance we are bestowed from God is of a spiritual nature. Our inheritance is imperishable, unfading, and is waiting for us in Heaven. A person must repent of their sins by putting on Christ in the waters of baptism—becoming a child of God's—before she or he can be granted

entrance to His kingdom (John 3:5-6). However, unlike Esau's bowl of soup deal, our oath during baptism goes beyond that moment in time. Becoming a Christ follower is a life changing event because when we get baptized we are daily committing every ounce of effort and strength we have to following His teachings.

My great grandmother used to say to people that "You are a gentle beam of living love." With the Holy Spirit inside of us we are living with love itself inside of our souls (1 John 4:8). Like Esau though, we can focus on momentary pleasures instead of focusing on the living love of God. If a person only thinks of God and loving their neighbors during the holidays, can they truly say they're lovingly living as His children?

Podcast Link

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fIZPsKeS_xY&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=33

Question

What type of situations momentarily cause you to shift your focus from God?

34. Keeping a Righteous Zeal

While God's children are out in the world trying to shine His love to others, scriptural truth can be traded for a lie. Toward the end of 2 Kings 4, Elisha was in the land of Gilgal surrounded by the sons of the prophets. He told his servant to prepare a pot of stew for the sons to eat. One of the men went into the field to gather food for the stew and noticed a vine with wild gourds. The man took the gourds back with him and put them in the stew. As the group began to eat, they cried out to Elisha, "O man of God, there is death in this pot!" The man who brought back the gourds saw what he wanted to see, edible food amidst a famine. Spiritually, the world is full of unrighteous distractions and influences that can appear to fill our appetites, but truly are nothing more than spiritual poison.

1 Thessalonians 5:21 explains that we should test everything with the scriptures to keep ourselves from sinning. By turning to God and His word, a person will be able to make decisions based on God's standards instead of man's. Yet as humans, we are going to make mistakes on our spiritual journey (Romans 3:23). The Israelites who partook of the stew turned to God's prophet Elisha to be saved. God's children today can go to God directly by praying. Blessed is mankind that we have graciously been gifted the opportunity to repent and be healed. Sin can easily go unnoticed if God's children aren't consistently occupied with Heavenly thoughts. Psalm 119:10 teaches His followers that we should be diligently seeking God and storing up His word in our hearts if we desire to stay obedient to His commandments.

God made His children creatively inventive and with modern technology we have even more opportunities to recenter our minds on righteousness. As we move on from one thing to the next, we can also

forget how simple it is for us to say a prayer. Prayers can be short, long, simple, or complex, because God always wants to hear from us. Combining daily habits is another great way to maintain Godly centered activities. You can listen to God's word, hymns, or biblical podcast during your daily commute or devote time for a prayer before opening the computer for work. Saying, "God bless" when finishing talking to or emailing someone is another great way to include God into your day. As long as we put in the effort, there will be endless opportunities for us to shine God's light to others. In what ways can you stay on the path to Righteous success?

Podcast Link

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_t1fFClyIQ&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=34

Question

What type of activities tend to get you excited? How can you incorporate God into them?

35. Accepting God and Standing for Him

John 15:7 says, “if you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” An Old Testament verse that sounds similar to John 15:7 is Psalm 37:4, “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” On the surface—if read on their own—these verses make God sound like a wish fulfilling genie for those who follow Him. However, in order to get a verse’s context, we should also read the sentences before and after it. Psalm 37:3 and 5 read, “Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.” To understand the context of John 15:7, a person should read John 15:4 through John 15:10. This section of verses explain that a person cannot glorify God through righteous actions if they do not accept God and heartfully obey His standards.

Simply being generous and acting in a way that could be considered Godly isn’t the key factor that differentiates righteousness. Accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior in the waters of baptism is what truly differentiates Christ followers. Romans 6:3-5 explains that children of God are buried with Christ in baptism so that they can be united with Him in His resurrection. Obeying this command of God’s is necessary to be united with Him in Heaven because baptized Christians gain His Holy spirit, the guarantor of our eternal inheritance. The act of baptism is also important because during it the new Christian commits his or her life to serving God and obeying His standards—as Jesus teaches.

Bathing in the waters of baptism cleanses us from the sins of our old ways of life, but it does not make us immune to future sin. 1 John 1:6-10 says, “If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive

us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” As much as God’s children try their best to stay on His righteous path, mistakes are going to happen. Yet, it is not our mistakes that will define us, but the actions we take afterward. 2 Cor 7:9-10 stresses the importance of repentance when it says, “As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.”

Righteous actions are not what grants us eternal life because Christ’s divine blood is what grants us amnesty with God (Eph. 2:8-10). Our God glorifying deeds keep us abiding in His righteous light, as a testament to our commitment toward Him (John 15:8). In both the Christian and non-Christian areas of life, there are traditions, teachings, and other influences that come from mankind and not from God. These will hinder God’s children from carrying out His true will. 1 John 4:1 says, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.” As you go about your daily routines, make sure to stop and ask yourself, “According to His word, have I truly accepted Him? Am I conducting myself in a biblically contextual way?”

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahZtLOmAIMA&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=35>

Question

What are the desires of your heart? Can they be considered worldly?

36. A Resolution to Grow With Christ

A new year can make us reflective on the previous year and what goals we want to accomplish for a better year. Hence, the new year's resolution gets made. These resolutions are admirable because we should be striving on how we can improve ourselves. Yet, these resolutions are known for being temporary phases that soon end up forgotten. If we truly want to turn our resolutions into long lasting habits, then we will need a Christ like approach.

James 4:13-14 reads, "Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." Often our good intentions and pride get the best of us. We make big claims without considering how we will follow through. We also might not know where to begin, or get distracted and become forgetful. This is very similar to when the pride of our stomach claims that we could eat the whole menu, only to stop eating after having an appetizer. If we find our pride getting the better of us, stop and consider our goal to grow with God. He grants us the ability and opportunity to accomplish what we set out to do (James 4:15).

Another way we can get ahead of ourselves is by rushing to meet our finish line. Our aim of growing with God turns into a sprint instead of a marathon. We may go from reading a verse once a week to trying to read the whole Bible in six months. When we rush our spiritual growth, our relationship with Christ will only suffer as a result. Hosea 6:6 says, "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." Our spiritual growth hinges upon a

sincere heart and genuine faith, not by simply completing goals as quickly as we can.

We will all make vows and promises that we cannot keep. Ephesians 5:2,5 (NIV) reminds us, “Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few...It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it.” We should be eager and willing to do the Lord’s work, but we should also do our best to prevent our mouths from getting ahead of us. If we do make a vow that we cannot later keep we must always turn back to the Lord.

No matter what we are doing and trying to accomplish we should try to keep in mind Paul’s words in Philippians 3:12-14, “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZ7mcUyINYU&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=36>

Question

Are there any vows you have made to God that you have not kept yet?

37. Above All Else

In Genesis chapter 37 we learn about Jacob's son Joseph. Jacob loved Joseph most of all his sons and displayed this by making him a robe of ornate colors (Gen. 37:3). This planted the seed of envy in Joseph's brothers and after he told them of dreams where they would bow to him, his brother's sought a way to kill him. Joseph's eldest brother Reuben tried to save him by convincing the other brothers to throw him in a pit, where He would come by later to get him. While he was away, however, his other brothers sold Joseph to a caravan of slavers that passed by. Joseph was brought into the land of Egypt and sold to one of Pharaoh's officials named Potipher (Gen. 37:12-36).

While Joseph was with Potipher, God had blessed him and he eventually rose in status until he became the official's personal attendant (Gen. 39:4). Potipher's wife eventually took notice of Joseph and tried to seduce him into committing adultery. Day after day she would talk to him and Joseph would always refuse her. One day she grabbed Joseph and commanded him to sleep with her and as Joseph fled she grabbed his cloak and it was left behind. In anger she used this to frame him and had him sent to jail (Gen. 39:20). Chapters 40 and 41 of Genesis reveal that Joseph spent at least more than two years in prison. God was still with him and eventually Joseph met Pharaoh and serviced him directly.

While serving Pharaoh, Joseph had two sons and was able to stored up food for seven years while the land in Egypt was very fertile. After those years, a famine ensued across many lands and eventually made it way to Egypt. Jacob saved countless lives by selling off the stockpiled food, and eventually his father sent his brothers into the land of Egypt to buy grain. Joseph eventually meets his brothers and

was not angry at them. He excused himself to cry secretly and then inquired about his father. After some back and forth over a couple of meetings, Joseph reveals himself and says, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God.” (Genesis 45:4-8)

Joseph maintained a close relationship with God and adhered to His standard after suffering betrayal, slavery, being framed, and put into prison for years. Joseph could have scorned God and envied those who had better lives than he did while he was suffering, but he chose to see righteousness as the solution to get him through his trials and not the cause of them (James 1:2-15). He was not a slave to his emotions but chose to trust God, becoming a slave and righteous example to the Egyptians. His confidence in God allowed him to choose prison over the peer pressure to divulge into sinful actions with Potiphar’s wife, or even sinful practices while he served Pharaoh (1 Cor. 4:1-5). Joseph’s trust in God was so strong that it led him to choose to forgive his brothers and view his suffering through a righteous lens. Above all else, Joseph chose to believe in God and live according to His standards. As a human he probably had moments of tense emotions, but he did not let them lead him into sin.

“Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” (James 1:16-18). Will we choose to

become deceived and turn from righteousness because of the world or our emotions? Or, above all else will we choose to trust God and count it all as joy?

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wHkc8Tyey0&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=37>

Question

What situations have you considered bad, but led to blessings in hindsight?

38. Having Godly Compassion With our Expectations

A big portion of our stress, anxiety, and frustration can come from unfulfilled expectations and unachieved ambitions. Many times—even without realizing it—we think of ourselves and others as superheroes who can accomplish anything and everything. These unrealistic expectations and ambitions cause a mindset centered around our desired outcome from the very beginning. When our hearts become too outcome focused, then everyone involved will likely be seen as a tool to be used until a desired outcome is reached. If we are to follow Jesus' example, then we must find a righteous way to handle the unrealistic expectations that get placed on ourselves and others. This is amongst one of the many reasons why the late Archbishop, Desmond Tutu, once said, "You are made for perfection, but you are not yet perfect. You are a masterpiece in the making."

Every person on this Earth is created by God in His image, so that one day we can become perfect with Him in Heaven. People will say that this world is chaotic and evil because of our free will. However, God created such a beautiful world that even the choices that we later found out were wrong can still have meaning and lead us closer to Him. Romans 3:23 says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We all have made wrong choices and will continue to have expectations that are unrighteous. Therefore, we must keep in mind that everyone's value does not come from the outside worldly expectations that they accomplish. The worth of a person comes from God, the being that created their inner soul (Genesis 1:27). Out of our love and respect to God, we should be striving to give no opportunity to the devil (Eph. 4:25-32).

The devil has no gains in this world when we shine our Godly light to ourselves and others. Jesus gives us the instructions to shine God's light when he said, "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:28-34). We glorify God when we focus on treating others in the same way we would care for ourselves. Therefore, Ephesians 4:32 reminds us that we should, "be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." This week, how are you going to show compassion to yourself? How will you righteously help others on their journey toward God?

Podcast Link

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yu_cLUc0Ov4&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=38

Question

Are there any self-made expectations that cause stress in your life?
What can you do to give them to God?

39. Expectations From Above

When was the last time you wondered, “What does God want me to do?” The latter half of Ecclesiastes 12:13 says, “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” Day to day the ethical choice will be a righteous one and it will often be the obvious choice. However, there are those days where our standard of good will blur our vision of what is righteous.

A biblical example of this takes place in 2 Samuel chapter 6 with the story of Uzzah the priest. At the beginning of the story, King David is trying to transfer the arc of the covenant from the city of Baalah to the City of David. The Israelites decide to transfer the arc of the covenant by an oxen cart instead of using the traditional posts to carry the arc by hand. Uzzah and his brother were walking with the cart when the oxen stumbled. Uzzah now has a decision to make, does he take control of the situation and keep the holy relic of the Jews from hitting the ground?⁴ Or, leave the situation to God’s will? Have you ever felt like Uzzah?

Uzzah ultimately takes matters into his own hands and decides to defy God by letting his emotions, fears, and opinions cloud his judgement. He touches the arc and dies for it. No matter how we personally justify it, when we defy God we are leading ourselves and others to death (James 1:14-16). Colossians 3:12-15 says, “Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.”

⁴ In Numbers 4:1-16, the Israelites are told the proper way of moving and carrying the arc of the covenant. In which they are told by God that they cannot touch any of the holy things, lest they die.

Many times our emotions or own sense of justice will take over and we will lose sight of what God wants us to do. In 1985 a man named Anthony Ray Hinton was falsely convicted of murder and sentenced to death row. He was understandably angry and because of that he gave up on the world and stopped caring for others. Four years later, he heard a cellmate crying and his compassion eventually stirred in his heart. Anthony inquired what was wrong and the cellmate said that he had just received a letter telling him that his mother had passed. Anthony comforted his cellmate, made him laugh, and then vowed to live each day selflessly. He brought love and unity to a loveless place of death. After a Supreme court ruling freed him of all charges, Anthony was asked about why he forgave and was not angry at the people who put him in jail for thirty years. He replied by saying, "If I'm angry and unforgiving, they will have taken the rest of my life." Spiritual death is the greatest danger that we can face and it can easily happen when we let circumstances, opinions, and emotions distract us from performing God's will.

Jesus shows us the greatest example of living a righteous life by truly keeping God's commandments and having compassion for others. He tells us in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." We abide with Jesus Christ when we get baptized and live out His loving example. Will you choose to follow into death like Uzzah? Or, will you choose to trust Jesus and fulfill the expectations God has for you by spreading His good truth?

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iIHdIrs0gc&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=39>

Question

Have you self-justified any actions recently?

40. What If?

One of the most powerful phrases in the English language is, “what if...” These words can easily tempt people into dedicating their whole lives to them. I truly did not understand the power of these words until my twin brother’s ashes landed on my doorstep. Grief encouraged me to deny reality, bitterly place blame, and escape to every alternative truth in my mind. “What if...” can also become one of the most powerful distractions from God in the present.

Essentially these words can rob of us our present and righteous moments because they warp our perspective of reality. Philippians 4:8 says, “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” God wants us to focus on these sentiments because this is a way from escaping the temptations and sin that result from pondering, “what if...” When my brother Daniel died from his brain aneurysm in 2020, I couldn’t help but want to dwell on, “what if” questions. Such questions like: What if he had gone to hospital for his headache the night before? What if he had lived a different life style? What if he had done this or that? The fact that my intense emotions were stirring up these questions wasn’t the potential issue. The problem would have occurred if I had not confronted these emotions by leaning on God and those He lovingly put into my life to help me.

Turning to God directly and having His love shine through those close to me helped me realize that dwelling on what could have been would only lead me down a path of depression and bitterness. Daniel, the doctor’s monitoring his condition in Houston, the EMT crew, and even God were not to blame for Daniel’s death. They all were doing

their best to make sure Daniel lived a healthy life. Also, if I want to move on from his death and choose to have joy, then I should be focusing on Daniel's spirit and eternal life instead of his physical death. 1 John 5:13-15 reads, "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. And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him." When Daniel died I prayed for God to have mercy on his soul. God gives me the hope to know that He took my prayer about Daniel into His loving hands.

1 Corinthians 10:12-13 says, "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it." God blessed me with Daniel's loving influence in my life. The good characteristics of my brother can be carried out through me, especially as I live for God. My brother loved drawing and every time I draw to encourage a sister or brother in Christ I get to share a bit of Dan. God granted me the way of escaping the temptations experienced during grief by helping have a higher perspective, instead of merely a positive one (Proverbs 3:5). Rather than focusing on the physicality of death, God grants me the ability to see how I can carry on Dan's loving spirit by focusing on Him and others. By abiding in God we can strive forward with confidence and joy, even amidst some of our lowest moments in life. When you are going to meet your true Father in Heaven, do you want to be thinking of all the "what ifs" or of all the moments you chose to say, "with God I did"?

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zk-uPyaaMOY&list=PLLvjtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=40>

Question

Do you feel you ask “what if...” too often? Write down or verbalize your thoughts.

41. Identifying With Truth Over Lies

Jesus refers to the devil as the “father of lies” (John 8:44). Lies are the Devil’s greatest weapon and we see this even in the very beginning with Adam and Eve. Satan doesn’t bring eternal death into this world using murder, mayhem, and other terrors of evil. He does it with a lie. He got Eve to believe that she can be just like God. Sometimes, this is one of the lies we can believe as well. When we do, we will be tempted to manipulate or control other people and situations so that we can obtain a desired outcome. Yet, Jesus shows us that our relationship with God is more important than anything else.

In Matthew 4, Jesus is tempted by the devil after fasting for 40 days and 40 nights. Jesus’ body was past the point of having just a simple food craving. Thus, the devil first tempted Jesus with the thought of food saying, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” The devil was using Jesus’ momentary bodily desire to prove that He could be just like His father. But Jesus replied, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Overall, an exhausted Jesus confidently resisted the devil’s temptations three times in the wilderness. He accomplished this by leaning on God’s truth instead of the devil’s lies.

Just like Jesus, we can resist listening to the devil’s lies by leaning on God and internalizing His truth. The devil relies on persistence when tempting us because he holds no true authority. However, God has authority over all things. Therefore, internalizing His truth and drawing nearer to God is the way to conquer temptation (Hebrews 2:18). Romans 12:2 says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may

discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus’ flesh was battling His spirit. His spirit wanted to accomplish God’s will but His body desired to live. Thus, He turned to God and prayed, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” After a short time He prayed a second time saying, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” Jesus lived His life dedicated to internalizing and living God’s word. By doing so, He was able to pray for God’s will to be done, even if His will meant He was to die.

Jesus says in John 14:6, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” If we continue reading to the next chapter we also see Jesus say, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:4-5) Through Jesus we have the ability to let God reshape our actions by transforming our hearts and minds. By leaning on God and His Word, we can begin to identify the devil’s lies in our lives and begin to replace them with truth.

There is an old quote that says, “Watch your thoughts, they become your words; watch your words, they become your actions; watch your actions, they become your habits; watch your habits, they become your character; watch your character, it becomes your destiny.” The question is: Are our thoughts leading us toward a destiny based on lies or the truth?

Podcast Link

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8_tyEvqQPo&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxK
PZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=41](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8_tyEvqQPo&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=41)

Question

What things have you believed that turned out to be lies? Whatever they may be about, write them down or verbalize them.

42. Joy Instead of Happiness

In the Declaration of Independence it is written, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” At first glance, happiness seems like a lofty goal, but happiness is rooted in our emotions. Thus, it is fleeting and temporary. However, having joy is greater than happiness because its foundation can be found in God—our eternal Creator. Joy is an indescribable peace and satisfaction that fills our souls because we know that we are being eternally sustained by a being much greater than ourselves.

The devil promotes happiness because it sways the heart toward pursuing momentary desires instead of God (James 1:13-15). He uses lies to trick us into thinking we can be like God, or that obedience to God means sacrificing our happiness. Since we are beings living in a physical world, God’s blessings will include things that make us happy. He knows what we need to be physically sustained (Matt. 6:8). Yet, God is the only thing that can everlastingly sustain us. Jesus admits this when He tells the devil in Matthew 4:4, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

The author of Ecclesiastes at first struggled to find the difference between a life lived by happiness and joy. We know this because in Ecclesiastes 2:10-11 he wrote, “I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.” Toward the end of the book the author notes that he turned

toward God because after he chased every pleasure under the sun he learned that pleasure is vain.

Pursuing happiness is like a person who decides to only eat pasta. Is it delicious? Yes. Can it be done? Yes. Will it provide all the nutrients that your body needs to be healthy and live long? No! The author makes this point as he concludes the book of Ecclesiastes saying, “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter; Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.”

We will all have to meet our maker in the end. Therefore, will we choose to acknowledge Him now—while there’s still time—or will we wait till it’s too late to repent of our actions? We all have the choice to decide if we will live according to our fleeting moments or the all-powerful God. If we spread His loving light and abide in Him, His Holy Spirit will produce in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). Everyone has the freedom to choose joy over happiness. To choose loving God and others over loving self. Declare your Independence from sin by proclaiming your God today!

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xB90O3NHGk&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=42>

Question

When have you chosen to pursue happiness instead of God and self-control?

43. Scars Influenced by Faith

Have you ever thanked God for your scars? Trauma—no matter how intense—does end and the wounds it causes can heal. Whether physical or emotional, we can choose to see our scars as a reminder of tragedy or triumph. The way we perceive our scars will affect the way we recognize the trauma that made them. Since our thoughts influence our actions, the choices we make during recovery can affect the healing process.

The apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 12:7, “So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.” Paul then mentions how he prayed and pleaded with God three times to have the thorn removed. He replied to Paul saying, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” After hearing the Lord’s reply, Paul resolved and admitted, “For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” When Paul mentions being “weak” he is talking about relying on God. Our strongest moments are when we let ourselves be vulnerable with our Father, turning to Him for comfort and guidance. He can heal us and provide the way of escape from our temptations, but only if we are willing to obediently listen to Him.

One of the hospitals I go to for my more intense surgeries has some of the best surgeons in the world. One time my doctor told me of a wealthy client he had who renovated his hospital room so that he can recover in luxury. The renovation plans included marble flooring with a large marble covered bathtub. When my doctor heard this he told the client to get rid of all the marble because it is extra slick when wet and

that isn't safe for a recovering patient. The client ignored my doctor and you can imagine the damage that was done to his recovering body when he did indeed fall.

We may be thinking, "He's a silly rich guy not listening to his doctor." Yet, we can all too easily ignore the advice of the great Physician that is our Father in Heaven. God tells us in Jeremiah 33:2-6, "Thus says the Lord who made the earth, the Lord who formed it to establish it—the Lord is his name: Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known. For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city and the houses of the kings of Judah that were torn down to make a defense against the siege mounds and against the sword: They are coming in to fight against the Chaldeans and to fill them with the dead bodies of men whom I shall strike down in my anger and my wrath, for I have hidden my face from this city because of all their evil. Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security." If we call on God and make Him our refuge then He promises to become our shield against our enemies. The greatest among them being the devil. The devil will try his best to wound us. God will heal those wounds to be scars if we let Him.

Podcast Link

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGeU_SWonV8&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=43

Question

How do you act when you are sick or recovering from trauma? How can you still shine for the Lord in those difficult situations?

44. Inner Conflict

Søren Kierkegaard once wrote, "Therefore do not deceive yourself! Of all deceivers fear most yourself!" Sometimes we think that our inner thoughts are creating a better path for us, when truly they are leading us toward sin. Proudful nationalism, self-deprecating negative reinforcement, and the like, are examples of thoughts that deceive us from the truth. Children of God are meant to spread the Gospel by embodying Jesus Christ. However, the Bible never mentions Jesus favoring one type of person or country over another and using His divine power for selfish gain. Galatians 3:28 reads, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Then Jesus says in Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

If we are to serve God and others with a Heavenly mindset like Jesus, then how can we make sure we aren't deceiving ourselves with false truth? Acts 17 records the difference in attitudes that Paul and Silas observed of the Jews in Berea versus Thessalonica. Acts 17:11 says, "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." Paul and Silas noticed the zeal that the Berean Jews had for the word of God. They daily tested everything according to the scriptures so they could determine what was God's truth. Romans 12:12 states that God will transform our actions by renewing our mind toward His will. Yet, God can only do this if we are doing our part to let Him—as the Jews in Berea show.

Another Jew who showed his zeal for Christ was an Alexandrian man named Apollos. The author of Acts describes Apollos as being,

“competent” in the scriptures (Acts 18:24 ESV). After being instructed in Jesus’ teachings, Apollos started boldly preaching about His message. During Apollos’ time in Antioch, Acts 18:26 says, “He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately.” No matter how studious we are, there are always areas of spiritual knowledge where we can grow. As children of God who are seeking to imitate Jesus’ example. We should all be like Apollos regarding instruction and correction. He used the opportunity to listen and learn from Aquila and Priscilla: expanding his knowledge. Then, he sought to pay it forward by expanding the knowledge of the people in Achaia (Acts 18:27).

2 Timothy 2:15 says, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” To prevent the mishandling of God’s truth we must seize all our opportunities to become confident in God’s truth. Confidence is the key to beating deception. James 1:22 reads, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” A big component of certainty is repetition. When we are taking action to grow in our relationship with God and then put that faith into repeated action, then there is nothing that can sway us from bringing glory to God. Let us not be deceived, “God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” (Galatians 6:7-10)

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ughNHPTgU2Q&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=44>

Question

Pick an action you typically do or tradition you follow when worshipping God. What does the Bible have to say about it? Take time this week to find out.

45. Righteous Resolutions

How do you make peace with someone who does not want peace?

At first the relationship between King Saul and David was great. Starting off, David became the king's armor bearer and played the lyre to help Saul feel renewed after a harmful spirit would overtake him (1 Sam. 16:14-23). Then he killed Goliath in battle and fought successfully against the Philistines everywhere Saul sent him. 1 Samuel 18:5 says, "So, Saul set him over the men of war. And this was good in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants." The story sounds like the start to an epic friendship, but then Saul starts becoming jealous of David's success. His envy drove him to attempt to kill David several times, but they all failed because the Lord was with David.

By 1 Samuel 20, David approaches the king's son Jonathan, feeling that there is no hope for his and Saul's relationship. After hearing David, Johnathan is at first in denial. However, Johnathan is a righteous man and decides that he will do what he can to find out a definite answer for David. Johnathan approaches his father and as the topic of David gets discussed, Saul says, "Therefore send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die." Johnathan then warns David of his father's murderous intent. Thus, begins David's journey on the run from Saul.

David flees from Saul's pursuit by hiding in caves and going from town to town. Amidst this, David even has two opportunities to kill Saul. The first time, David simply cuts the corner of Saul's robe to prove that he is not against Saul. Saul is so touched by David's actions that in 1 Samuel 24:18 he says, "And you have declared this day how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the Lord put me into your hands. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safe? So may the Lord reward you with good for what you have done to

me this day.” Saul then proceeds to ask David the favor of not killing off his house when David is King, to which David agrees. The next time, David and some men snuck into Saul’s camp and they found everyone asleep because of the Lord. David’s men encouraged him to kill Saul but David replied, “As the Lord lives, the Lord will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should put out my hand against the Lord's anointed. But take now the spear that is at his head and the jar of water, and let us go” (1 Samuel 26:10-11). After letting Saul live the second time, David left Israel to live amongst the Philistines. There he learned about the death of Saul and Johnathan at the hands of the Philistine army.

A person would normally relish in the demise of their enemy. Especially if they did not do anything to provoke them. David, however, recognized Saul for who he truly was, the Lord’s anointed. Therefore, He mourned the death of his enemy just as much as he would have for a friend. Everyone on this Earth has been personally created by our Father in Heaven. Romans 2:11 says, “For God shows no partiality.” Children of God should not let conflict distract them from His truth. David never did anything to warrant Saul’s wrath; all he ever did was serve Saul to the best of his ability. Even though Saul tried to take his life multiple times, David left vengeance to the Lord, he trusted Him completely. Trusting God and treating your enemies according to His standards entails taking action, just not sinful action. David’s actions included: turning to God in prayer, seeking help from his friends, and fleeing from Saul. Yet, David did not lash out at Saul. He also didn’t seek revenge on Saul or Israel when he was amongst the Philistines. David did not let conflict cloud his heart from God’s teachings, and neither should we.

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lk-kSmzdVk&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=45>

Question

Is there anyone you struggle to forgive? Why do you find it harder to forgive them compared to others?

46. Wrestling With the Devil

What image comes to mind when you think the devil and his evil? A little red guy on your shoulder with horns and a pitch fork? A person? The government, or society? This world? Ephesians 6:12 says, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Evil’s original state is not tangible, but because we live in a physical world it will commonly be revealed as such. This is one potential reason why people created the phrase, “hate the sin not the sinner.” Combating evil will require us to see a person as more than just a sum of their sins. Following Christ doesn’t mean we excuse another’s sinful decisions, but it also entails that we have compassion for a heart that is struggling against its temptations.

After the church of Corinth informed Paul of a member of their church who committed an offense against them, the apostle replied, “The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him.” (2 Cor. 2:6-8) Paul continues in the next few verses to say that his reply was intended to reaffirm how the Christians in Corinth should conduct themselves when a person repents upon a mistake. Satan will use his lies to sway our emotional state and outwit us from obeying Christ’s teachings (2 Cor. 2:11).

When Paul was a practicing Pharisee, the devil preyed on his emotions to sway him from God’s truth. In Acts 26:9-11 he wrote, “On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord’s people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.

Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.” Regardless of the methodology the devil used to sway Paul, he must have been acting on his emotional state.

One of the devil’s biggest lies is that he has a physical form. Humans are merely vessels, but unlike pots, we get to choose what we hold inside of us. The weapons used to defend our hearts and minds from the devil aren’t tangible because you can’t physically fight lies. You combat lies by using the truth. Satan’s lies are demolished when we uphold God’s loving truth above all else. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 says, “For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

Podcast Link

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Elx_G4p-MA&list=PLLvjtVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=46

Question

Is there anyone you have falsely accused, blamed, or spoken poorly of that you have not reconciled with?

47. Building Your Spiritual Wall

Many people believe that meditation requires an emptying of the mind, but this is not true. Meditation is an exercise of the mind where a person is focused on only one thing. When someone meditates on God, that person thinks, eats, sleeps, and breathes His word. Psalm 119:15 reads, “I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways.”

In Matthew 7:24-27 Jesus Christ says, “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” The Bible records this parable right after Jesus’ teaching about spiritually hypocritical people—false teachers and disciples. If someone wants their relationship with God to be a solid wall against the devil, then their communication and meditation with Him should be strong.

As we meditate on God and His righteous ways, we are also to build good communication with Him. This is important in any relationship because it helps build trust. Jesus says that we should be praying like this, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”(Matthew 6:9-13) Children of God who trust Him understand that God works according to His will and nothing else. He is not like a

vending machine where people put in their prayer and get what they desire. Prayer is a way to honestly and safely express our hearts. When used in conjunction with meditation it is a great focusing tool that helps to recenter and recommit our entire beings to Christ and His teachings.

Meditation and Communication are individual forms of action that aid us in growing our relationship with God. James 1:22-24 says, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.” Acting like Christ is one of the best ways we can solidify our knowledge of Him into our thoughts and hearts. As we work on our personal relationship with God we should also remember to shine His love and light throughout our communities.

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OcO6Zpc4ADA&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=47>

Question

On average, how often do you meditate about God and His teachings outside of church?

48. Staying Mindful of our True Priority

Have you ever walked into a room with a goal, but after entering it you get distracted? Satan and the world around us are trying to distract us from Christ's purpose every single day. However, the devil's plan can only succeed if we allow it to.

After Jesus fed the crowd of 5,000, He had His disciples journey across the sea of Galilee while He dismissed the crowd. Matthew 14:25-27 then reads, "In the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, 'It is a ghost!' and they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.'" In response, the apostle Peter tells Jesus, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." The Lord asks Peter to come to Him and as Peter starts to walk on the water, a strong wind comes across the sea. Peter's fear of the storm causes him to take his eyes off the Lord and he begins to sink.

How often is the Lord telling us to draw ever nearer to Him, but we get distracted like Peter? How often are we in the presence of our Heavenly Father—at church or in the middle of prayer—and we start to lose our focus?

The prophet Daniel was taken from Judah and brought before King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. His name was changed from Daniel to the Babylonian name Belteshazzar as an act of subjugation. Daniel was able to remain faithful to God because he meditated on God and took actions to strengthen his relationship with Him. In Daniel 1:8-21, Daniel refused to defile his body with the king's food and chose to drink water and vegetables instead. Then in Daniel 2:17-19, he turned to the Lord for mercy so that he would be able to interpret the king's dreams and

not be destroyed with the other wise men. Daniel 6:10 also reads, “He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.” Whether he was facing tremendous hardships or rewards, Daniel gave God the accreditation He is due and put in the effort to have Him on his mind.

Romans 12:2 reads, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Keeping our thoughts and actions focused on God is an everyday battle. Luckily, we are not fighting our spiritual fight alone. After Peter began to sink, Matthew 30-31 says, “he cried out, ‘Lord, save me.’ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’” We are going to have moments of distraction. There is nothing wrong with that; so long as we choose to be like Peter and turn back our focus. We have an amazing and loving God who gives us the opportunity to repent.

Each day you have the choice to make Christ your priority. Will you choose to seize that opportunity?

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=do3p10tPPOk&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=48>

Question

When you lose focus from God during prayer, what do you most often think about? What do you think you can do to lessen this distraction?

49. Friendship with Jesus

Proverbs 27:6 (NIV) reads, “Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.” A friend will always try have your best interests in mind, even if it might not seem like it in given moments. However, a self-interested friend will probably try to be overly affectionate to avert suspicion. Matthew 26:48-50 (NIV) says, “Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: ‘The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.’ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ and kissed him.” Jesus replies to Judas’ introduction by saying, “Do what you came for, friend.”

The world is going to tell you to, “Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.” This quote implies that people need to have their enemies by their side because of their own self-interests and preservation. In Matthew 26:50, the Greek root word for “friend” that Jesus uses is *hetairos*—a self-interested companion, an imposter, a fake friend.⁵ Jesus using the word “*hetairos*” indicates that He was trying to do the same thing, right? False! Jesus does not act like the world because He is not of this world (John 17:14). If Jesus kept Judas around because of self-preservation then He would have stopped His arrest and avoided His crucifixion. Jesus wasn’t naïve regarding Judas. He purely loved God and His commandments above all else.

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus taught one of God’s commands when He said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.” Jesus knew that Judas was going to betray Him, yet He washed his dirty feet and lovingly guided him to God by example

⁵ Jesus also uses this word to describe Judas in two other instances: Matthew 20:13 and Matthew 22:12.

and through correction.⁶ Jesus knew that loving God and obeying His commands was the only way to be victorious over evil (Romans 8:31-39).

Everyone has the opportunity to become conquerors over all things by bathing in the waters of baptism and being close friends with Christ. In John 15:14 Jesus says, “You are my friends if you do what I command you.” Jesus made God His first priority and put His interests above any kind of selfishness. Every day you can choose to love God and obey His commands with the compassionate strength that Jesus did, but only if you are willing to be a true friend of His.

Podcast Link

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-O-c8xao_GQ&list=PLlvTjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=49

Question

How well do you handle constructive criticism from a friend?

⁶ An example of Jesus correcting Judas is in John 12:1-11

50. Daily Love for God

At least for a little bit, does your heart long for God each day? In Revelations 3:15 God tells the Laodicean church, “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.” The Laodiceans failed to realize that physical provisions are nothing in comparison to the eternal sustenance that God provides. They also were acting on the commands of the Lord, but they were doing so with a listless attitude.

Hosea 6:6 reads, “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” While it would be correct to say that children of God show their love for Him by acting on His commands, it is also true that those actions mean nothing unless they are done with a righteous motivation. The apostle Paul explained righteous motivation in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 when he wrote, “If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.” In the next few verses of 1 Corinthians 13, Paul describes the properties of the righteous love we should be striving toward as Christians.⁷

⁷ 1 Cor. 13:4-7, “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

God's only son and perfect child, Jesus Christ, exemplified God's righteous love to the point of death. Ephesians 5:1-2 states, "Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Jesus dedicated His existence to glorifying, teaching, and obeying God. He tells us to do the same in the two greatest commands: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength...Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30-31).

In John 15:1-11, Jesus tells us that His love is the same as God's because they are one. God's children should be making Him a part of their daily lives if they are to abide in His love by truly obeying His commands with their entire being (Romans 12:1-2). The goal of bringing glory to God is not something to be rushed. To truly love yourself or another being takes time. For love is grown and compounded in the daily selfless actions, more so than dramatically grandiose gestures.

Podcast Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5JnZbNlbyKY&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=50>

Question

Do you incorporate God into your daily life? How? What is another way you can?

51. Created Children in His Image

Psalm 139:13-16 explains how God carefully and lovingly knitted your soul and body piece by piece. No part of you is hidden from God because you were “fearfully and wonderfully made” by Him (Ps. 139:14). The Hebrew words for “fearfully” and “wonderfully” are “yare” and “palah”. In the context of Psalm 139, “yare” means to be awed and “palah” means distinct. Thus verse 14 is to be read as, “I praise you, for I am awe-inspiringly and uniquely made.” God loves you and If you want your existence to be pleasing to Him, then you first need to be baptized.

1 Peter 3:21 reads, “Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Baptism is much more than simply submerging ourselves in water, or a symbolic act of our sins being cleansed. When a person is baptized, they pledge themselves to God and recognize that they are a beloved child created in His image. Therefore they pledge their lives to God, promising to let Him transform their entire being so that they can daily carry out His will. Think of baptism as opening the gate to God’s path of salvation, and daily living according to His principles as choosing to walk down His road.

Each person is designed by God to daily spread His love throughout the world in her or his own unique way. The two greatest commands that God wants His children to live by are in Luke 10:27, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” If you are to love God with your entire being, then you first must stop your sinful thoughts and actions. Then you have to choose to

abide in Christ and act on His teachings. Ephesians 4:22-24 says, "To put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

Every person on this Earth is a God given neighbor that has been created in His image. Thus, God's children should act in a righteous manner that brings glory to Him and is becoming of His image. God shows no partiality and neither should His children. The Bible teaches that when you are righteously compassionate toward your neighbor, then you are reciprocating the love God has shown you. 1 John 4:7-11 explains that God showed His love for His children by sending His son, Jesus Christ, to become a living sacrifice to redeem us from sin. Therefore, when we dedicate our lives to loving others by way of His teachings, He is glorified and the love He showed us is made complete.

With each daily decision that you make you have the choice to exemplify God's righteous attributes. If you want to bring glory to God then Colossians 3:12-17 says to "put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 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."

Podcast Link

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zbp6UuSLtwo&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxK
PZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=51](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zbp6UuSLtwo&list=PLLvtjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=51)

Question

Spend some time identifying biases you have. How can you keep them from hindering you from shining God's light to others?

52. Priceless to God

When you look in a mirror, what do you see? Often what we see are imperfections that should be changed and improved. The outward appearance for many people is the start of their self-esteem or the worth that they place upon themselves. God, however, places value on the inward heart and soul of a person, instead of outward appearances (1 Sam. 16:7). Mankind often believes that one's wealth, fame, attractiveness, professional status, and other physical attributes determines their personal value. Vanity is just one tool that the devil uses in our society to distract us from God.

Matthew 4:1-11 tells the account of Jesus being tempted by the devil in the wilderness. When the devil tempted Jesus for the third time, he promised Him the entire world. Yet, Jesus denied all the physical attributes and riches of the world because He would not place them, or the devil before God. The apostle Paul accentuates a relationship with God being of more worth than physical gain when he says, "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ." (Phil. 3:8)

Having a relationship with Christ is invaluable to us because He knows our true worth and saved us from eternal suffering. Psalm 49:5-8 says, "Why should I fear in times of trouble, when the iniquity of those who cheat me surrounds me, those who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches? Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice, that he should live on forever never see the pit." God

created you and you are so valuable to Him that He sent His only son to die that you can live a life of eternal peace.

Formerly, each person on Earth was separated from Christ, having no hope of peace due to the debt of sin that separated mankind from God. Jesus paid our debt with God by shedding His divine blood (1 Peter 1:3-5). This act gave us access to God's Holy Spirit, which gives you the choice to become unified with God in this life and the next. Every soul was beautifully created to display the love which God showed them first through their own acts of righteously good works (1 John 4:19). Accomplishing good works shows our obedience to God and indicates where we believe true value lies.

Podcast Link

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_3HI8bV8qk&list=PLLvTjVCNIPxKPZnVnRS0EwU6zdXd89zA1&index=52

Question

Who is someone you value because of their inner person? What about them do you value? What are things they value about you?

Afterword

Congratulations!!! You spent a whole year growing your relationship with God and meditating on Him. We hope you have learned something new about Him and yourself. Know that God and His church are always there to help you in life. If there is any way we can help you get closer to God, please go to youarefromgod.com and send us a message through the connect tab. Thank you for your effort in making it to the end of this devotional. May the Lord bless you as you continue on your walk with Him, and always know that You are from God!

Stay safe and God Bless,
Scott, Tyler, and Forrest

About the Author

Forrest Theiss was allergic to writing and reading growing up. However, when he and his twin brother Daniel went to enlist in the military during their senior year of high school, they discovered they had a rare genetic condition. After many surgeries, years of being in and out of the hospital, and becoming paralyzed, Forrest found hope in Christ. In late September 2015, he was baptized. Soon after, he began writing for his church and pursuing other creative hobbies as a way to grow with God and uplift others through their challenges in life.

He currently lives in a more rural suburb of Cincinnati with Sarah, the love of his life, and her family. They have 40 chickens, 3 geese, and 3 dogs, and he gets to watch it all from his bedroom window as he is writing.

To read more about Scott and Tyler go to our church website at:
<https://www.westmasonchurchofchrist.org/about/preachers>

Other Works by the Author

You Are From God Devotional 2

Questing for God (A Devotional for Tweens)