

**Devotions – December 4-10, 2016**

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**Sunday, December 4, 2016**

The Bitterness Prison

Text: Matthew 6:14

**“If you forgive others for their sins, your Father in heaven will also forgive you for your sins.”**

Bitterness is its own dungeon. The walls are slippery with resentment. A floor of muddy anger makes the feet slip. The stench of betrayal fills the air and stings the eyes. A thick cloud of self-pity blocks the view of the tiny exit above.

Step in and peruse the prisoners. Victims are chained to the walls...victims of betrayal... victims of abuse...victims of countless put-downs...

This dungeon, deep and dark, is beckoning you to enter. ... You can, you know. You’ve experienced enough hurt...You can choose, like many, to chain yourself to your hurt...or, you can choose, like some, to put away your hurts before they become hates...

How does God deal with your bitter heart? He reminds you that what you have is far more important than what you don’t have. You still have your relationship with Him. No one can take that from you.

Let us pray: *Dear Father, I have been in the prison of bitterness. I ask for Your help to deal with this and to step away from it. I trust You will help. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.*



**Monday, December 5, 2016**

Finding Good in the Bad

Text: Romans 12:14

**“Wish good for those who harm you; wish them well, and do not curse them.”**

It was pretty hard to find someone worse than Judas. Some say he was a good man with a back-fired strategy. I don’t buy that. The Bible says, “Judas . . . was a thief.” (John 12:6) The man was a crook. Somehow he was able to live in the presence of God, experience the miracles of Jesus, and still remain unchanged. In the end, he decided he’d rather have money than a friend, so he sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver...Judas was a scoundrel, a cheat, and a bum. How could anyone see him any other way?

I don't know, but Jesus did. Only inches from the face of his betrayer, Jesus looked at him and said, "Friend, do what you came to do." (Matthew 26:50) What Jesus saw in Judas as worthy of being called "friend" I can't imagine. But I do know that Jesus does not lie, and in that moment He saw something good in a very bad man: His child. Child of God, He can help us do the same with those who hurt us.

Let us pray: *Dear Lord, You know the people who have hurt me. Yet, You ask that I call them "friend." Give me help to do this ... and to mean it. In Jesus' name I ask this. Amen.*



**Tuesday, December 6, 2016**

Know your Knack

Text: Galatians 6:14

**"Make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourself into it."**

God does not prefab or mass-produce people. There is no slap-dash shaping. "I make all things new," He declares in Revelations 2:5. He didn't hand you your grandfather's bag or your aunt's life. He personally and deliberately packed you.

You can do something no one else can do in a fashion no one else can do. Exploring and extracting can excite you, honor God, and help expand His kingdom. So, "make a careful exploration of what you are and what you have been given, and then sink yourself into that."

Discover and explore your knacks . . . the special things you do. When you do the most of what you do best, you put a smile on God's face. What could be better than that?

Let us pray: *Dear Father, You alone know all of my knacks. I praise and thank you for having made me "me." Unfold ways in which I can serve You and others. I believe You will continue to show me people and persons to whom I might witness. Amen.*



**Wednesday, December 7, 2016**

When Hopes Don't Happen

What do we do with our disappointments? We can do what Miss Havesham did. Remember her in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*? She was jilted by her fiancée just before the wedding. She closed all the blinds in the house, stopped every clock, left the wedding cake on the table to gather cobwebs, and wore her wedding dress until it hung in yellow decay around her shrunken form. Her wounded heart consumed her life.

We can follow the same course OR we can follow the example of the Apostle Paul. His goal was to be a missionary in Spain. However, God sent him to prison. Sitting in a dank Roman jail, Paul could have made the same choice as Miss Haversham, but he didn't. Instead he said, "As long as I'm here, I might as well write a few letters." Hence, our Bible has the Epistles to Philemon, the Philippians, the Colossians, and the Ephesians. . . A positive response to disappointment brings joy to our lives and gives glory to God.

Let us pray: *Dear Lord, when our hopes don't happen, show us other ways of bringing joy to ourselves and glory to You. Amen.*



**Thursday, December 8, 2016**

Guard the Gateway

Text: I Peter 5:8-9

**"The devil, your enemy, goes around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to eat. Refuse to give in to him by standing strong in your faith."**

You've got to admit, some of our hearts are trashed out. Let any riffraff knock on the door, and we throw it open. Anger shows up, and we let him in. Revenge needs a place to stay, so we have him pull up a chair. Pity wants to have a party, so we show him to the kitchen. Lust rings the bell, and we change the sheets on the bed. Don't we know how to say "NO"?

Many don't. For most of us, managing our thoughts is, well, not thought of. We concern ourselves with time management, weight management, personnel management, even scalp management. Shouldn't we be as concerned about managing our thoughts as we are about managing everything else? Jesus was. Like a trained soldier at the gate of a city, He stood watch over His mind. He stubbornly guarded the gateway of His heart. . . .If He did, shouldn't we?

Let us pray: *Dear Lord Jesus, help us to guard the gateway to our minds. We need Your strength to keep our hearts from welcoming trash. Amen.*



**Friday, December 9, 2016**

Some Days Never Come

Text: I John 4:12

**"If you love each other, God lives in us, and His love is made perfect in us."**

SOMEDAY. The enemy of risky love is a snake whose tongue has mastered the talk of deception. “Someday,” he hisses. “Someday I can take her on the cruise.” “Someday I will have time to call and chat.” “Someday the children will understand why I was always so busy.”

But we know the truth, don’t we? You know it before I write it. You could say it better than I.

Some days never come. The price of practicality is sometimes much higher than the cost of extravagance. But the reward of risky love is always greater than its cost.

Make the effort. Invest the time. Write the letter. Make the apology. Take the trip. Purchase the gift. . . Just do it. The seized opportunity presents wondrous joy. The neglected brings deep regret.

Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, You know the many things I have been putting off until another day. Give me the perseverance to make these sources of joy and service to others. Amen.*



**Saturday, December 10, 2016**

What Do You Treasure Most?

Text: Matthew 6:21

**“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”**

If your house was burning down and you could only save one thing, what would it be? It’s a decision made every day, and it’s never easy. There will always be things we grieve about giving up because of their essential value in our lives. If you want to know what yours are, look at how you spend your time and your money. It’s a dead give-away. Jesus said, “Where your treasure is ... you will most want to be.” Your ‘treasure’ can be relationships you would do anything to keep, a career that is central to your identity, or your investments for the future. These things are fine, indeed. The Bible says that wise people look ahead and plan. But it is where you are investing in eternity that really matters. “The rich young ruler asked Jesus, ‘What shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ ... Jesus said ... ‘Sell all you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and, come, follow Me.’” But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.” (Luke 18:18-23) In essence, Jesus was asking this man who was rich and successful, “Would you give it all up to follow Me? Would you forfeit it for a few years in order to have much more for eternity? Instead of building a career, would you spend your life building My kingdom?” Jesus wants to be “front and center” in your life. And when you put Him there, He promises, “All your other needs will be met s well.” (Matthew 6:33) Are you willing to put Him to the test?

Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, I now realize that my most prized treasure is not something but Someone! In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

