

..... Daily Devotions

January 6-12, 2019
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Sunday, January 6, 2019

Text: *Habakkuk 2:3 Living Bible (TLB)*

“But these things I plan won’t happen right away. Slowly, steadily, surely, the time approaches when the vision will be fulfilled. If it seems slow, do not despair, for these things will surely come to pass. Just be patient! They will not be overdue a single day!”

Waiting, it is one of the most difficult tasks in life. We wait anxiously for the arrival of our beautiful babies, or we wait nervously for the test results we are not sure we want to see. We wait in both anticipation and anxiety, delight and disparity, merriment and mourning. But still we wait.

Time has a way of standing still while we wait, in both the good and the bad. Waiting just seems to have a way of making us take a “time out”, time to understand the complexity of the situation or quite possibly the simplicity to the situation.

This is the true beauty of God’s great plan. I truly believe that God wants us to understand (earthly understanding anyway) that He has control, that He has had everything figured out long before we were born. He wants us to understand that there is a valid, wonderful reason why He is making us wait. The key is to trust in His timing and rely on His promises. (Proverbs 3:5)

If you’re waiting on something today, whether it’s been a few days or a few years, know that God is still there, listening to you, holding you, loving you. He is just working through His plan to make your life everything He knew it was going to be. While you wait, prayerfully thank Him for the challenges, talk to Him often, and know that He is listening to every single word you are saying.

Let us pray: *Father today, let me find peace in waiting, on whatever it may be. Let me praise You as You compose Your master plan for my life.*



Monday, January 7, 2019

Text: *Romans 12:6-8 (NLT)*

“In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So, if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.”

This verse deeply challenges me to examine the gifts God has given me, and then question what obstacles are holding me back from using these gifts to the best of my ability. Maybe it's because life is busy. There always seems to be too much to do and not nearly enough time to do it all. If you're anything like me, you are constantly trying to balance a million different tasks without dropping the proverbial ball. I can't help but wonder how all this busyness stands in the way of all the work we could be completing for the Kingdom. Maybe we need to try to find a way to silence the chaos, to take a breather and discern what's truly important.

Or maybe it is fear, a deep fear that we may never do what we are called to do “good enough.” I know there are days when self-doubt and uncertainty can creep in and make me believe that I am just too small of a person to ever make a difference, but that is so far from the truth. I know the Word tells me that I am perfectly and wonderfully made, equipped with every single gift that I need to make the impact He has planned for my life.

Whatever it is that stands in your way, whatever it is that is holding you back, bring it to God. Talk to Him about it, He already knows every hesitation we have, and He is there to help us and give us the confidence we need share these wonderful gifts within our world. He is a wonderful, loving God who will encourage us to be great for His Glory!

Let us pray: *Father today, let me experience a God-centered confidence that allows me to fully embrace all the gifts you have given to me!*



Tuesday, January 8, 2019

Text: Acts 4:31 (NIV)

“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”

When reflecting on the Book of Acts I can't help but think about how challenging it must have been to establish and spread the word of the first Church in those early days, to be the Church in a very different time. Their mission was successful because it was one of pure passion that came from their personal relationship with Jesus Christ and their deep connection with the Holy Spirit. Unlike the early days, our world today is filled with an abundance of ways to communicate the Good News. We are inundated with social platforms: Tweets from Presidents, posts from celebrities, media unending. And yet, at times, we seem to be much less effective at spreading God's truth than these men were, traveling by foot in a much more difficult time.

Maybe it's because this technology that we have at our finger tips also has a way of pulling us away from our relationship with Him. This technology can be a gift, if used correctly, but all too often we get sucked into its downfalls. We find ourselves at war with those we love over something that's unimportant. We find it easy to be harsh and forfeit grace when we don't have to look someone in the eye. And we can easily pass judgment on a situation we know very little about.

Maybe, like Paul and the apostles, we need to find a way to deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. To build a personal relationship that will ignite a passion within us. A passion to offer grace more, judge less, and love deeper. Maybe we need to bring things back to a simpler time where we can focus on what is truly important. To cut out the constant noise and spend quiet time strengthening our relationship with the One who loves us more than we will ever understand.

Let us pray: *Father today, let me focus on You, on Your word. Help me to follow Christ's example by offering grace more, judging less, and loving deeper. Help me to be a living example of Your love for me.*



Wednesday, January 9, 2019

Text: *Psalm 40:17 (MSG)*

“And me? I’m a mess. I’m nothing and have nothing: make something of me. You can do it; you’ve got what it takes – but God, don’t put it off.”

During the holidays we had a few gatherings at our house. And as much as I love seeing friends and family come together, I also tend to have some anxiety about the state of my home. It's a big house, but it doesn't seem nearly big enough to contain the 6 people who live there and all the clutter that goes with them. As we were diligently preparing, arranging, and cleaning, I found myself shoving an array of things into a closet off my kitchen. Out of sight out of mind, right? (Praying no one looked in there.)

As the closet became fuller, I began to think about how I tend to do this with my heart too, with my personal, emotional mess.

It is so much easier for me to shove my mess down deep inside, to a place where hopefully no one can see it. To haphazardly hide the clutter, hoping it will just go away. To push the uneasy feelings away, out of sight out of mind. But the problem with this practice is that eventually we are going to have to open that door. Depending upon how much mess we've shoved in that space, there's a good chance that once the door is opened, the mess will pour out uncontrollably. Maybe, one of the most important parts of being a Christian, about being the Church, is that we do our best **not** to hide our messes away or confine them to a space that will eventually become too crowded and overflow. That we find comfort in being transparent and learn to love one another despite the mess.

We are part of a wonderful Church family, a family that offers grace, love, and hope. And no matter how it appears, you can be certain that each member of this family has mess and clutter, no one is exempt from this. Sure, in the moment it seems easier to just hide the mess, but this is not a long-term solution. When we expose our messes to others: our anger, our sadness, our disappointment, and our insecurities, we will find that we are not alone. We will begin to understand that the love of God far exceeds any mess we could try to hide. We will begin to see that God is able to help us clean up this mess, one room at a time because He "has what it takes". We will become approachable to those who are not so familiar with the Church, and we will be walking examples of God's unending grace and mercy. Then and only then are we able bring this message to the world, that we are all imperfectly human, and despite our imperfection, God's love for us will never change.

Let us pray: *Father today, let me find peace in revealing the areas of my life that are uneasy for me. Let me find peace in being transparent with those around me. Let me be a living example of your unending grace and mercy.*



Thursday, January 10, 2019

Text: *Psalm 139:16 (MSG)*

Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth; all the stages of my life were spread out before you, the days of my life all prepared before I'd even lived one day.

Living the real-life stages of our relationship with Christ.

My husband and I have 3 children. Over the years we have learned that there are many, many stages that kids go through. We have a 4-year-old who is in the “tantrum stage”, especially when she hears the word NO. I know from experience that this will pass, but when you're a mom trying to tame your toddler at the local Piggly Wiggly, it's undeniable that your face will turn red as you scramble out the door with the little one over your shoulder. We have a 12-year-old who is at a stage where she is beginning to really grasp that there are consequences for her actions; not studying for a test will probably result in an F. It's difficult to watch this stage, because although failure is a huge part of personal growth, we still hate to see our kids fail. We also have a 17-year-old. He is at a stage where he is getting ready to “do” life on his own. We rarely have to tell him when he messes up and he is pretty quick to accept responsibility for his actions and learn from both the good and bad choices. I am proud of the young man he is becoming.

We all go through stages. Just as children, we too have these stages in our relationship with Christ. I wonder how often God wants to throw us over His shoulder and carry us away when we throw a tantrum because we didn't get our way. Or if His heart breaks as He watches us fail a test that we chose not to prepare for, when He must watch us suffer through a long day, or month, or year. Or if He feels a bit of pride when we can instantly own up to our mistakes and ask for forgiveness without hesitation. It seems that these stages can come and go in life, especially when we fall away from our relationship with Him. When we talk to Him less and get wrapped up in our earthly problems. When we try to shoulder our burdens on our own, we can easily revert back to the “toddler” stages.

"It's just a stage" they tell us as we're raising our babies but really, life is full of stages, not just of growing physically but of growing in our faith. Stages of our relationship with Christ. I can remember early days of faith when I had a difficult time understating what faith was all about. Before I saw Him work in my life, before I really read scripture, before I gave Him the glory for all the good that surrounds me. I am happy to say that the stage I'm in right now with God is one of comfort, of strong faith. I have seen Him work and I fully understand that everything I have is due to His undeniable **mercy and grace**. Not that there's never a difficult time, not that I don't have days when I err (sometimes terribly), not that there aren't days when I'm discouraged, but even on the bad days, ultimately, I know the good in my life outnumbers the bad by a landslide! Stages, oh the stages we go through. And through it all our Father never waivers in His desire to love and support us despite of all our blunders. The perfect love of a Father.

Let us pray: *Father today, let me reflect upon my life and all the stages You and I have been through together. Thank you for offering your unending mercy and grace through every stage of my relationship with You.*



Friday, January 11, 2019

Text: 1 John 4:19 (MSG)

“We, though, are going to love—love and be loved. First we were loved, now we love. He loved us first.”

I recently saw a conversation on social media that asked how to win God’s favor. To paraphrase the person asked, what do I have to do I make Him love me? I never did comment on that post because I couldn’t think of a way to explain the concept of God’s love in words that were simple yet could encompass the full concept of God’s love for every single one of us. I could have written paragraphs and yet at that moment, I couldn’t find the right words to express the notion that we need to do nothing, absolutely nothing, for God to love us.

The deep love of God is extraordinary, so extraordinary that it can be hard to perceive. Even as I spend time in scripture and prayer there are still many moments when I cannot fully encompass the concept of His love for me. God loves us all, unconditionally, equally. He doesn’t love you because your actions are better than others, or you pray more than others, or you give more than others. He doesn’t love you more today than yesterday or than He will tomorrow. Simply put, He doesn’t love you more than He loves anyone else. He doesn’t love you because you have earned His love, or you have done something to please Him. He simply loves you. And if you want to really get deep, He loves your rival as much as He loves you. It is an unrestricted, unexplainable, and unending love. It is a love that is almost unimaginable and a concept that is almost impossible to harness.

I must say that coming to know and understand His love for me and others has had a great impact on my life. There are people in life who seem to have a knack for pushing my buttons, the person who frustrates me, and the person I want to run from in the grocery store. But once I began to recognize that God loves them just as much as he loves me, I was floored. If God loves them, shouldn’t I? Even though they frustrate me, or at times drive me crazy, shouldn’t I do my best to love them? Shouldn’t I try to respect them, no matter what our differences are? Shouldn’t I try my best to follow the example of my Savior? It is easier said than done, and I fail at it daily, but the voice of the Holy Spirit tells me to keep going, keep trying. To love when I don’t want to and respect when it seems impossible. What an awesome gift we have been given through the sacrifice of our Savior!

Let us pray: *Father today, I thank you for your unending love. Please keep reminding me that this love is not just for me but for everyone. Let me find joy in the differences and learn to love more like You.*



Saturday, January 12, 2019

Text: *Isaiah 58:7*

“Share your food with the hungry and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help.”

We are called to act, Galatians 6 tells us to “not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t give up”. We are called to keep going, keep helping, keep loving despite our weariness. And it is easy to become weary in this world. There seems to be so much hatred, so much conflict, so much tension. This hatred, conflict, and tension can easily make us believe that our outreach is not doing any bit of good, but it is. You may never really know how many lives you touch by sharing your food, or donating your clothes, or by simply helping someone in need, but your impact is endless. And it can get tiresome, it can be easy to judge those who have less than us or live differently than us. It can be easy to say that they should work harder or somehow find a way to change their situation. But the simplicity of the situation is this: just by being a light, by being an example of Christ, we may be the one that gives someone the courage to take that leap of faith.

We are blessed, we are surely blessed. Sometimes we recognize these blessings and sometimes we don’t, but no matter where we are in life, we are blessed. We are blessed by the wonderful gift of Jesus, who was born human, who knows our every emotion. We are blessed with a Father who gave the ultimate sacrifice to ensure His children would be saved from their own demise. And we are blessed by the presence of the Holy Spirit, who so gently guides us through this journey we call life. These blessings are ultimately God serving us, loving us. Eugene Peterson’s *Message* translation of 1 John 3:16-17 says it perfectly:

This is how we’ve come to understand and experience love: Christ sacrificed his life for us. This is why we ought to live sacrificially for our fellow believers, and not just be out for ourselves. If you see some brother or sister in need and have the means to do something about it but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God’s love? It disappears. And you made it disappear.

It can be hard to serve others, and it can be tiresome, but don’t give up. Jesus was a perfect example of what servant leadership should look like. He gave everything to serve you and I, He gave more than needed and more than we deserved. What a blessing this is, and what a joy it should be to reflect that blessing into the world around us.

Let us pray: *Father today, let me take time to step back and see all the blessings you have bestowed upon me. Let me find ways to pass these blessings on to those around me, to be an example of Christ to the world without growing weary.*

