

Devotions – September 27 – October 3, 2020
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Sunday, September 27, 2020

Finding the Way Home

Text: II Corinthians 1:4

“(God) comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”

Sometimes this journey can be so difficult that we simply become overwhelmed; it seems there’s no end to the darkness. During such a time in our own family’s life, my husband emerged one morning from some quiet time with a new lesson learned. “I think God wants us **not** to forget in the light what we’re learning in this darkness.”

Paul writes this same thought to the Corinthians, often describing the hard times he and his group endured in Asia. Paul wants the Corinthians to understand how God can redeem even our darkest moments. We’re comforted, he says, so we may learn how to comfort others. Paul and his team were learning things from God during their trials that they could use to comfort the Corinthians when they faced similar troubles. God does that for us, as well, if we’re willing to listen. He will redeem our trials by teaching us how to use what we’ve learned in them to minister to others.

Are you in darkness now? Be encouraged by Paul’s words and experiences. Trust that God is right now directing your steps and that he is also etching his truths on your hearts so you can share them with others who are in similar circumstances. You’ve been there before, and you know the way home.

Let us pray: *Father, help those who are hurting today, so that they may see and know your loving presence in their darkest hours. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.*



Monday, September 28, 2020

Is it Good for You?

Text: Psalm 119:68

“You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees.”

Because I like dark chocolate, I once googled “Is dark chocolate good for you?” I got such a variety of results – some good, some not-so-much. (You can do the same for just about any food product.) There is an incredible array of answers to such food questions, so the search itself may give you a headache.

But, if you’re looking for something that’s 100% good for you all the time, may I recommend the Word of God? Listen to what it can do for the follower of Jesus, who is seeking to build a solid relationship with him:

- It can keep you pure. (Psalm 119:9, 11)
- It can bless you. (Luke 11:28)
- It makes you wise. (Matthew 7:24)
- It gives light and understanding. (Psalm 119:130)
- It helps you grow spiritually. (I Peter 2:2)

“The Lord is good to all,” says Psalm 145:9. And in his goodness, he’s provided those who love him with a guide that helps us see how to strengthen our relationship with him. As we decide how to live in a world full of choices, let us praise God that he’s told us in Scripture what’s good for us. Let us say with the Psalmist “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.” (Psalm 119:103)

Let us pray: *Thank you, Lord, for leaving your inspired Word. Help us to read it carefully, interpret it correctly, and to apply it enthusiastically in our lives. Amen.*



Tuesday, September 29, 2020

Walking Backward

Text: Philippians 2:7

“Rather, (Jesus) made himself nothing.”

A friend of mine was quite a fan of author Flannery O’Connor. She told of footage found from a British newsreel crew who filmed her on her family farm in 1932. (Flannery went on to become an acclaimed American writer.) Flannery caught the crew’s curiosity because she’d taught a chicken to walk backwards! Beside the novelty of this trick, this was a glimpse of history and a perfect metaphor. Flannery, because of her literary gifts and her spiritual convictions, spent her time on earth decidedly walking backwards – thinking and writing in a counter-cultural

way. Publishers and readers alike were often puzzled by how her Biblical themes ran counter to the current religious views they were expecting.

A life that runs counter to the norm is inevitable for those who would truly imitate Jesus. Philippians tells us that Jesus, though “His very nature” was God, didn’t move in the predictable ways we would expect. He didn’t use his power “to his advantage,” but “rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant.” Christ, the Lord of creation, gave in to death for the sake of love. He didn’t grab prestige but embraced humility. He didn’t seize power but gave up control. Jesus, in essence, walked backward – counter to the power-driven ways of the world.

Scripture tells us to do the same. Like Jesus, we serve rather than dominate. We move toward humility rather than prominence. We give rather than take. With the help of Jesus, we walk backwards.

Let us pray: *Lord Jesus, help us to live out your example of walking backwards. Amen.*



Wednesday, September 30, 2020

When We Know Who Wins

Text: Revelation 21:4

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes.”

My brother is a huge fan of a particular college basketball team. Last year, they won the national championship, so his son texted him congratulations. The only problem was my brother hadn’t had a chance to watch the final game! He was frustrated, he said, knowing the outcome beforehand. But, he admitted, at least when he watched the game later, he wasn’t nervous when the score stayed close to the end: he knew who won!

We never really know what tomorrow will bring. Some days can feel ordinary and tedious, while other days are filled with joy. Still, other times, life can be grueling, agonizing even, for long periods of time.

Despite life’s unpredictable ups and downs, we can still be securely grounded in God’s peace. This is because, like my brother, we know the end of the story; we know who “wins.”

Revelation, the final book in the Bible, lifts the curtain on that spectacular finale. Following the defeat of death and evil, John describes a glorious victory scene where God makes his home with

his people and “wipes every tear from their eyes” in a world with “no more death or mourning or crying or pain.”

On tough days, we can cling to this promise. There will be no more loss or weeping, no more what-ifs or broken hearts. Instead, we will spend eternity with our Savior. What a glorious celebration that will be!

Let us pray: *Lord, you promise the hope of heaven. We trust that you will soothe every hurt, heal every wound, and wipe away every fear. Thank you. Amen.*



Thursday, October 1, 2020

I Will Fear NO Evil

Text: Psalm 23:4

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”

In 1957, Melba Pattilo Beals was chosen to be one of the “Little Rock Nine,” a group of nine African-American students who first integrated the previously all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. In her 2018 memoir, *I Will Not Fear: My Story of a Life-time of Building Faith Under Fire*, Melba gives a heartbreaking account of the injustices and harassment she struggled to face courageously every day as a fifteen-year-old student.

But she also wrote about her deep faith in God in her darkest moments. When fear almost overwhelmed her, she repeated the familiar Bible verses she had learned at an early age from her grandmother. As she recited them, she was reminded of God’s presence with her, and Scripture gave her courage to endure.

Melba often recited Psalm 23, finding comfort in confessing, “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.” Her grandmother’s encouragement would ring in her ears as well, reassuring her that God “is as close as your skin, and you have only to call on him for help.”

Although our particular situations may vary, we will likely endure life’s struggles and overwhelming times that could easily cause us to give up to fear. In those moments, may your heart find encouragement in the truth that God’s powerful presence is always with us.

Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, when times in my life cause me to fear, help me to remember that you are near, and to find courage in the power of your presence. Amen.*



Friday, October 2, 2020

The Blessing of Encouragers

Text: Acts 9:27

“But Barnabas took (Saul) and brought him to the apostles.”

The 2010 movie *The King’s Speech* tells the story of England’s King George VI, who unexpectedly became monarch when his brother abandoned the throne. With the country on the brink of World War II, government officials wanted a well-spoken leader because of the increasingly influential role of radio. King George VI, however, suffered with a stuttering problem.

I was especially drawn to the film’s portrayal of George’s wife, Elizabeth. Throughout his struggle to overcome his speech difficulty, she was his constant source of encouragement. Her steadfast devotion provided the support he needed to overcome his challenges and rule well during the war.

The Bible highlights the stories of encouragers who gave powerful assistance during challenging times. Moses had Aaron and Hur’s support during Israel’s battles; Elizabeth encouraged her pregnant cousin, Mary.

After his conversion, Paul needed the support of Barnabas, whose name literally means “son of encouragement.” When the disciples were fearful of Paul, Barnabas, at the risk of his own reputation, vouched for him. His endorsement was essential to Paul being welcomed by the Christian community. Barnabas later served as Paul’s traveling and preaching companion. Despite the dangers, they worked together to proclaim the Gospel.

Believers in Jesus are still called to “encourage one another and build each other up.” May we be eager to offer encouragement to help support others, especially as they face difficult circumstances.

Let us pray: *Lord, help us daily to be an encourager of another in you. Amen.*



Saturday, October 3, 2020

Changed

Text: Proverbs 16:3

“Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.”

In *Surprised By Joy*, C. S. Lewis confessed he came to faith at the age of thirty-three, “kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance to escape.” In spite of Lewis’ personal resistance, his shortcomings, and the obstacles he faced, the Lord transformed him into a courageous and quite creative defender of the faith. Lewis proclaimed God’s truth and love through writing powerful essays and novels that are still being read, studied, and shared more than fifty-five years after his life. His life reflected his belief that a person is “never too old to set another goal or dream a new dream.”

As we make plans and follow dreams, God can purify our motives and help us to devote everything we do to him. From the most ordinary tasks to the greatest challenges, we can live for the glory of our Almighty Maker, who “works out everything to its proper end.” Every action, every word, and every thought can become an expression of sincerest worship, a gift and sacrifice to honor our Lord, as he watches over us.

God isn’t limited by our limitations to settle or dream small. As we choose to live for him—dedicated and dependent on him—he will bring about his plans for us. Whatever we do can be done with him, for him, and only because of him.

Let us pray: *Lord God, thank you for reminding us that no jobs are too small and no dreams are too big in your vast kingdom. Amen.*

