

*Encouragement for your*

# **Walk of Faith**

**31 Day Devotional**

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***Encouragement for your Walk of Faith***

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# Day 1



## *Restoring Lost Trust*

Mark Twain once said, “A cat that sits on a hot stove, won’t sit on a hot stove again. He won’t sit on a cold stove either. That cat just don’t like stoves.”

Being burned emotionally is kind of like being burned physically—it takes time for it to heal, it will probably leave a scar and the event seems to be indelibly imprinted on one’s mind.

Many people are like the cat that sat on the hot stove. They’ve been burned, they remember it and they aren’t taking any chances on it happening again. That may be fine and good when it comes to cats and stoves; but when we are talking about human beings it can be disastrous.

A person who does not want to trust anyone else often ends up isolated, bitter and lonely. Those who will not trust God with their lives are far worse off.

As Christians, God meant for us to live out our lives within a “community of faith” in which our lives are united with other believers and with Him in a life of spiritual unity and harmony.

But before we can do that, notice the issues that must be addressed concerning trust. The first of which is, can anyone be trusted anymore? In response to this question, we must not take the cynic’s point of view. We must not allow our point of view to be soured. I realize that that is difficult given the behavior of some. At times even the Psalmist had a problem with feeling that he could trust others. In Psalm 12 David writes, “Help, LORD, for the godly are no more; the faithful have vanished from among men. Everyone lies to his neighbor; their flattering lips speak with deception.” NIV

I will admit, given the opportunity, some people can make one wonder about the trustworthiness of human beings in general. Nevertheless, we cannot afford to cut ourselves off from the world in hopes of not being hurt or disappointed.

It’s plain and simple. People are not perfect. People will fail us. But consider this: sometimes our expectations of others may be unrealistic. In one of his sermons, Haddon Robinson mentioned that Dr. Jerome Frank, at Johns Hopkins, spoke of what he called our “assumptive world.” “What he means is that all of us make assumptions about life, about God, about ourselves, about others, about the way things are. He goes on to argue that when our assumptions are true to reality, we live

relatively happy, well-adjusted lives. But when our assumptions are distant from reality, we become confused and angry and disillusioned.”

Before we convict the world and even God of not being trustworthy—as some have—let us take personal inventory. Ask yourself, are you disillusioned because of false assumptions about the way things were going to be? Was the other person even aware of what you expected? In relation to God, were you really trusting in Him or just assuming that He would take care of things—although you never prayed about the need or His will?

This is an issue that can get complicated. But understand this, failing to develop a healthy understanding about the nature of trust in one’s life and relationships can be disastrous to those relationships as well as to one’s personal happiness.

## Day 2



# *Overcoming a Lack of Trust*

For many, disappointment of one kind or another has become a major obstacle in their relationship with others and with God. The reason lies with the unwillingness or uncertainty of trusting again. “What if I get hurt again?” It is a real possibility with some people. In fact, I have met people who, because of their past actions, should not be trusted. But we usually know these people for who they are. Avoiding dishonest people is usually fairly simple. The problem is that once one has been betrayed or disappointed in a relationship once, one often has a tendency to avoid all relationships of any substance.

This obstacle of disappointment is often made larger when one feels that God should have stepped in and stopped the wrong from ever occurring. When this happens one may feel twice betrayed. However, when feelings of this sort persist, one must remember the truth that God is at work for our good and consider the possibility that God may be using the obstacle in our path to send us in a new and better direction.

Jean Otto wrote, “Have some of your carefully created castles been washed away? Mine have. Several times along my life’s journey, I had nowhere to turn except into my heavenly Father’s arms. There I remained

quiet, soaking up his love for as long as I needed. Then I saw his hand begin a new creation for my life, a new direction, a new service for him and his kingdom. Waves need not always destroy. We must allow our heavenly Father to use them to redirect our lives.”

The Psalmist reminds us, “The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.” (Psalms 9:9-10) NIV God’s very character should give us assurance that He can be trusted to give us trustworthy direction for our lives.

But as we look back once more at the obstacle of abused trust within our human relationships we cannot overlook the importance of understanding the weakness of our fellow human beings. Oswald Chambers wrote, “Jesus Christ never trusted human nature, yet he was never cynical, never in despair about any man, because he trusted absolutely in what the grace of God could do in human nature.”

Recognizing the limited and fallible nature of other human beings does not have to mean that we give up the hopes all meaningful and trusting relationships. It does not mean that we have to be suspicious and cynical. It does, however, mean that we have to be gracious, forgiving and understanding of those weaknesses. After all, we are as human as the rest.

Ultimately and unfortunately, most will be hurt or disappointed in another person eventually. But when we, as believers, hold to our faith, continue to trust God, and determine that we will forgive and move on when wronged, I believe that we will eventually find that we have not been stopped by the obstacles on the road of life. Instead, we will find that we are stronger for them.

Take to heart Paul’s encouraging words, “And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” Romans 5:2b-5 NIV

# Day 3



## *Who Can We Trust*

You've probably seen the sign in a store before that says, "In God we trust; all others pay cash." That seems to be the philosophy of many in our society. They say, "I don't trust anyone but God." But I often wonder how many really trust God given their attitude and actions?

Obviously, we should put our trust in God, but often that is easier said than done for human beings who are faced with so many uncertainties and unpredictable people. As Christians we know that we are to believe that God can lead, guide and direct us in our lives, yet how do we actually do it? It begins by knowing the One in whom we are placing our trust.

Speaking of living amidst uncertainties and deceptive people, David wrote in Psalm 12 verses 6 and 7, "The words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times. O LORD, you will keep us safe and protect us from such people forever." NIV

David's trust in God's ability to take care of him was rooted in what he knew to be true about God. Do we not believe in the Lord's ability to keep us from those people who would want to harm us, mislead us or be untruthful to us? We do if we really know God's nature and power.

Perhaps you are not familiar with the concept of trusting God with the decisions and the circumstances of your life—maybe I can help. First, we must learn to "trust" God. "But how," you may wonder?

Begin with His credibility. Jesus said in John 14:1, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me." NIV If you read on, you will see that the basic case for trusting God for everything eternal is based on the truthful, righteous character of God. Believing in God is the first step in learning to trust God.

Next, just take your faith walk step by step. Paul offered this word of encouragement in Romans 15:13, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." NIV Note the key word in that passage--"as." Joy and peace come "as" we put our faith—no matter how small—into practice.

Finally, put God to the test. In other words, give Him an opportunity to help. In Malachi 3:10-12, God offers an unusual challenge for us to "test" Him. Read the whole passage from the Bible. God is simply

saying, “Give me an opportunity to show you how I can take care of you.” He puts forth the challenge because He knows He can do it.

Less safe, but also necessary, is the fact that we must learn to trust others. I know what you may be thinking, but I’m not suggesting that you be gullible or naive about your relationships. Nevertheless we must not allow past experiences with failed trust to affect the direction of all relationships in our lives.

In his book, *A Psalm in Our Heart*, George O. Woods tells the story of an experiment that was captured on film that demonstrated “how disappointment may condition us to live in a state of hopelessness.”

A pike was placed into a large tank. At feeding times minnows (its favorite food) were poured into the water. The pike energetically swam, gobbling up dinner.

Next, a clear glass cylinder was set in the center of the tank, and the minnows were placed within the oval. Unaware that an invisible wall separated him from his prey, the pike darted for the first minnow—only to slam into the glass. Stunned, he backed away and tried again. Same result.

For a number of hours this process continued. Finally, in defeat, the pike settled to the bottom of the tank.

The glass cylinder was extracted, freeing the minnows. They swam right by the nose of the pike, but conditioning had convinced him the minnows were inaccessible. Eventually he died of starvation.”

I cannot guarantee you that people will never fail you or even that you will never be disappointed with God—I do not know your expectations. However, if you will begin by seeking to have a fruitful relationship with Jesus Christ you will find that knowing Him will give you a fresh perspective on who you can trust.

# Day 4



## *Living in a Cynical World*

Many in our society have become so cynical that everything and everyone is suspect. Even the good deeds of others are thought to have some ulterior motive. Of course, the definition of the word cynic is “A person who believes all people are motivated by selfishness.” Therefore, a person who is cynical is “Scornful of the motives, virtue, or integrity of others.” Naturally, this leads to a lack of trust which, in turn, leads to broken relationships or unwillingness to form lasting healthy relationships.

Nevertheless, it does not have to be that way. We can choose not to be cynical, but to look for the good in others, to believe in miracles, to hope in times of hopelessness and to even believe in the power of God to truly change someone’s life. So, for the sake of the cynics let us take a moment to address the issues.

The primary question seems to be “Is anyone real or trustworthy anymore?” To address that we would have to ask the question, “Are people less trustworthy than at other times?” Whatever the case may be, the perception of our society has certainly changed and that, I feel, is the primary problem.

In his book, *If things are so good, why do I feel so bad*, George Barna writes, “We are very skeptical and suspicious people. We no longer trust other human beings – often because we know that they probably maintain the same self-absorbed values and goals as we do....People are now deemed guilty until proven innocent, a perverse twist of the justice system upon which this nation was built...” To a great degree our view of society is influenced by the slant with which it is presented to us by many in the media and entertainment industry. Their attitude appears to be, “Those with enquiring minds want to know.” This slant is founded in perverse enjoyment of finding fault. Additionally, it is based on varying degrees of moral understanding which eventually leaves everyone suspect. Cynics thrive in this type of an environment.

But instead of following the trend to doubt *everyone* try believing in *someone*. As a whole, people will *sometimes* give us a reason to doubt their trustworthiness or their motives; but if we will ask God to help us to see the good in them, they might just surprise us. Instead of criticizing the actions of others we would do better to change our own.

Additionally, instead of placing *all* of our hopes in humanity why not look to Jesus Christ instead. Some have become so cynical that they have even begun to doubt that God is still in control. Life is not what they thought it would be and therefore they have begun to doubt that God will do what the Bible promises. Others have reduced life to the mechanical and the mundane. They think that they have it all figured out and God is not in the picture. For them there is no divine intervention, no divine providence, and no divine justice.

As Americans we have been force-fed the faults and shortcomings of others and many have become jaded, and hardened, as a result. Few things shock us anymore because we will believe just about anything about just about anybody. The uncertainties of life are bad enough without wondering if a trusted friend will fail you or without wondering if God really cares anymore. But if anyone can rise above times like these, those who trust in the Lord can.

As long as a critical and suspicious attitude prevails, we as Christians must see that our lives are in line with the Word of God. We must walk a straight line, live above suspicion and, above all, believe that God is still in control. Cynicism and faultfinding may be acceptable among the world, but among the family of God--Christian people--it should have no place. No matter what others do the love of God should still be seen in our lives. (I Corinthians 13:5b-7)

## Day 5



# *Controlling Our Anger*

In his book *The Making of a Godly Man*, John Trent writes, “Each year in America, an average of fourteen men are killed by soft drink vending machines. After not receiving a drink or due change, these men shook the machines until they tipped over and crushed them to death. Each man became the victim of his own anger. Inappropriate anger is a dangerous weapon.”

Although, at times, there are good reasons to become angry, it is amazing how we usually allow the small and insignificant matters in life to anger us to the point of doing something that we regret. Most of the

time we just feel silly or foolish afterward, but sometimes great regret follows our momentary lapse of good judgment. “Temporary insanity” and “road rage” are terms with which we have become familiar because so many people have a problem controlling their anger.

However, let us look at how we can keep ourselves from living with the regret of uncontrolled anger. First, do not lose your perspective when people mistreat you. This can be tough. When people appear to be getting away with doing what is wrong it can be irritating to say the least. And when one is dealing with a person that one might call a proverbial “snake in the grass” the first thing we usually want to do is act quickly to expose and stop them. However, Psalm 37:7-8 tells us to, “Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.” NIV

Waiting can actually be effective, because unchecked, a schemer will almost always be revealed for what they are. Yet, if we try too hard to expose them they may actually use our actions to clothe themselves in the garment of a victim—acting as if we have attacked them. In the end, we will appear to be the “bad guy” and they will continue on in their wicked ways.

Secondly, always try to prevent improper anger from spreading. As we have often seen nothing seems as powerful and as completely devastating as a forest fire out of control. Many times these raging infernos are caused by people who intentionally set fire to an already dry and combustible forest or by the careless actions of people who are just not thinking. For years we have heard the slogan “Only you can prevent forest fires.” Well, the Bible says something similar on the subject of anger. “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” (Proverbs 15:1 NIV) In other words, many times you and I have the power to prevent a raging inferno of wrath and anger simply by a proper response.

As a Christian and a pastor I have found that there are some people who attempt to provoke me just to see what I will do. Of course, I can be angered, after all I am still human. But now I realize that I can make a decision not to respond adversely. If I escalate a situation or agitated conversation, it is not because the “devil made me do it,” it is because of the decision that I have made. Conversely, I have also found that I have the ability to defuse situations, calm people, and frustrate the plan of those who would want to agitate.

Through a dependence on God, an understanding of His Word and a bit of common sense we are actually empowered to do good in spite of the bad behavior of some. We do not have to live in regret because of a

moment or word of anger. Pausing long enough to make sure that our actions and words are appropriate may save us a lifetime of regret.

## Day 6



# *Coping With Not Knowing*

We have all faced times when we searched for meaning or for understanding to make sense of our circumstances while encountering some difficult moment in our lives. We tell ourselves that it would be easier to endure if we just knew why. Maybe it would. Maybe it would not. Yet one thing is for sure, there is often more to life that we do not understand than that which we do understand. Perhaps if we looked to the Bible we could find that needed revelation that would answer the question, “Why is this happening in my life or to me?” After all, the scriptures do contain a great deal of answers about life.

However, we sometimes appear to come to a dead end—even in the scriptures—if we are looking for an explanation of “Why is this happening to me?” I say this because, while I do believe that the scriptures are complete, trustworthy, and inspired by God, I have also had people ask me some “why” questions for which I could not find an answer. This is the time that I refer back to the character and trustworthiness of God.

In Romans 8:28, Paul deals with trusting God during the time in which we are forced to live in this gray area when he wrote, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” NIV

Note that the basis of Paul’s appeal centers on the impeccable character of God. “We know that in all things God works....” Or if you would allow me to paraphrase, “God is at work in everything....” Stop! Before anyone jumps to the conclusion that God causes everything, let me make it clear that that would be a misunderstanding of what is being said. What is being said here is that God is at work for His people in every moment and every circumstance of their lives. This is a great truth because, ultimately, it is what we believe about God that will determine our outlook. A right belief about God is the first step to true faith.

In fact, I believe that what one believes about God is more important than the circumstances or the outcome of those circumstances. Whether one is crushed by life or whether one celebrates life is often a matter of what one believes about God—even if that belief about God is a vague, underdeveloped understanding of God. The simple belief that there is a God who is looking out for you and me can prove to be a mighty hinge on which the door to a new outlook can swing open.

But before someone thinks that I am speaking solely on the philosophical plane, allow me to point out that it is this good God that is at work to change things in our lives—things that we cannot change. So much for philosophy, now we are talking about the power of prayer. It's true, when we pray we must believe that God wants to work out those problems beyond our control for our good. Why? It is because we love Him and He loves us and because we have accepted His call or claim upon our lives.

Anyone who will come to God, through His Son Jesus Christ, will find someone (Hebrews 7:25) who is willing and able to help during those times in which there is no clear direction and no clear answers. We can rest in the fact that our “not knowing” does not prevent God from working on our behalf. Ultimately, what matters is that we know Him.

## Day 7



### *Deception Can Be Apparent*

For many, the nature of living the Christian life is far too subjective. The problem with this is that we will often hear people say that they have come to faith in Christ or that they truly love God and have a very real relationship with Him, in spite of living a life that would seem to contradict any true relationship with God. And, after all, who can argue with them? If someone proclaims a love for an invisible God, by what visible means can we contradict their claim? In fact, our society and its political correctness seem to forbid drawing any such conclusions. Nevertheless, some accurate conclusions can be drawn about human behavior in relation to godliness.

Even with this in mind, the words found in 1 John 1:6 and 1 John 2:9-11 may seem harsh, but they need to be heard within the community of faith. First, John writes, “If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.” 1 John 1:6 NIV

Later, John firmly states, “We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.” 1 John 2:3-6 NIV

Evidently, to say that no one has the right to say anything about another's behavior just because it is a matter of faith is to reject accountability to anyone but God—and even that is made to be subjective. Yet accountability within the community of faith cannot be avoided because all within that “community” are being held to the same or similar standard and are representing the same God. To have widely varying standards would ultimately discredit that God and others within the community of faith.

Furthermore, John continues, “Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.” 1 John 2:9-11 NIV

John wants us to know that the ultimate end for those who say one thing and do another is self-deception. Notice the image of being in darkness and being blinded by darkness. For those who are deceived, the line between right and wrong just gets more and more blurred.

It is not that it is wrong for us within the community of faith to draw conclusions about the life of an individual whose lifestyle does not match up with Biblical standards. Rather, our error would be in either drawing too many conclusions about insignificant matters, or matters that we cannot know, or in simply being critical of that person without offering help and guidance.

However, when a person is deceived it is evident. And this can become a problem for that person in his relationship with God. Ultimately, only that individual can choose to submit his life to Christ. Until then, it is our responsibility to pray for him.

# Day 8



## *Forget and Be Fruitful*

Have you ever felt like something from the past was holding you back or dragging you down? In the Old Testament story of Joseph, the son of Jacob, we find a man who surely felt that way on many occasions, until one day when continually moving forward in obedience to God really paid off.

In part, the story is found in Genesis 41:46-52. Prior to this part of the story Joseph had been sold into slavery by his brothers, falsely accused by his owner's wife and thrown into prison—where the people he had helped, promptly forgot him. Yet he never gave up on the hope that God would turn his life around. We pick up the story after Joseph had been vindicated, liberated and exalted to a new position of power.

The story reads, “Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.’ Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and men shouted before him, ‘Make way!’ Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt. Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt.’” NIV

In spite of all that Joseph had achieved, he still had to make the choice to leave his past behind before he could enjoy it. In doing so, his dreams became a reality. No longer could the past deeds of others stop his dreams from being fulfilled. His family had not understood God's plan for him—neither had he for that matter. His mistake was in sharing too much too soon with people who were not ready to believe that God could do great things with him.

However, the past wrongs of others could not stop God from working all things together for his good—only Joseph could do that. He could have declined his new opportunity by saying, “I'm unworthy. I can't; my family rejected me when I was younger. I've been lied about. People have failed me. No one stood up for me in the past.” Or perhaps he could have just said, “I'm too hurt.” But instead, he embraced the new opportunity with a “can do” attitude.

Consequently, it was when he left his past behind that his life truly became fruitful. We read, “During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully. Joseph collected all the food produced in those

seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in the cities. In each city he put the food grown in the fields surrounding it. Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure.” NIV

Joseph’s labor was blessed immeasurably. God did more than enough in Joseph’s life because he believed that God was more than enough. As a result, his life was used as an instrument to preserve life. In reality, God had been at work behind the scenes all the time.

Note Genesis 45:4-7, “Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Come close to me.’ When they had done so, he said, ‘I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.’” NIV

In the end, Joseph’s promotion justified his faith and benefited others. God always blesses us so that we will be fruitful and be able to help others and bring glory to His name. So, leave the past behind and enter into what God has prepared for you.

## Day 9



### *Guilt and Regret*

Guilt and regret are partners in crime. Together they will rob us of our peace of mind and leave us feeling defeated and blaming ourselves for past decisions. Most commonly when I hear people speak of guilt and regret, it is usually concerning words spoken or not spoken, deeds done or not done. Naturally, these two areas of concern cover most matters in life and for that reason can become crushing to a person’s psyche when their memories cannot be escaped. The psalmist David once confessed to God, “My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.” (Psalm 38:4 NIV)

Of course, the best way to fend off guilt and regret is to avoid involvement with them. We avoid them by making wise choices in the

way that we live. James wrote, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” (James 1:5 NIV) I have heard wisdom defined as “the right application of knowledge,” but it centers on having good judgment. That, in itself, would prevent many actions that would lead to feelings of guilt and regret.

Therefore, as we live our lives we must determine to make wise choices. It’s the simple acts of everyday life that we must determine to undertake. First in regard to our relationships, we know that those we love want to know that they are loved and accepted—make your love clear to them. Friends and family members will not always be with us so act now while there is time. We must take advantage of the time and the opportunities that God has given to us.

Additionally, we should refrain from saying and doing things that do not resolve problems, that do not uplift or encourage, and that do not ultimately offer any lasting good to other people other than to make us feel better. Many people, in the hopes of making themselves feel better, have used cutting remarks and spiteful deeds in retaliation to another’s words or actions only to find themselves going too far and causing too much damage. It is simply not worth it. It would be better to walk away and refrain from saying anything.

However in the final analysis, the guilt which cannot be escaped leaves us with only one choice—we must face it. It is the only way that we will ever put it to rest. In the Dec. 31, 1995 edition of *Parade* magazine there was an article with the following story and observation, “In Lincoln, England, authorities suspected a man named Wayne Black of theft. The police apprehended a man who had a tattoo on his forehead that read, ‘I’m Wayne Black.’ When confronted about his identity, the man insisted he was not Wayne Black. Frequently our denials of guilt are just as lame as Black’s. Although ‘guilt’ may not be tattooed across our forehead, we know we’re wrong.” When we find ourselves confronted with our guilt we must be willing to be remorseful and make things right.

Guilt and regret are burdens that can easily become “too heavy to bear.” Why not pray for wisdom to live with good judgment and to avoid those pitfalls which cause us to be left with feelings of guilt and regret? Finally, make the decision to do and speak all the good that you can while the opportunities present themselves.

# Day 10



## *Holding Onto Our Spiritual Strength*

At times the human mind questions the value of continuous prayer, devotion, and worship. For many Christians these powerful activities, at one time or another, often become commonplace and mundane over the years. For far too many, what they once did out of love they now do out of habit. And after a while, the value of the habit is not even clearly seen.

The challenge for the Christian is not to give up what may have become a mundane task, but rather to relearn the value of these activities and thereby become reenergized and passionate about them again. After all, familiarity with these activities has not invalidated their power; it has only separated us from their power.

In I Timothy 6:11-12, Paul points out to a young minister named Timothy several pitfalls to avoid and actions to take in keeping his life pleasing to the Lord. Paul writes, “But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” NIV

Paul is encouraging Timothy—as well as you and me—to pursue only those things that are pleasing to God, the first of which is a godly manner of living. In order to do this we must first pursue a life of faith in God. Paul had just warned Timothy in verse 10, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” NIV

His point was not that everything of this world is evil, but rather that having one’s faith in the systems and schemes of human society will leave us empty in the end. However, it is not so with faith in God. Let the cynics say what they will about religion; I have been at the bedside of the dying too often to doubt the importance of knowing God when all natural means of help have failed. Pursuing a life that can endure the failures of material comforts will be found to yield much greater dividends than all of humanity’s carnal pursuits combined.

This passage of scripture also encourages us to be diligent in our commitment to hold on to our faith. I would like to tell you that having faith will only get easier and that the life of faith will only get smoother, but I cannot. The truth is that those of us who will follow Christ are literally fighting for our Christian faith. There are many enemies of our faith. Sometimes the enemies of the faith are those who would teach heresy or seek to attack our choice to believe. But sometimes the enemies of the faith can be found much closer to home, such as complacency, sin, doubt, and fear in our own hearts.

Yet, if we will take hold of the eternal life that has been promised to those who will follow Jesus Christ we will find that it will become a catalyst for our faith in Christ. God's promise of everlasting life is the destiny of all who will follow Christ and submit the standards and decisions of their life to the measurement of His will.

Through His Word we know what God expects of us. We know what we must do. But do we know that God can and will give us the strength and passion for the commitment? Our assurance is that if we are willing to take the necessary actions to renew our commitment to Him, then God will provide the renewed freshness to our experience that we seek.

## Day 11



### *How to Overcome Our Enemies*

One of the most difficult problems that we will all eventually face is that of dealing with someone who has mistreated us or is presently mistreating us. Even if we are able to move away from them, avoid them or outlive them, we are still going to have to learn to deal with the effects of their hurtful actions. This being the case, we can take comfort from God's Word that there is a solution to our problem.

The Apostle Paul advises us in Romans 12:17-21, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's

wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary:

‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him;  
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” NIV

If you’re like most people who have been emotionally injured by someone, the “burning coals over his head” is about the only part that sounds good in that passage. Why? It is because we humans are not naturally inclined to do good to people who have done us wrong. However, retaliating will almost always backfire on us and will never make us a better person. Thus I encourage everyone to consider the Apostle Paul’s advice.

First, do not respond to “evil with evil.” Responding to someone with evil actions will hurt our testimony and degrade our character. Never allow another who is in the wrong to cause you to disgrace yourself with actions similar to theirs. People who know us and want to think well of us are watching to see how we will react. We will always have to live around people who mistreat us, so why not settle in our mind the way to live and respond ahead of time.

It is amazing how, if given the time and the opportunity, God will instruct us how to settle matters with others and will often even do something to help them to have a change of heart if we will remain committed to behaving as His Word instructs us.

Remember, *IF* revenge is warranted it is God’s business to dispense it—not ours. But also remember that as we would want God to be merciful to us, so we should be merciful to others. Regardless of the actions of others, we must be watchful that our response is Christ-like. After all, the desired outcome is for good to prevail. Sometimes it is a Christ-like response from our lives that burns in someone’s mind much more than a stinging retort from our mouth.

Learning to deal with hurts inflicted upon us by others can be difficult, but we can be certain—according to God’s Word—that taking matters into our own hands is the wrong thing to do. However, placing it all in His hands is definitely the right thing to do. In fact, it’s really the only sure way to overcome our enemies.

# Day 12



## *How to Train a Child*

Parenting is a challenging endeavor for even the most enthusiastic parent. Mixed in with the joy and love for one's children, there are packed schedules, frayed nerves, skinned knees, runny noses, bruised feelings, and an unlimited number of questions—just to mention a few. There are moments of being proud and of being disappointed, laughing and crying; but they are all moments that a parent wouldn't trade for anything if it meant that they were deprived of sharing in the life of the child. So, parents keep hoping, praying, celebrating and preserving even though all that comes their way.

In general the thing that makes most parents so persistent in their task is the realization of how fragile and impressionable a child can be and of how much potential is contained within the life of the child. The child depends upon the parent in more ways that can always be seen at the moment. Often the child learns the good and the bad about human nature from his parents. He learns of love or rejection for the first time from his parent. The parent/child relationship is so much a part of who he is that he will carry what he has learned—be it good or bad—with him for the rest of his life.

In the years that I have pastored and counseled people, I have often been amazed by the indelible impression parents have made on their children. From the couple receiving premarital counseling to the elderly man in the nursing home, whatever mother or father taught them, did or did not do, or modeled before them is ever present in their memory.

The writer of Proverbs shares a great truth with us in chapter 22 and verse 6 when he says, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." NIV

Without a doubt, all children are being trained by someone in some way. I wish I could tell you it was always a good situation, but I cannot. I see people all the time who are suffering in their lives because of the way they have been trained. Someone's little prince or princess finds themselves constantly sulking and angry because people do not bow to them as mama and daddy did during their childhood. Others are in constant conflict because all they ever knew growing up was arguing and fighting. The problems due to the teaching of poor values, morals, social skills and behavior patterns seem endless. They can be overcome; still, it is difficult.

Nevertheless, many are being taught or trained in a positive manner. Good training always is—even if it brings negative consequences to the student. But more than this, training a child must be intentional and purposeful with a clear objective in mind. In the area of character and morals, the disposition or inclination of the child cannot be what determines the direction his life will take. Left to himself, his inclinations may take him in a negative direction with dire consequences. A child would do well to determine his own interests and the talents he wishes to develop; but a parent must be the guiding force in areas of faith, morals, interaction with others, and more.

It is all about balance and consistency. That is why it is so challenging. Yet, it is a challenge that we parents must accept because—for good or bad—what our children learn from us will remain with them for the rest of their lives.

## Day 13



### *Life is a Contact Sport*

Most of us just want to live a normal carefree life without unnecessary hassles, interruptions, and hurts. We tend to think that if we are nice and we mind our own business things will usually go smoothly. And so, we go down life's road in our own little world. But life has a way of getting our attention—doesn't it?

I'm reminded of my first experience with playing on the football team in Junior High. I was a carefree young teen who had never played, but thought the prospects of playing football on the school team would be fun. It was fun. But I did not know how serious some of the guys who had been playing for years took the game. It did not take long before my laid-back attitude cost me.

Trotting down the field one day—from out of nowhere—another player “rang my bell” as they say. The term comes from the ringing in one's head after being hit hard. As it turns out, the coach had put him up to it in order to make me pay attention to what was going on around me. Lying on the ground looking up, it occurred to me that football was

serious business to these guys. It was not long before I got the hang of the game and rang some other people's "bell."

Living in this life is much the same way for those who assume everyone has the best of intentions, their best interest at heart, or that life is somehow always supposed to be fair. It does not take a lifetime for them to find out that life is a contact sport and a person can get hurt if he is not aware of his surroundings and the rules of the game.

Knowing this, we should not only be wise, but also look out for one another and be careful that our words or actions do not become the source of an injury to someone else. The Apostle Peter wrote, "Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. 1 Peter 3:8, 9 NIV

Often we would make our own lives, and those of others, easier if we purposed to be as agreeable as possible. Hurts can often be avoided this way. Kindness shown to others can often pave a smoother path for us to travel because our attitude toward others is frequently what determines the amount of difficulty we encounter.

Even if we cannot eliminate all of the bumps and bruises in life, we can certainly minimize their number and their effect. Note Peter's words, "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult..." It would be easy to retaliate as with football—giving in return what you have received—but in the long run nothing would be gained. Go against the grain and against natural tendencies. Realize that everyone has not set out to hurt you. Life is just similar to a contact sport—if you are in the game you will get bumped.

Everyone else is in the same situation as are you. Although many are dysfunctional and somewhat clumsy at expressing themselves or interacting with others, in reality every person around you wants to be happy and feel that others care about them. It is when you and I realize this and respond in a truly Christian manner that we both bestow a blessing and reap a blessing.

In fact, this is our calling. This is our purpose. In a world where life seems to be like a contact sport, if used appropriately our words and actions become buffers that spare others the pain and upset that others may carelessly dish out.

# Day 14



## *Nothing Lasts Forever*

The other day I was looking through some old photo albums of ours. There among the yellowed pages of the albums were years of memories caught on film—snapshots of past days and past memories. I was surprised at how fast time had seemed to pass. Of course, I remembered most of the events and most of the people. Yet, had it not been for those fading photos to remind me, there would have been far too many events and people that I might never have thought about again.

But that is the way it is for human beings. We are finite—limited in our existence—constantly being reminded of our weaknesses and limitations. We can only retain just so much knowledge. We can only hold onto just so many memories. We can only live just so many years. Time appears to be our friend when we are young and seems to be our enemy when we are old. All of us that will really last forever is our eternal souls.

Nothing seems to last. You have probably heard the old saying that “Nothing lasts forever.” The saying does seem to capture the essence of our sad resignation to the facts. Everything is constantly changing and there is almost nothing that we can do about it.

Spring flowers will fade. The green of summer will fade and the beautiful tapestry of fall’s color will also fade away. And yet, hopefully, we thrive and hope and dream and keep going. We can do this because we can choose to embrace change instead of cursing it. And we can embrace it because we know deep down that this present existence is not all that there is.

The writer of Hebrews was obviously aware of the limitedness of all that is natural when he wrote, “In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.” Hebrews 1:10-12 NIV

I love the imagery evoked by those words when He says that heaven and earth “will all wear out like a garment” and “You (God) will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed.” The picture is one of God “rolling up” the heavens like they were a robe and replacing them as easily as one changes clothes. Truly, these words and

images speak of God's infinite power, but they also reinforce the idea that nothing natural will last forever.

However, let us not miss the greatest truth found in these words. "But you (God) remain" (v.11) and again in verse 12, "But you remain the same, and your years will never end." Let all that is natural and temporal be done away with and God will still exist. A great theological truth, but what difference does it make?

It is all about perspective. Too often we allow meaningless, temporal matters and temporal concerns to control our lives while giving little or no thought to spiritual matters such as our souls. We often spend unnecessary time cultivating everything from our lawns to our lifestyles—that will all pass away—while giving little or no thought to cultivating a relationship with God—who will always remain.

Nothing natural will last forever. But the good news is that there is more to our existence than just the natural. One's spiritual life does last forever.

## Day 15



### *Nothing Will Be Wasted*

Do you believe in providence, in prayer, and in God's desire to use you? If so, when faced with a situation so great that it leaves you feeling that all you possess is useless, just remember that nothing you have that you commit to Christ will be wasted. Jesus can take the most insignificant or seemingly worthless experience, talent or knowledge in your life and use it for His glory.

In fact, God often takes the insignificant things of the world and in our lives to bring the most glory to Himself. Sure, He can use our talents for His glory, but He can also use our failures. He can use our strengths, but also our weakness. He can use our position in life, but he can also use our lack of position in life. Nothing is wasted that is placed in His hands!

I heard a story that illustrates this beautifully. World War II was raging when a young seminary student who was preparing himself to enter the war as a military chaplain found a used book at a bookstore on

the subject of “How to Speak Russian.” He had no desire to go out with the other students at night after a long day of classes, instead he preferred to remain alone in his room where it was quiet and catch up on his reading. This little book would be a nice distraction as well as a new challenge.

From then until his graduation he studied the little book whenever he had a chance. His friends just laughed at his odd hobby, but he never gave up trying to master the Russian language on his own.

After graduation and induction into the Army as a Chaplain he was sent to the European theatre where his battalion was involved in heavy fighting. One night as he lay on his bedroll, staring up at the stars, his thoughts were only of how horrible his situation was at the time. Everyday and every night he was constantly trying to give comfort to the wounded and dying. The dead and the dying constantly surrounded him. With all of his preparation at seminary he was still unprepared for this. In fact, although he had committed all that he knew into God’s hands, he still did not feel prepared for anything he was being asked to do.

Just then a medic came running to him, “Chaplain, we have a man seriously wounded, he is scared and panicking, but we can’t understand what he is saying to us. Can you come help us?”

Upon arriving at the scene he realized that it was a Russian soldier who had evidently gotten mixed up in the lines and been separated from his company. As he knelt down beside the man he heard familiar words—words from that little book. He could understand much of what the soldier was saying. He stayed by the soldier’s side speaking words of comfort to him in broken Russian and praying with him the best he could until the man died from his wounds.

As he returned to his bedroll and laid down under the stars once again, he said later that he remembered feeling that the stars were brighter and the load was lighter because he knew that God was at work, even in the war, and even in him.

What he had thought was an insignificant interest or hobby had been used by God to give comfort and guidance to a Russian soldier in the last moments of his life on this earth. Nothing had been wasted. God was using it all.

It is important that we turn every part of our lives over to God because only He is able to use it all for His glory.

Take time to read John 6:1-13 and reflect on it in light of what you have just read.

# Day 16



## *Praying Without Seeing*

Encouraging someone's faith when prayers appear to go unanswered is one of the more difficult tasks that I have been given as a pastor. Nevertheless, it is an undertaking that I am willing to accept because I believe that prayer works; giving up and losing hope accomplishes nothing of any value. Yet, each Christian person must come to grips with the inevitable struggle that comes to all who seek to live "by faith and not by sight." (2 Corinthians 5:7) This struggle involves more than zeal and more than tangible results. It involves the formation of Jesus Christ in a person's soul. (Galatians 4)

It is strange that we want to live this life of faith but insist on clear explanations about every disappointment. Let me point out the obvious. The life of faith must be lived in trustful dependence on Jesus Christ—in spite of what circumstances may say. We know this, we just do not like grappling with these issues of our faith. Instead, many would just rather cry foul! This is more a symptom of a superficial and carnal society than a theological problem.

In America, this aversion to not getting everything for which we pray is due more to the influence of our culture than to theological truths. First, there is the Americanized theological teaching that says, in essence, "Life is a bowl of cherries without the pits—if you *really* have faith." Such a doctrine could only flourish in a materially prosperous country. This skewed approach to theology is made worse by the fact that we enjoy the highest standard of living in the world and the best of many of the necessities of life.

Sometimes it is our self-centered point of view that causes us to come to God, disappointment over unanswered prayers, and with the attitude that we should be treated differently than others. I regularly hear people question, "Why has this happened to me?" This is usually followed by the observation that "This is not fair!" However, I rarely hear people ask the question, "Why did that happen to that person?" or comment on the inequities of life when it concerns others.

Perhaps, before one indicts God for a lack of concern for oneself and his needs, he should examine *his* true concern for the plight of his fellow humans around the world. Yes, this too has an affect on our prayer life. The plight of all humanity is inextricably bound together with our own. How much compassion should we expect for ourselves when we have

shown such a modest amount for others? Is faith really just about our ability to believe for great things or is that just one of the factors considered in an overall appraisal of the way we live?

That said, allow me to further point out how much simple faith is an everyday part of the Christian life. In the book of Romans alone notice the following truths about faith:

"The righteous will live by faith." 1:17

"Man is justified by faith." 3:28

"Righteousness ... comes by faith." 4:13

"The promise comes by faith." 4:16

"We have gained access by faith into this grace..." 5:2

"You stand by faith." 11:20 (NIV)

We have faith. The lack of it is not usually the problem. Rather, it is the understanding of our faith that we lack. One reason I have found that it is difficult to encourage others when prayers have gone unanswered is because of the person's approach to faith, prayer, and their lack of understanding of the scriptures. We have already mentioned how the Americanized outlook on life can color one's perspective, but there is more.

The theological slant of some may affect their view. One such idea with which I am familiar, hopefully not stated too simply, is that the work of Calvary has been done—from salvation to healing and beyond. Therefore, all one must do is appropriate the necessary faith in what has *already* been accomplished through Christ. There is merit to the thought, but taken to the extreme, it can be confusing. We have people who sometimes die of a disease of which they have previously, and most vigorously in faith, confessed their healing as being accomplished. Yet, they were not healed. Sometimes before they die they, or others, wrongly question the value of faith and prayer or else think that the person's faith was defective.

There are others who pray without any apparent conviction. They ask God for help, but then say, "Well, whatever will be, will be." (James 1:6-8) Still others treat God as if He were Santa Claus. They eagerly pray through their list of requests—many of which are selfish or misguided—and then wonder why God does not love them enough to give them what they want. (James 4:3)

But finally, we come to those who accept the struggle, who are willing to yield to the Father's will, and who trust God with all their heart. With each of the others we might find a clear answer as to why God did not answer, but what do you tell someone who appears to be faultless, fearless and faithful? Well, there just are not answers to every question. Yet, we do know some things.

In a reading of Romans 8:18-28, we hear the confident words of a man who had seen miracles and disappointments as he encourages us in our faith and in our prayer life.

In verse 28 he gives us this piece of assurance, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

From these words I draw four truths for those who are praying for but not seeing any apparent results. To begin with, we must trust in the blameless character of God. We must hold to the fact that God is at work for our good—even if we cannot see it. Also, we must remember that God responds to those who love Him—with an answer or with assurance. And finally, God is faithful to those who have accepted His claim upon their lives. He will not leave us.

This is where a true understanding of God’s character, His purposes and His love begins. I know that we are all concerned that our faith not fail us but, in all our praying, to fail to seek to know Him, would be a far greater failure.

## Day 17



### *The Problem with Sin*

For many today, the problem with sin is that “sin” is an outdated subject—without relevance or importance. I suppose the reason some feel this way is because in order to believe in sin, a violation of God’s laws, one would have to acknowledge a supreme set of laws or commandments or truths presented to humanity by a supreme being, namely God.

The objection among those who reject the notion of sin in modern times is often that the talk of sin evokes images of snorting, red-faced, judgmental preachers pointing a condemning finger downward to those unfortunate enough to have “missed the mark” in their attempt to please God. Warnings of hell are sure to follow and God is sure to be misrepresented.

Not to justify or defend everything that is said or done by all who call themselves “preachers of the gospel,” there are nevertheless several

problems with this viewpoint. The problems are that those who reject the idea of ministers preaching against sin usually focus on the owner of the supposed “finger of condemnation” or on the feelings of the one whom is found in the seat of the accused. Sometimes the problem is that they feel humanity has outgrown such primitive teachings of a moral standard and that the human race is able to correct its own behavior—thereby saving itself without God’s help—and achieve a higher and more pure form of morality.

But what if there is a God who is responsible for our being here on earth? If this Creator-God exists, and I believe He does, then it is reasonable to believe that He would hold His creation accountable to fulfill its purpose for which it was created. After all, why would God create without purpose? We could go on to reason, if we as His creation have a purpose, that He would also communicate His purpose to us—possibly even giving us direction as to how to live our lives. The reason that all religions do not speak of sin is that all do not believe that humanity is directly accountable to only one God.

Yet if humanity is accountable to one God, then it is reasonable to believe that humanity is accountable to that God for violating His laws or standards. Hence, we arrive at the one question the cynics and unbelievers do not want to consider: “What is the problem with sin from God’s point of view?”

In short, I believe that first of all it separates humanity from God (Isaiah 59:1-2). To violate God’s laws without remorse or concern is to create tension between us and God, in the same way as if we were to create tension between us and our friend by inconsiderate or wrong behavior.

Sin also separates us from one another (1 Corinthians 12:24-25; Colossians 3:12-14). When human beings mistreat one another there can be no fellowship or unity within that relationship.

Finally, sin separates us from what we were meant to be (Ephesians 4:17-18). One can never fulfill his/her full potential and purpose as the creation of God if a life contrary to the plans and desire of God is chosen. The happiness, joy and fulfillment that God offers can only be found by following Him.

What is the problem with sin? I suppose it depends upon the point of view one chooses to consider—either that of a cynic or that of a loving God.

# Day 18



## *Remember to Pray*

“Stop, I want to pray first!” my daughter screamed. The nurses paused for a moment as I tried to calm my seven-year-old so that they could continue. It was very early in the morning when we arrived at the hospital and we had both been sleepy and a bit bleary-eyed all morning. We were there so that my daughter could have a needed medical procedure performed. It had to be done, but I knew ahead of time that she was not going to find the experience enjoyable.

The first part of our visit had been uneventful. She sat quietly and colored in a coloring book while I filled out one release form after another. Even after we went back into the area when she would be prepared for her procedure, she appeared not to be too bothered by her surroundings. We laughed about how the hospital gown was too big for her and she was comfortable talking with the nurses. But then it was time to start the IV fluids.

The nurses reassured her as they prepped her hand for the needle. It was difficult for them to find a vein, but finally they found one and in went the needle. The vein collapsed or they missed—whatever the case—the IV would not work and they would have to pull it out and start over. By this time my daughter was fairly upset. Of course, not as upset as she was about to be when they told her that they were going to have to do it again in her other hand.

At this point she was frantic. We tried to calm her but to no avail. The nurses were upset because they did not want to hurt her and because they still could not see a vein clearly. It was then that she stopped all our activity with her cry, “Stop, I want to pray first!” Why had I not thought of that? After all, I’m a pastor! That is what I do all the time. I go to hospitals and pray with people all the time who are going through this type of experience.

The only thing I could think of is that I had been doing everything I could to keep her calm while being occupied with the seemingly endless job of paperwork and had just not been thinking. Yet, somehow I do not think that I am the only one to have ever had this type of an experience. In fact, it is common behavior in times of extreme stress and pressure. We are so busy trying to process the incoming information or with trying to deal with the rapidly changing circumstances that, although we believe

in prayer, we forget to stop and do it—until something or someone reminds us.

Suddenly in the midst of distress, it occurs to us that we should pray. The Psalmist evidently was remembering a moment like this when he wrote in Psalms 18:6, “In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears.” NIV

According to the scriptures we know that God is always listening to and for our prayers; however, we sometimes forget to present all of our needs to Him in prayer. It reminds me of the old song we used to sing, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*. The song reminds us,

What a friend we have in Jesus,  
all our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
everything to God in prayer!

Oh what peace we often forfeit,  
Oh what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry  
everything to God in prayer!

We did stop and pray as my daughter had requested and although the nurses were not sure they could get the vein, the needle went in perfectly and all went well. Sure the nurses were skilled, but I believe that it was prayer that made the difference.

# Day 19



## *You Can Believe*

You have probably heard of “doubting Thomas.” Well, Thomas has never been alone with his doubts. There have always been, and always will be, those who are skeptical of anything or anyone that seems to be too good to be true.

Their questioning—skepticism—is varied in its form and reason. Nevertheless, try to go beyond the norm in the area of seeking outstanding achievement and it will not take the skeptics long to surround you in an attempt to corral your ambitions before they get out of hand. Seek to soar high above mediocrity and soon their surface-to-air missiles will be in hot pursuit of you and your dreams. After all, who do you think you are? Do you think that you are special?

It is just such questioning that keeps timid and self-conscious people in their place and from becoming bold and confident people. For the skeptic—doubter—the timid are easier to tolerate than the bold. People who are bold believe in things, dream dreams, and expect positive results against all odds.

As a disbeliever and a doubter the skeptic loves the status-quo. And feels threatened when someone challenges it. If this happens, there can be only one course of action: they must attack the idea or the believer in an attempt to discredit and disarm.

Even Jesus endured these attacks. When Jesus was speaking with the woman at the well in John chapter 4, and He challenges her thinking, she responds by making comparisons in an attempt to put Him in His place. “Are you greater than our father Jacob...?” NIV she asks? Basically, “Who do you think you are?” It happens again in John 8:53 when He challenges the Pharisees. They respond, “Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?” NIV

Challenge the thinking of a skeptic and it will upset him because he fears the unknown. Unforeseen circumstances are always out there lurking in the shadows ready to pounce on you and bring you down. This is why it would be best not to believe or best not to try—because of what could happen. Thomas, one of the disciples of Jesus, evidently thought like this. When the report came that Jesus had risen from the dead, it was Thomas that held up the hand of caution. After all, there is no use in taking the chance of looking foolish.

Read the story with me, “Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.’

A week later... though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.’ Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’

Then Jesus told him, ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’” John 20:24-29 NIV

Thomas was unwilling to venture out in his faith without proof. But that is a problem in itself because faith is “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” (Hebrews 11:1 NIV) Perhaps that is not logical to some. Yet, neither is fearing what might happen when there is no proof that it will happen. It really comes down to that which one chooses to believe. I would encourage you to believe God’s Word, to believe that He can and will help you though uncertain times and situations. But, what if? Paul answers that. “What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar.” Romans 3:3-4 NIV

While we should not be gullible, I am concerned that life experiences have caused us to become a tainted society in which many automatically question everything and everyone. I would just like to remind you that if you are looking for God’s help in making a better life for yourself, it is alright to believe, to trust, and to venture out. The fact that we do not know what lies ahead only makes life more exciting.

## Day 20



# *The Sinking Sand of Self-importance*

The truth is that our opinions are rarely as important in the grand scheme of the world's existence and in the lives of others as we sometimes think they are. Often humans are under the impression that others wait for their opinions, seek their direction and are lost without their guidance. But, believe it or not, the world will most likely make it with or without our intervention.

At times we are annoyed and at times we can look back and laugh about situations caused by people insisting on having their way and trying to make people do things or think in ways as they see fit; but when it comes to matters of faith it is no simple annoyance or laughing matter. Anytime anyone seems to be trying to develop his or her own following in matters of faith, or if he or she leads another away from the simplicity of serving Jesus Christ, no matter how well meaning that individual may be, there can be a serious problem developing.

The Apostle Paul dealt with this type of problem before. He knew all too well the problems associated with religious excess and self-righteousness. It is for this reason that Paul, a former Pharisee and persecutor of the Christians, addresses this problem in Philippians 3:1-11. His primary message is that within the community of faith, the faith and confidence of the believer must remain in Jesus Christ—not in people or even in one's own ability to live righteously.

Paul quickly makes the point that he could brag more than most anyone about his standing in the religious community, his religious goodness that comes from works and about his devout religious devotion in the past. But this is one man who has seen self-righteousness for what it really is—rubbish.

In verse 7 he begins, "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his

sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.” NIV

He had realized that the best he could do would only amount to his best—not God’s best. He could keep rules and impress people; however he was still afraid to die. Yet, through faith he had found not only the courage to die, but also the courage and power to live an abundant life of faith, free of guilt, condemnation, and the sinking sand of self-righteousness.

Paul reminds us, in short, to watch out for those who exalt themselves as the example. You know, the kind who exalt “their experience” as the only way. They will tell you that if you do not have what they have, feel like they feel, look like they look, believe like they believe, then you are just lost. It is as simple as that.

On the other hand, those who follow and exalt Jesus Christ see human goodness as no substitute for knowing Christ. It is only a trait of those who follow Him. These people also know that the true assurance of being on solid ground with God comes only through knowing Christ and placing one’s faith in Him. Knowing this, we must beware of following or becoming one who builds his or her life on the sinking sand of self-importance.

## Day 21



### *The Business of Life*

Everyday in the exchange of goods and services or stocks and bonds people in business seek to come out ahead and record a profit for what they have ventured in the market. They each have a goal in mind for which they are working. They know that the risks are sometimes great and wise choices must be made. Those who are really good at business know that one cannot make a practice of selling too cheap or buying into an unprofitable business enterprise. The reason is that no matter how much business one does, failing to achieve the goal and gain the prize renders all efforts as nothing.

In the business of life, many people would do well to learn a similar lesson. Millions of people are constantly in search of happiness, peace

of mind, a secure hope for the future. Far too often, individuals invest themselves and much of their lives in unprofitable ventures that net them nothing substantial for their time and effort. The reason, we might ask? Sometimes life is even more complicated than the stock market. Unforeseen variables, unpredictable people, and unplanned events constantly make an impact on the business of living in the world. Humanity needs assistance that is unaffected by all these factors. This is where one's relationship with God comes in to play.

Of course, in today's American culture many have overlooked the spiritual and eternal. Apparently their hopes of having it all in this life lie in the offerings of this natural and temporal world. But Jesus had these words of warning for those who are predisposed to such ideas. In Matthew 16:26 he said, "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" NIV

Let me say to those who might be inclined to dismiss the value of spiritual matters and to hold on to those temporal gains of this life, whatever it is that you are holding on to that is keeping you from God's best for your life—you have sold out too cheap! And the irony is that God never told anyone that he could not have worldly goods and a relationship with Him, too—He just said that He had to have first place. (Matthew 6:33)

So, in the final analysis, what good is it to gain all that the world has to offer if we lose the most important possession we have—our soul? The soul is not only eternal but also the essence of who we truly are. Furthermore, the question must be asked, "Is this a proper exchange?" Some people think more about the trading of stocks and bonds, automobiles, homes and other such items than they do about what they are trading for their eternal souls. The implication, and I believe the truth of this scripture, is that a person's soul is of more value than the whole world. Thus we are left with the inescapable truth that an equitable or profitable trade for the human soul does not exist.

In the business of life, the guidelines are clear: trade anything for your soul and you have sold out too cheap.

# Day 22



## *The Cycle of Life*

The other morning, while I was driving my four-year-old daughter Hannah to school, she asked me an odd question. She had been looking out the window of the car at her surroundings when she asked, “What’s wrong with the trees, daddy?” I looked around at the surrounding landscape to see what she was talking about. All I saw was the fall foliage. So I asked her what she meant. “They’re all torn up!” she said. I looked again and saw what she meant. Most of the trees were partially covered in bright-colored leaves and partially bare. In a way the trees did look “torn up.”

I suppose that I did not see them that way because I have lived through so many changes in the seasons that everything that happens in nature’s seasonal transformations seem so natural at this point. It could be said that my perspective has been changed by the passage of time and a myriad of experiences—and I suppose that it will change even more as I get older.

In fact, this change in perspective toward the way one views life is seen more deeply in those who have lived a long life. Often the contrast is seen most clearly in the things about which people of different ages are most worried. The older one gets, the more it becomes clear that the little upsets of life are just that—little upsets. The youth sees his or her life “torn up” by circumstances, but the older—often much wiser—individual sees these things as just a part of life. Much of what we allow to vex us really does not make a great deal of difference in the grand scheme of things. These annoyances, we find, are just part of living.

In the Old Testament we hear from King Solomon on this matter. He had lived a life filled with all types of experiences—both good and bad. In the end we read part of his final analysis of life when he writes, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 NIV)

Solomon is telling us, in part, that no one experience represents the totality of life. Life is made up of multiple experiences, opportunities, heartaches, and joys, all mixed with times of productivity and times of frustrations. Simply put, life is composed of multiple seasons. This gives us hope when we see our world “torn up” by circumstances that are beyond our control. It gives us hope because we know that it is not the seasons of life that define us—it is how we respond to the seasons of life.

Solomon goes on to encourage us to look beyond momentary circumstances to find God’s purpose for ourselves in life. He writes, “(God) has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men....I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil—this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him.” (Ch. 3:11-14 NIV)

God allows the changing seasons of life to come, not to discourage us, but to remind us of our need to find His purpose for our lives as well as to remind us of our need for His help.

## Day 23



### *When Are We Most Like God?*

Within the religious community there has always been a doctrine or belief that has resurfaced on a regular basis from the time of the Garden of Eden. It is the idea that we are gods. In an attempt to deceive Eve in the Garden of Eden, we read that the serpent said to her concerning the forbidden fruit, "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God...." Overall, it was an attractive proposition; but as we know, things did not work out for her and Adam like they thought or as the serpent had promised.

Still, to be like God has been a quest for some and an obsession for others throughout the centuries. The problem that usually arises is that not every one agrees on what makes an individual most like God. This in itself has caused a great deal of hurt and misunderstanding among

human beings. And I suppose defining who the god to be imitated actually is would be a great start in our attempt to model ourselves after Him.

In this case, I am speaking of the Christian God revealed in the pages of the Bible. However, when we compare the best of our human attributes to His personal attributes we might be surprised at the results.

Consider this. Is it our intellect that makes us like God? Certainly, the human mind is a creation of God. I have difficulty believing that such complexity of design and intellectual ability is all the result of random evolution. The human brain is better than any supercomputer. Yet, the Bible tells us that our thought processes do not come close to those of God. In fact, God tells us in Isaiah, “‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the LORD. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’” 55:8-9 NIV

Perhaps it is our creative ability that makes us like God. We do have an unusual ability to create and this does remind us of our Creator. Yet, when we compare our creations to His they do not look as impressive. There are far too many scriptures to support this to list here—I looked.

Another area of humanity in which we feel we excel is personal holiness. This is certainly a proper pursuit as long as we do not become impressed with our personal successes in this area. The prophet Isaiah compared human righteous acts to “filthy rags” (64:6 NIV) in comparison to that of God’s righteousness. And Paul reminds us in Romans 3:10 that, “There is no one righteous, not even one...” So once again we fall short of being just like God.

We could consider more areas of supposed “divine likeness” among humans, but there is at least one area in which someone said that we are most like God, and I think that they were right. “We are most like God when we forgive.” Oddly enough, this is one area in which few seem to want to excel. We hold our hurts close to our hearts—no wonder our hurts infect us with so much poison. Human beings will often choose to excel in matters of intellect, generosity, sacrifice, holiness, purity and a myriad of other areas before choosing to forgive. Yet, it is when that choice is made that we become most like God.

# Day 24



## *The Power of Life and Death*

Children have a way of making us think about what we do and say. The other evening at church I had just finished delivering my sermon and was taking time to pray with people. Having already prayed for my oldest daughter who had come forward, I was alerted to the fact that I had inadvertently overlooked my five-year-old daughter, Hannah. She was upset and crying because I had prayed for her sister but not for her. So, laying my hands on her head and trying to make up for overlooking her, I prayed sincerely.

My prayer for her contained several requests from God and a blessing. However, the one thing that evidently caught her attention above all else was when I had asked God to make her strong. I say this because immediately after I had finished praying she lifted up her head and with a big smile on her face, asked me expectantly, “Daddy, am I strong?”

At that moment I realized that, although my prayer was important, what I said in response to her was also important. I had the opportunity to build her up or tear her down, to teach her to believe or to doubt. I could impart to her the strength of God’s grace or to drain her spirit of life. So, looking her in the eye, I said “Yes, sweetheart you *are* strong.”

The reason I think my response was so important is because of the scripture that says, “The tongue has the power of life and death...” (NIV Proverbs 18:21) Evidently, what we say has a tremendous impact on those who hear our words. By our words we can lift up or tear down. We can encourage or discourage. We can strengthen or weaken. We can express love or hate or kindness or cruelty.

Furthermore, we are accountable for what we say. In fact, Jesus had some strong words for the Pharisees, who although outwardly appearing to be very religious, their words had proved that they were actually far from God in their hearts. Listen to what he has to say to them. "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words

you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned." Matthew 12:33-37 NIV

The problem was not just that their words were evil or even that their words were careless, hurtful, or reckless. This issue was not the need to be faultless in one's speech. It's all about the intent of one's speech which is directly connected to the content of one's heart. The problem was that their words revealed the evil in their heart. One does not hurt, tear down or otherwise negatively affect another with his words merely because he lacks wisdom. In many cases he does so because there is a problem with what is in his heart.

The situation with my little girl just reminded me of the inconsistencies in human speech and behavior. For the Christian, we must understand that regardless of what we pray and profess, the truth about the content of our heart comes out when we speak. How many times have we undone our prayers and good works by our spoken words? Ultimately, we must realize that it is not just what we pray that matters—it is also what we say after we have prayed that matters.

Once the content of our heart has come into line with God's Word we will see it reflected in both our prayers and our speech.

## Day 25



### *Translating Our Faith*

The other day while getting a cup of coffee at a coffee shop, I briefly overheard a conversation between two young women. Apparently they were speaking of a mutual friend who was obviously a Christian or at least religious-minded. One statement went something like this, "She has all these different translations of the Bible that she uses, but I still do not understand what she is talking about." That got me thinking about what I feel is a common problem with people of faith who want to share their faith with others.

Consider this: the more diverse the population of our country becomes, the more likely it is that one will encounter a person from another country who is speaking a foreign language. If you or I only speak English, then the words of the foreign language are

incomprehensible and thus rendered meaningless to anyone who does not speak the language. However if there were someone there to translate the foreign language for the one trying to understand, suddenly the previously incomprehensible language would have meaning for the one seeking to understand what is being said.

My point is simple. If as Christians we want others to understand the meaning of our faith, it will take more than quoting verses of scripture and talking about Christian issues and beliefs in Christian “lingo.” This will no longer work effectively in our changing and diverse communities. What we must do is “translate” our faith for those with whom we seek to share it. To translate, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is “to express in more comprehensible terms.”

Paul speaks of this very real need that we have as Christians to share our faith in an understandable manner in 2 Corinthians 3 and 4. As he has said, “If the meaning of our faith is hidden it is hidden from those who are perishing.” (Paraphrase of 4:3) We must not allow something as meaningful as our faith to be hidden.

But the question remains, “How do we express the reality and meaning of our faith in a way that almost all can understand?” Paul gives us a start in the right direction in verses 8 and 9 of chapter 4 when he tells us the type of faith we are to display in addition to our words. He writes, “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. Simply put, when hard times come our faith keeps us going.

In verses 16-18 he continues, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” Again, in simple terms, our faith gives us hope for the future and strength for the day.

This is only the beginning, of course. Each must find his or her own way of sharing and living out one’s own faith in a way that reveals to others, in a clear and positive manner, why each one of us has chosen to place faith in Jesus Christ.

# Day 26



## *God's Waiting Room*

Waiting on God isn't discussed very much, but it's done quite often. We don't like to admit that we're waiting on God—maybe we think someone will doubt our prayer life or faith because we have not received an instant answer. But the fact remains that often we are left in God's waiting room—just waiting. For the human mind it can be maddening.

Note the heart-felt words of the psalmist in Psalms 130:1-6, "Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy... I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning." NIV

He has prayed. He has waited. He has hoped. He has longed for a response. But there was nothing. He would have to learn what others have learned. There is a way we can survive the waiting room with our nerves intact. We can do it by understanding that God's waiting room is much like other waiting rooms that we have encountered. Consider a few simple observations about waiting rooms that have come to me over the years. The first is kind-of obvious.

Waiting rooms are designed for waiting. In hospitals, as in other places, the personnel often offer coffee, drinks and sometimes-even food to those who are waiting in order to make them more comfortable. There are magazines to read and even TV's to watch. But does that really make us comfortable? Even with those amenities, who would choose to spend their off day in a waiting room? The last place we feel comfortable is in a place of inaction.

When our desire to hear from God is that strong, we want to do something in hopes that God will respond. But what we must do is show faith and wait on the Lord. I like what G. Campbell Morgan said about waiting on God. He said, "Waiting for God is not laziness. Waiting for God is not going to sleep. Waiting for God is not the abandonment of effort. Waiting for God means, first, activity under command; second, readiness for any new command that may come; third, the ability to do nothing until the command is given."

“But, what if” we say. Never forget that our greatest enemy in the waiting room is fear. In Psalms 46:10 the Lord says, “Be still, and know that I am God...” But when you’re in God’s waiting room there’s nothing to be gained in rushing about and trying everything under the sun—you’re in the waiting room—*be still and rest in knowing that the Lord is God*. “He will never leave you or forsake you!” Someone said, “Never think that God’s delays are God’s denials. Hold on; hold fast; hold out.”

I am also aware that waiting rooms are where we hope and pray for the best. It takes faith to hope when all we see is the unknown. Some may think that there is no faith in hoping but really they go hand-in-hand. Look at what Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” *(NIV) bold added* It takes faith to wait on God in prayer when what we want to do is take action.

Waiting rooms are also where we are reminded that God is in control. It’s harsh but simple, in the waiting room we either grow up and go on or we give up and fall apart. We must chose to trust God because He is God and for no other reason.

Too often we want to rush ahead of the Lord and we end up in a most uncomfortable situation. “If we had only waited,” we say latter, “God wouldn’t have had to come to our rescue.” But, if we will wait on the Lord we will spend more time rejoicing and less time being rescued.

## Day 27



### *What Did Mama Say?*

The older my sisters and I get the more we laugh about the things our mother has said over the years. Her country wisdom, mixed with her southern accent and odd sayings from her youth, has given us much to tease her about. For instance, we grew up eating fried chicken “lags” and eating chicken “aggs”. We were always encouraged to never give up because “every dog has his day.” I have heard stories about “jack-leg” (pronounced jack-lag) preachers and old men from her youth that were

always “drunk as a bicycle” just to mention a few. No. I do not understand that one either.

Of course, not everything she said was funny, but almost everything she said had some kind of an effect on us. I see that same power to communicate in the words of my wife and the mother of my two girls. What mama says matters. This is one reason I have learned when the children ask for my permission to do something to say, “What did your mama say?” No, I am not hen pecked. I just have chicken house ways! Like I said, what mama says matters.

There are many stories in the Bible that reveal this power mothers have to influence their children by what they communicate to them. Two particular passages come to mind. The first one is a somewhat obscure story found in the Old Testament book of Judges, chapters four and five.

The story is about a ruthless commander of the Canaanite army named Sisera. The scriptures say that, “he had nine hundred iron chariots and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years...” (Judges 4:3 NIV) They also tell us that he and his army were finally defeated and his life was lost. Then this sad moment is recorded concerning his mother’s reaction to his failure to return.

“Through the window peered Sisera's mother; behind the lattice she cried out, ‘Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why is the clatter of his chariots delayed?’ (Judges 5:28 NIV) For twenty years she had rejoiced with him every time he went out and returned from “oppressing” other people and taking their possessions. But there was no rejoicing that day. Although Sisera was responsible for his own actions, stop and think about how her approval of his actions may have reassured him that what he was doing was right—even though it was evil.

Now, on the opposite end of the spectrum consider the life of a young man in the New Testament named Timothy. The Apostle Paul wrote to him and said, “I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.” (2 Timothy 1:3-5 NIV)

Timothy was evidently a good man and a godly man. So much so that Paul said that he was thankful for him every time he thought of him. Paul remembered that Timothy was a man of “sincere faith” and commitment to God. Yet, note who is given most of the credit for Timothy’s spiritual character—his grandmother and his mother. Listen to Paul’s assessment of Timothy’s spiritual standing. He says that Timothy’s faith first “lived” in his grandmother and in his mother and now that same faith was alive in him at that moment. What a powerful

statement! The faith “living” in him first found life in his mother and grandmother.

Certainly, there is no way for us to know the particulars of what each of these mothers had taught their sons as they grew to manhood. But one thing appears to be certain, what they were taught found life in each man’s heart. For us the message is clear, mothers should never underestimate the power of what “lives” in their heart nor should they underestimate the likelihood that it may find life in the hearts of their children.

## Day 28



### *What is The Power of Prayer?*

What is it about the act of prayer that causes changes to take place in the realm of the supernatural and in the life of the believer? What is the source of the inherent power found in the act of prayer? In other words, what makes prayer powerful? Much has been said about the believer’s authority in Christ, the inherent power of the spoken Word, and the power of coming into agreement with the plan and will of God. All of these are important. Yet, let us consider a more basic and foundational principle that is at work in the area of prayer that many today seem to overlook.

I do not know that these truths originated in my mind or were placed there years ago through another, but I have long believed that there were certain truths about prayer that we must accept. The first is that, for all our zeal and intensity, prayer does not always change our circumstances or eliminate our problems. Secondly, prayer never changes the essential nature, character or eternal purposes of God—He does not need to change. However, prayer always changes the one who sincerely prays and seeks God according to His instructions.

Therefore, instead of delving into the multiple mysteries of prayer, let us consider that perhaps the fundamental power of prayer, that affects all else, has its basis in the workings of the believer’s transformed heart. In fact, all else done in prayer hinges on this one indispensable truth—a person’s heart must be rightly oriented toward God if one’s prayer life is

to be effective. (James 4:3) Furthermore, it can be said that the power of prayer is seen and manifested primarily through the transformed heart, which is both the cause and product of prayer.

The scriptures are filled with numerous admonitions and exhortations concerning prayer and the need for a person's heart to be right when communicating with God. Thus, the spiritual transformation of the human heart is essential for all who call themselves believers.

Paul wrote, "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:8-13 NIV

The fundamental power of prayer is not about "spiritual energy" or any other New Age or metaphysical belief of our society that people want to try to blend with the Christian faith. Prayer works when people are brought into a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. As we see in the Romans 10 passage, the power of prayer is found when a person acts upon the word of God in faith by calling out to Him for the transformation of heart and life which He has promised to those who will call upon Him in simple faith.

One may not have had Biblical training of any depth or be able to articulate one's faith as clearly as others and yet he may have an incredibly powerful prayer life because of the spiritual work which has taken place in his heart. There is simply something powerful at work in a heart which is drawn to believe the Word of God and in the spirit of a person who loves God with all his heart and mind.

So often in our attempts to find more effective methods of prayer or in our search for a "new thing" or in a misguided desire to be accepting of "other people's beliefs," we overlook the true basis for powerful prayer—a heart transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. The fact that this is essential is such an elementary concept for most. Nevertheless it remains, for many churches and individuals, a neglected and even an abandoned area of concern. In turn, this results in an ineffective prayer life, or possibly worse, a spiritually toxic environment where every new idea or desire of a pagan world is accepted by the hearts and minds of people who, without a heart transformed by the Holy Spirit, have no true spiritual compass.

Never have the words of Paul been more needed than in our world today. He wrote, “Pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” 2 Timothy 2:22 NIV

## Day 29



### *Wind in Your Hair*

As we were walking through the parking lot returning to our minivan, my daughters noticed a new-looking white mustang convertible parked in the space beside our van. “Oh daddy, that’s what we need!” my oldest informed me. “I don’t think so,” I replied. She immediately responded, speaking for herself and her sister, “But daddy...” which was followed by the reasons why it would be a great idea to buy a sporty convertible. There were several arguments, although my favorite reason of all was “Daddy, we want wind in our hair!” At this I was reminded of the need for excitement that young people have and I had to admit—that sounded good even to me. In fact, I can remember when I wanted “wind in my hair,” too!

It is that need for excitement that goes far beyond cool-looking cars that is indicative of the young and worrisome to their parents. Don’t misunderstand me; it is not that I have lost my desire for excitement, but I find that now that I am “Daddy” I do look more for safety features on vehicles than for what merely looks sporty. I may buy a sports car one day; however, for now I must admit that I am much more preoccupied with weightier matters. Now that I am older I try to eat better, exercise more, and make sure the mortgage is paid. Maybe it is because I see the consequences of my decisions and not just the excitement of the adventure. Admittedly, at this point in my life it is difficult for me to find a balance between adventure and responsibility. I am torn—I want my children to grow up living life to its fullest and yet, I want them to be watchful of the pitfalls of life and live a life that is pleasing to God.

Of course I realize that I am not as adventurous as some. Certainly I have not “done it all” or “seen it all.” And because of this, I can be easily dismissed by those looking purely for excitement. Balance is

bland to the young, especially when it comes from daddy. Nevertheless, recklessness in life is often only one step beyond adventuresome.

With this in mind I want to share the words of someone who—for the most part—had indeed seen and done it all. The person of whom I speak is King Solomon whose story is found in the Old Testament. Solomon was a man who loved to feel the “wind in his hair” and also a man who knew the sting of foolish decisions. Even so, what he has to say might just surprise you. Listen to what this wise man has to offer.

He writes, “Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment. So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body for youth and vigor are meaningless.” Ecclesiastes 11:9-10 NIV

It would appear that Solomon is telling you and me that we should live our lives to their fullest. Enjoy yourself—especially while you are young. Indulge in life’s excitement. Don’t allow the worries of life to steal the joy of your youth. Feel the wind in your hair! But wait, here is the balance, just remember God while you are living for the moment.

We would do well consider these words written by a man who started out enjoying what God had provided but became reckless and thus had to live with the consequences of his overindulgences. There is a balance in his words. He is not telling us to live any way we want. Nor is he portraying God as a harsh judge ready to punish those who have too much fun. God approves when we enjoy life. He is merely cautioning us not to become reckless in our decisions.

I realize that choices about life’s adventures and thrills lie ahead for my daughters. They will both make mistakes and they will feel moments of life’s enjoyment to its fullest. My only request of them and of other young people is for them to stop for a moment and consider what God would want them to do instead of just pursuing the excitement of the moment.

So, for all those young and not so young who are looking for excitement, may God always be first in your life, may life’s worries be far from your mind, and may you always feel the wind in your hair!

# Day 30



## *Cynics—faultfinders or answer finders*

“‘Are you cynical?’ Elizabeth Peale Allen asked in *The Good Life*. ‘It could land you in the Coronary Care Unit.’ According to Dr. Redford Williams, an internist and behavioral medicine researcher at Duke University Medical Center, ‘A cynical, mistrusting attitude is a driving force that makes people most susceptible to heart disease.’ Of course any cynic worth his weight would dispute this research.”

Our society has its fair share of cynics. Many are suffering from heart disease of a different nature. They are suspicious of others, doubters of other’s character and, the detractor of all do-gooders. Many of them even pride themselves in their cynical thoughts and ways. Some are admired as too shrewd or cunning to be taken in by anyone with a hidden agenda or impure motives. The problem is for many of these people is that everyone is suspect—if not out-right guilty to begin with—except for them of course. It is odd, but often true, the one who lives to point out the hypocrisy and errors of others rarely sees the error of his own life.

Pride is often the hidden motive behind the words of a cynic. In every critical comment, in every attack on the integrity or intentions of others, there is the underlying belief that they are justified in their assessment because they are not that way or believe that they would not behave in such a way. In reality, cynicism is the thinly veiled act of passing judgment on others.

Cynics are faultfinders not answer finders. Yes, they believe that by exposing the errors of others that they help to bring about positive change. But do they? Or do they simply add to the growing attitude of distrust and faultfinding that seems to be prevalent today? For those outside of the community of faith my message may fall on deaf ears, but for those who seek to “do what Jesus would do” listen carefully.

Consider the words of Jesus on judging others, “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then

you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.”  
Matthew 7:3-5 NIV

We are rarely in a position of accurately judging the actions of others, but when we do we must remember that we only do so after we have made adjustments in our own lives to *not* be guilty of the same thing. In addition, it should be our intention to help the person in question.

The Apostle Paul writes, “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else...” Galatians 6:1-4 NIV

There is nothing intrinsically valuable or virtuous in being a cynic and a critic. Too many get caught up in tearing down the lives and influence of others around them so that they can feel better about themselves and the way that they are living. Certainly there is enough in the world to give us cause to be cynical. However, there is nothing of value to be gained by constantly focusing on the faults and failures of others. We want others to give us the benefit of the doubt. We want others to bear with us. We think others should trust our intentions. We are all flawed in some manner, yet when we work with and bear with one another and believe the best about one another, we become more than we are when we go it alone. You can help reverse the negative trend in our society by making an extra effort to be fair and optimistic when dealing with others.

# Day 31



## *Decisions, Decisions*

On the subject of making decisions, Yogi Berra is reported to have said, “When you come to a fork in the road...take it.” It would appear that many people have taken Yogi’s muddled advice and are mired down once again in their indecision. If life’s decisions were just a little easier or if the right answers were just a little clearer, we would all have an easier time with the decisions that we face. But it is not always easy to know what to do or what to choose.

As a pastor I would love to be able to give people “three easy steps to always making the right decision,” but I cannot. Decision making is just not that simple in all situations. But perhaps the most troubling problem that I see among people in general is not just that they are having difficulty making decisions, it is that many do not seem to be learning from their previous bad decisions. It would appear that many just repeat their former bad decisions in a continuing cycle—without realizing that if they continue to do what they have always done they will continue to get what they have always gotten. Someone has called that “the definition of insanity.”

Of course I am not saying that if we make the same mistake more than twice we are insane. But would you not agree that it is a bit foolish to continue the same decision making pattern when we can see that we are likely to get the same results every time?

There is a simple law at work here—like the natural law of gravity—called the law of sowing and reaping. This is more of a “life” law or a “spiritual” law. A very simple way of explaining it is to say that our decisions have an impact on our lives—whether for good or for bad.

The Apostle Paul wrote in the New Testament book of Galatians in chapter 6, verses 7-9 “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” NIV

Paul is trying to help us to see much more than just “sin” is wrong. He also wants us to understand that we must not allow ourselves to be driven by our natural desires, human weaknesses, and instant satisfaction. Good decisions often take more time, call for us to defer

instant satisfaction, and to refrain from just accepting the first solution that comes our way. Perhaps that is why he ends with, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” It takes discipline to hold to the proper course of life. We must be sold out to doing what is truly right—not just what feels right at the moment. Then we must be willing to wait for those good decisions to pay dividends into our lives.

So, when facing life’s decisions, pray for guidance. Gather all pertinent information about the decision. Seek godly and wise counsel from people whose life demonstrates that they know how to make good decisions. Look for solutions that respect your worth and dignity as a person, your well-being and that of those you love and that honor God. Finally, take your time before making the decision and take time after the decision to allow the wheels you have set in motion to move you to where you want to be in your life. In time you will see that the seeds planted by wise decisions will produce a good and abundant harvest in your life.

***Other inspirational books by Mark Beaird are available for order through Amazon, Books-a-Million, Barnes and Noble and other retailers. Also, look for Kindle versions coming soon.***