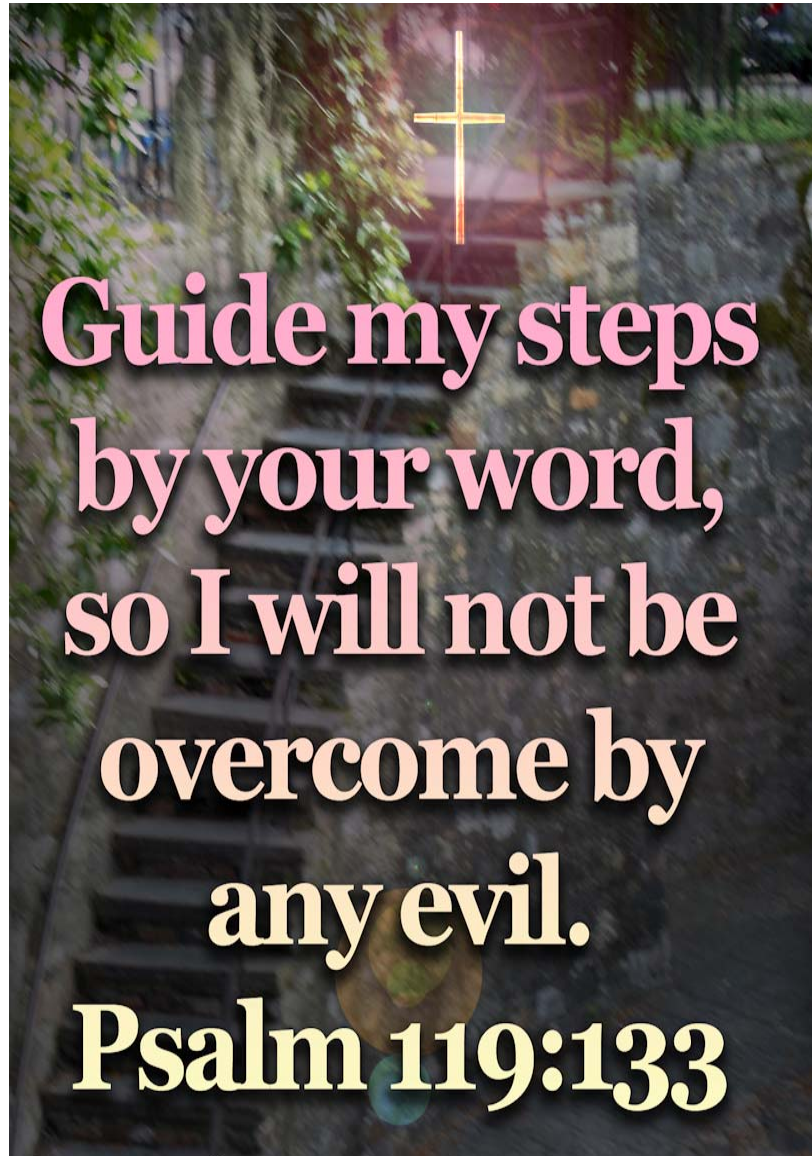


Daily Devotional

March 2017



Guide my steps
by your word,
so I will not be
overcome by
any evil.

Psalm 119:133

Foreword

In the first day of our March devotions, we complete for now our discussion of *The Mission and Disciplines of the Christian Way of Life*. This is a topic we will return to at the end of the month and throughout the year. Beginning with day two and a good part of the month, we return to our study of Isaiah.

We close out the month by returning to *The Mission and Disciplines of the Christian Way of Life*. There are many disciplines that prepare the Christian to make disciples. Without a daily time of maturing our faith through prayer, worship, and a number of other disciplines, we are not prepared to achieve the task Jesus has assigned for us to do. That's what the final devotional lessons in this book are about, a reminder of our mission and a closer look at some of the disciplines that enable us to achieve that mission.



In His grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Kevin Redig". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Kevin Redig

All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NKJV (1992 edition) or the NIV (1984 edition).

Christian Way of Life

Wednesday, March 1: Read Luke 3

So the first discipline of the Christian Life can be described as sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to what He has to say or, alternately, abiding in Christ as a branch in the vine. There is one more thing to which I would like to draw your attention before we move on, consider John 15:9:

*"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you;
abide in My love."*

This is an astonishing verse! But to understand it, we must understand just how the Father has loved the Son. Consider Luke 3:22:

*"You are My
beloved Son;
in You I am
well pleased."*



The Father's love for the Son is dramatically described, but did you note that Jesus says He loves us in this same way? You will never come to grips with the depth and meaning of this aside from spending time with the Lord, abiding in Him!

There is nothing automatic about our abiding in Christ. We need to make it a priority in our lives and set aside the time to do so. If we don't, the demands of this life will push our time with the Lord out of its rightful place.

Continued on the next page

Christian Way of Life

Wednesday, March 1: Read Luke 3 Continued

John 15:10 tells us that part of abiding in the love of Christ is to obey His commandments. This verse makes it clear that we are not in fellowship with the Lord unless we are walking in obedience to what He has revealed to us. But we must realize that in terms of priority, we don't start with obedience, but rather with abiding in Him. Obedience flows from abiding.

When you and I struggle with obedience in some particular area, our greatest need is not to strive harder but to come out from the struggle and abide, to sit at His feet and fix our eyes upon Him!



“ . . .you have been in the arena, you have been endeavoring, you are a failure, come out and sit down, and as you sit there behold Him, look at Him. Don't try to be like Him, just look at Him. Instead of letting that fill your mind and heart, let Him fill it. Just behold Him, look upon Him through the Word. Come to the Word for one purpose and that is to meet the Lord.” (Douty)

Sometimes, this is all we can and should do! Not as an excuse for failure, but to find God's answer to our need.

Isaiah Lessons

Thursday, March 2: Read Isaiah 7

Let's return to last year's study of Isaiah, beginning where we left off.

Not for the first time in Israel's history, and not for the last, the king is very worried about circumstances. He is facing an aggressive enemy bent on destroying Israel. Let me draw your attention to God's guidance communicated through Isaiah:

*If you do not stand firm in your faith,
you will not stand at all. Isaiah 7:9*

This is timeless advice—every bit as applicable to Christians during the age of the Church as it was to the kings of Israel! Let me ask a simple question, “What does it look like to stand firm in one's faith?” To answer, how about another question: What if you were one of the Israelites at the Red Sea and heard Moses thunder out

Stand still and watch the deliverance of the Lord. . .
Exodus 14:13-14

What would standing firm look like? It would entail taking God at His word, standing firm in the peace of the Lord, and letting Him deal with the Egyptians. What does it look like to “stand firm in your faith” if you are David before Goliath? (I Samuel 17:45-48) It means declaring, “*the battle is the Lord's*” and charging the giant!

Sometimes standing firm in our faith is simply trusting and allowing God to work out the details. Other times, it means trusting in the midst of taking action and leaving the outcome to Him. Of course, this leaves lots of in-between possibilities. How do we know which one we should be doing? Let's see if we can find the answer in another chapter of the book of Isaiah tomorrow.

Isaiah Lessons

Friday, March 3: Read Isaiah 30

Although the timeframe of Chapter 30 is far removed from that of Chapter 7, the circumstances are much the same. Israel is once again facing an external enemy. What should she do? One thing we know for sure,

*If she does not stand firm in her faith,
she will not stand at all! Isaiah 7:9*

In light of our study yesterday, what should Israel do—“stand still and watch the deliverance of the Lord,” or attack her adversary trusting that the “battle is the Lord’s.”

Trying to answer this question for Israel, or in our own lives, is to put the emphasis on the wrong place. How about putting into practice Isaiah 30:15:

*This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel,
says: “In repentance and rest is your salvation,
in quietness and trust is your strength. . .”*

This Word from the Lord naturally breaks into two components. First, in repentance and rest is your salvation, the salvation in view is deliverance from one of life’s difficulties. And where is this deliverance found? In repentance, a change of mind, not trusting in the things of this world to deliver, but instead resting in the all-sufficient One. And how do we perpetuate this in time? That’s the idea of ongoing strength, a “quietness” within the soul coupled with trusting the Lord. So to draw things together, if we turn from trusting in anything else to a moment-by-moment dependence upon the Lord He will not only deliver but also strengthen. He will make it clear whether ours is to act or simply stand and allow Him to act. In the closing words of Verse 15, it records that Israel “*would have none of it.*” In other words, they continued to scramble for deliverance elsewhere and therefore had little strength and no peace. We’ve all tried their approach. Try Isaiah 30:15 instead.

Isaiah Lessons

Monday, March 6: Read Isaiah 8

You have heard me mention many times, “God’s ways are not man’s ways.” And not only that, God’s ways are much higher than man’s ways and preferable in every way. Isaiah Chapter 8 is a perfect illustration of this. In Chapter 7, the southern kingdom of Judah was worried about the allied power of Damascus and the northern kingdom. God said, “Trust me!” However, the people

*...rejected the gently
flowing waters of Shiloah.*

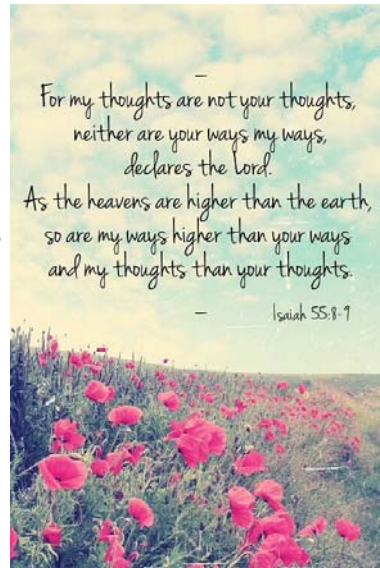
Isaiah 8:6

That is, they rejected the admonition to trust in God, and now they are going to have to deal with a much greater foe—Assyria. Assyria is going to

*...sweep on into Judah, swirling over it,
passing through it and reaching up to the neck,*

That is exactly what happened as the Assyrians eventually surrounded Jerusalem. Yet in the face of military disaster and all the hardship that goes with it, God’s ways remain the same. For He told Isaiah,

*...not to follow the way of this people. . . Do not call
conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy;
do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The
Lord Almighty is the One you are to regard as holy,
He is the one you are to fear. . .* Isaiah 8:11-13



Continued on the next page

Isaiah Lessons

Monday, March 6: Read Isaiah 8 Continued

Right from the beginning, Isaiah is told not to follow man's ways. Instead, he is told to fear the Lord, regard Him as holy, He will be your sanctuary! And that is exactly what happened during the days of Hezekiah. The Assyrians did indeed surround Jerusalem and God miraculously delivered the city.

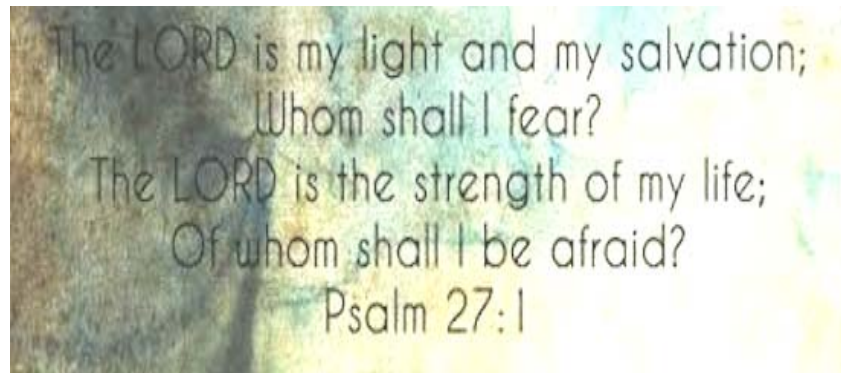
That's why Isaiah says,

*I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding His face from
the house of Jacob. I will put my trust in Him.*

Isaiah 8:17

Right there are the same two options available to us. We can trust God, as Isaiah did, or we can turn to our own devices. If we choose to trust our devices instead of trusting the Lord, we should expect God to "hide His face from us" just as He did from the northern kingdom.

That example should make it easy to decide!



Isaiah Lessons

Tuesday, March 7: Read Isaiah 9

Chapter 9 is packed! There are clear references to the Messiah in the first half of the chapter and then strongly worded language describing the judgment that was going to fall upon the north. This is exactly what happened at the hand of the Assyrians who conquered and then deported a large part of the population of the northern kingdom. These deported people, sometimes referred to as the *Ten Lost Tribes of Israel*, did not retain their distinct Jewish identity to the same degree as have those of the southern kingdom. So when someone identifies themselves as Jewish in our day, it is because of their connection to the southern kingdom of Judah. Nonetheless, you will see as you read Isaiah, and the other prophets, that God is going to miraculously gather the northern kingdom back together again at some future time—something only He could do.

That brings us to Verses 6-7. Every Christmas we read this passage and it clearly prophetically speaks of Jesus Christ. This passage is so linked with Christmas it is almost nostalgic. Yet, it is only the very first phrase: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given. . .” that refers to the first nativity. That’s it! The entire rest of this very well-known quote can in no way be said to have been fulfilled by Christ to date. Has He taken upon Himself the mantle of government? Was He called Mighty God and Everlasting Father? Has He assumed David’s earthly throne to reign? Has justice and righteousness been established on earth? The answer to all of these questions is an unqualified no. However, it is going to be a resounding yes when Jesus returns again. We can be certain that as part of that return, He will be able to restore those northern tribes to their rightful inheritance at the same time.

Isaiah Lessons

Wednesday, March 8: Read Isaiah 10

Chapter 10 continues what is a recurring theme for Israel:

- They turn from the Lord.
- He warns them and they don't listen.
- So judgment falls from the hand of God.

There are a couple of very interesting *wrinkles* that we should notice in order to better understand history and God's sovereign control over it. In Verses 1-3, the injustice has gotten so bad that God pronounces in Verse 4:

"Nothing will remain but to cringe among the captives or fall among the slain."

The point is that God is completely able to punish a nation for its sin. (Biblically aware Christians in America should be very concerned!)

That's not all. Historically, it was the Assyrians who destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel and deported its people. Did you catch in Verse 5 that God calls Assyria "*the rod of His anger*" and "*the club of His wrath?*" God is so in control of things, that He is able to use one nation to discipline another.



Isaiah Lessons

Wednesday, March 8: Read Isaiah 10

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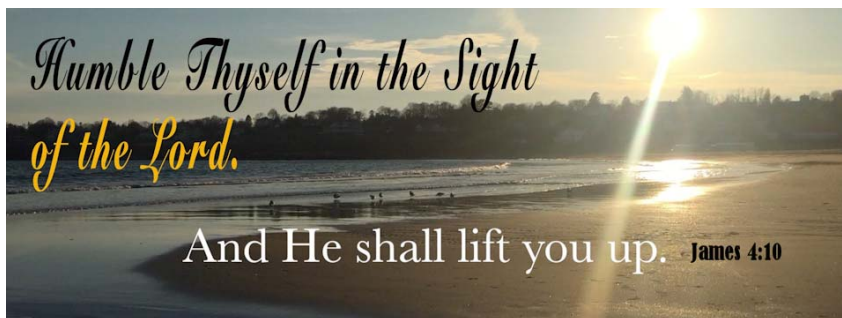
There is one more thing we should glean. In Verses 7-11, the terrible pride of the Assyrians is revealed. Their king thinks that it is because of his power and greatness that he is going to destroy Samaria and deal with Jerusalem.

Once again the sovereignty of God is on display when we read in Isaiah 10:12:

When the Lord has finished all His work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, He will say, "I will punish the king of Assyria for the willful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes."

We worship a very, very big God. He can reach into this world any time He wants to in order to punish a nation which has turned to sin. He may choose to use one nation to punish another. But, when His chosen instrument gets puffed with pride, He can address that as well.

As we shall see, that is exactly what happened to the king of Assyria after the siege of Jerusalem. He was cut down by his own sons in the temple of his god—or was it by the Lord?



Isaiah Lessons

Thursday, March 9: Read Isaiah 11

As is so often the case, we have judgment declared in consequence for sin followed by a clear demonstration of the grace of God. Who is this shoot that will come up from the stump of Jesse and bear fruit that is mentioned in Verse 1? It is clear this verse is talking about a descendant of David, but who is it that is in view?

By the end of Verses 2 and 3, it is clear that it is none other than the promised Messiah—the Lord Jesus Christ! Now we can certainly make a case that Verses 2 and 3 were fulfilled at the first coming of Christ, but what about Verses 4-9? Did Jesus strike the earth with judgment and slay the wicked? (Verse 4) Has the environment described in Verses 5-9 ever existed? The answer to both of these questions is no because Christ is not presently ruling upon this earth, but He is going to. And when He does, there will be justice of a kind we do not presently have, and there will be environmental changes of a kind that are not possible for man to bring about.

Some spiritualize this as what it will be like in heaven, but does that seem to be the thrust of the passage to you? In fact, could this passage really be fulfilled apart from Christ exercising dominion here on this earth? How about the rest of the passage, unless the scattered people of Israel actually return to Israel at some future date, this prophecy will be unfulfilled. God has shown He is capable of doing what He says he will, and we should have every confidence in the truthfulness of God's Word and the certainty that the reality of Isaiah 11 will be fulfilled.

Jesus will reign, Israel will be regathered, and the grace and mercy of our God will be on full display! Who is like unto our God?

*For the LORD is good and His love endures forever;
His faithfulness continues through all generations.*

Psalm 100:5

Isaiah Lessons

Friday, March 10: Read Isaiah 12

In Chapters 9 and 10, God foretold His use of Assyria to discipline the northern and southern kingdoms. In Chapter 13 and following, the emphasis changes to Babylon and then other nations who, at one time or another, persecuted the Jews. And right in the middle of this we have Chapter 12. This chapter is constructed around the phrase, “*In that day. . .*” The immediate question is, “What day?”

Well there is no doubt that the Jews have thanked their God many times for their deliverance, using words similar to those found in Chapter 12. But given the prophetic nature of Isaiah, I strongly suggest that this is meant to be descriptive of the time when Jesus returns as the King of kings and Lord of lords and rules over the entire earth with His kingdom centered in Jerusalem. Just spend a few moments thinking about how glorious it would be to have Jesus Christ Himself rule over this earth in perfect justice! Just so we don’t miss the application to the Church—the words here are beautiful.

*Surely God (the Lord Jesus Christ) is my salvation;
I will trust and not be afraid. (Verse 2)*

What a blessing in the day in which we live to not be afraid! Furthermore, in Him we can draw from “*the wells of salvation*” (Verse 3); for...

*On the last and greatest day of the feast,
Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is
thirsty let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes
in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water
will flow from within him.” John 7:37-38*

The Lord has done “glorious things” through His Son, and we are called to “*let this be known to all the world.*” (5) So that “in that day” we would have the blessing of hearing:

*“Well done My good and faithful servant. . .”
Matthew 25:21*

Isaiah Lessons

**Monday, March 13: Read Isaiah 13
and 14:12-14**

Much of Chapters 13-27 are prophecies describing the nations surrounding Israel. Chapters 13 and 14 deal with Babylon, and that will be the focus of our attention for the next few days. Reference to Babylon must be understood at a number of different levels. The first and the easiest, is the nation of Babylon. Consider the first two verses of the book of Daniel:

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God."



Isaiah Lessons

Monday, March 13: Read Isaiah 13 and 14:12-14 Continued

Actually, Nebuchadnezzar overran the southern kingdom on three occasions with the final result that Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple burned, and much of the population taken into exile. Now the Lord used Babylon to discipline the nation of Israel for its sin, but Isaiah 13 also makes it clear that Babylon itself is going to be judged for its sin—this is clearly declared in Isaiah 13:19:

*Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the glory of
the Babylonians' pride, will be overthrown
by God like Sodom and Gomorrah.*

The description of Babylon's fall carries into Chapter 14. However, in Isaiah 14:9, there is a quite distinct change in the language. Then Isaiah 14:12-14 should really catch our attention for several reasons. First, the individual in view is said to be named the "*morning star*," which also happens to be the name Lucifer.

Second, this morning star is said to have decided to take God's place and establish his own throne. The various kings of Babylon were prideful men (Nebuchadnezzar had to be humbled by God), but there is no record that any of them decided to take the place of their gods. What I am saying is these verses seem to have switched to language that no longer fits any known king of Babylon. That's why these few verses are often considered to be descriptive of the fall of Satan.

I'll explain more tomorrow.

Isaiah Lessons

Tuesday, March 14: Read Isaiah 14

Verse 12 should really grab your attention:

*How you are fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer, son of the morning!*



We were talking about the king of Babylon, where did the name Lucifer come from? Verse 14 is almost as arresting:

*For you have said in your heart:
I will ascend into heaven,
I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;
I will also sit on the mount of the congregation
on the farthest sides of the north;
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,
I will be like the Most High.*

Isaiah Lessons

Tuesday, March 14: Read Isaiah 14 Continued

These are sometimes referred to as the five “I wills,” and when taken collectively are a clear indication that the creature intends to supplant and take the place of the Creator. But who, exactly, is speaking?

It is possible to take the word translated Lucifer literally and translate it: shining one, light-bearer, or morning star. But many Bible scholars treat it as the name it also is and consider it to be descriptive of Satan’s rebellion against God.

I think this is well worth considering; but in order to give this any weight, we have to understand how we went from talking about the King of Babylon to Satan himself. This is a complex subject outside the scope of our devotional, but in the short space available, we can still shed some light on this topic:

- In II Corinthians 4:4, Satan is said to be the “*god of this age.*”
- In I John 5:19, we are told “*the whole world is under the control of the evil one.*”

Do you see the connection? Satan, as the ruler of this world, is behind the world system that opposes God and behind the kingdoms that attack His people. What Isaiah has done, right in the middle of Chapter 14, is to switch from Babylon’s earthly king to the fallen angel which stands behind His kingdom. Furthermore, the plans of Satan to supplant God are clearly revealed.

The rest of the chapter tells you how well that works!

Isaiah Lessons

Wednesday, March 15: Read Luke 4

Luke Chapter 4 clearly reveals to us one specific example of the temptations faced by Jesus during His time on this earth. Verse 13 makes it clear that Satan would be back to tempt again. As you can see, the kinds of temptation faced by Jesus were far beyond the kinds of things we face. As a follow-up to yesterday's devotional, I particularly wanted you to note the second temptation in the series in Verses 5 and 6:

*The devil led Him up to a high place and showed Him
in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.
And he said to Him, 'I will give You all their authority
and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give
it to anyone I want to. So if You worship me,
it will all be Yours.*

Did you catch it? All earthly kingdoms and their authority have apparently been given to Satan. Notice that Jesus did not dispute this issue. When did this happen? I would suggest it happened at the fall of man. In Genesis 1:28, Adam and Eve were given dominion over the earth and told to rule over it. Apparently, when they sinned by disobeying God and listening to Satan, dominion over this world defaulted to Satan. That is why, as we saw yesterday, Satan is said to be the "god of this age." Perhaps now you see another aspect of the return of Christ. As the Last Adam, He is going to re-establish dominion over this earth on behalf of humanity as the greater Son of David who will rule with an iron scepter.

Don't let this confuse you about God's sovereignty over all things, including Satan's machinations on earth. For God limits the extent of what the evil one can do while history plays out. At issue here is mankind retaking dominion of this earth and it will be done by the representative man—Jesus Christ. (Revelation 19-21)

Isaiah Lessons

Thursday, March 16: Read Ephesians 6

Ephesians 6:12-20 very nicely extends our discussion of Satan's rebellion and rulership of this fallen world. Here are some things to note:

- This passage reminds us, as Christians, that despite the horrific actions of a group like ISIS, in reality there are "*spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*" that are behind the actions of every nation.
- This means we should not be surprised at attacks against Christianity, and in particular against the spreading of the Gospel and the making of disciples. This is what the forces of evil do. And there are many people, many of them well meaning, who have either been duped by demonic influence or readily follow it to suit their own agendas. This is the explanation behind the sweeping moral changes that have occurred in our nation in the past few years, changes which any thinking or spiritually perceptive person couldn't help but know are going to be detrimental for society.
- God has not left us to deal with this on our own! If we have a need, then His grace has an answer. We don't have time to delve into detail, but He has provided us armor suitable for the world in which we live: the Word of God as the belt of truth, the imputed righteousness of Christ as our breastplate, the Gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of our salvation and the sword of the Spirit. The Word of God is to be our only offensive weapon.
- One last thing to note. Paul says, "*With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying. . .*" (Verse 18); and then he asks for prayer in boldly proclaiming the Gospel. We need to realize, as Paul clearly did, that sharing the Gospel is part of the spiritual battle and requires one to put on the full armor of God!

Isaiah Lessons

Friday, March 17: Read Ezekiel 28

Before moving from the book of Isaiah and the topic of Lucifer's rebellion, there is one more thing I would like to show you which has a very practical application for our fellowship. Ezekiel 28 is similar to Isaiah 14 in a number of ways. It starts out talking about the earthly king of Tyre. Then in Verse 12, it moves to narrative which couldn't possibly be true of any earthly king. For is any man, "*the model of perfection?*" Which king was "in Eden, the Garden of God" and adorned with every precious stone? And how could the king of Tyre be "*anointed as a guardian cherub?*"

Once again, we have moved to a description of Lucifer as he was created and now stands behind every earthly king—both Babylon and Tyre.



Isaiah Lessons

Friday, March 17: Read Ezekiel 28 Continued

In particular, I want to draw your attention to Verses 15-16:

You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub from among the fiery stones.

Lucifer sinned, and was driven from his role as the guardian of the throne room of God because of something said to be “widespread trade” which led to “violence.” Widespread trade is literally “that which passes through the hands,” typically some kind of commodity. The word translated violence can also mean just that which is gained unjustly.

With great insight, Donald Barnhouse points to the original sin of Lucifer as taking that which passed “through his hands” as the guardian of the throne room of God, namely the praises due God, and doing “violence” to them by directing them to himself. Look at Verse 17,

Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. . .

Here is the application. We gather each Sunday for a time of what we call worship. Do you ever wonder why we always set aside a time of preparation, a time to make sure we are in fellowship and our hearts are pure. That is simply because we want to take the focus off of ourselves, and put it where it belongs. For God deserves the full praise of every creature, and we dare give Him no less.

The Christian Life

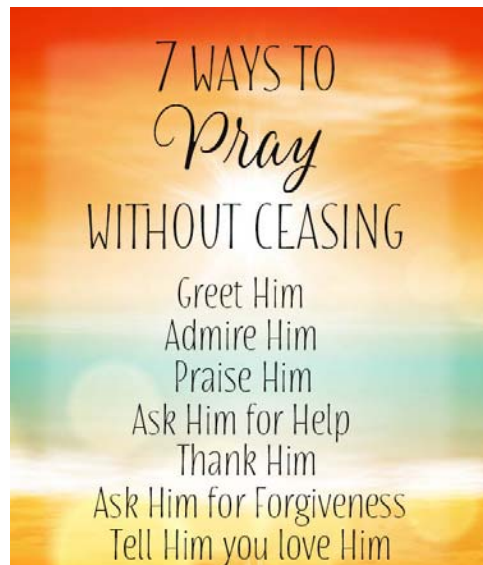
Monday, March 20: Read I Thessalonians

From Isaiah we are returning to our study of the Missions and Disciplines of the Christian Life.

Let me remind you that we have one singular mission—to make disciples! That includes both the lost turning to faith in Christ as well as assisting those saved to grow in grace and knowledge. And then there are many disciplines associated with the Christian life.

In the same way a soldier is not ready for his mission of close combat unless he has mastered such disciplines as marksmanship and carrying a heavy pack, neither is the Christian ready to disciple without a daily time of maturing his or her own faith through prayer, worship, and a number of other disciplines. That's what the next devotional lessons are about, a reminder of our mission

and a closer look at some of the disciplines that enable us to achieve our mission.



Let's consider prayer as another of the disciplines of the Christian Life. I am sure you have heard a message on I Thessalonians 5:17, "*Pray without ceasing. . .*"

The Christian Life

Monday, March 20: Read I Thessalonians

Continued

We sometimes try to obey this admonition as if it were a stand-alone command. Consider this. If we were fully engaged in the mission of making disciples, sharing Christ with neighbors and grandchildren, and abiding in Christ on a daily basis, praying without ceasing becomes the most natural thing in the world to do.

Furthermore, your prayers aren't so much going to be about you, but about that lost neighbor, needy grandchild, and a host of other mission-focused needs. Prayer isn't something that is meant to stand in isolation, it is part of being in the battle to win souls and help them grow. I read recently of a missionary agency that interviewed 50 candidates for missionary work, three of them had regular prayer and devotional times. Contrast that with what you find in Scripture when Moses, Jacob, Daniel, and many others wrestled with God in prayer, sometimes through the night, because of God's call on their lives.

I am suggesting we are not really prepared for our mission of reaching others unless we improve our facility with prayer. M'Cheyne said it this way:

*What a man is on his knees alone before God,
that he is, and no more.*

So here is our simple approach: we are going to spend the next few days looking at one of the model prayers that has been preserved for us in Scripture. Our hope is to learn both how to pray and to think about the content of our prayers.

The Christian Life

Tuesday, March 21: Read John 13

In II Thessalonians 1:3, Paul warms up to the subject of prayer by saying,

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.

We tend to give thanks for material well-being and comfort. Paul gives thanks for evidence of faith and brotherly love. Now there is nothing wrong with giving thanks for physical blessings. I am simply suggesting that we give thanks for things we value, but, have we extended our thinking to match Paul's in that we value manifestations of faith and love among God's people? As a simple point of application, give thanks for simple indications of faith on the part of others and ask for others to grow their faith when you know they are facing difficult situations.

As for a love that is increasing among us, consider our fellowship for a moment. We have people from all parts of the country, all kinds of work backgrounds, and even many different denominational backgrounds. This is not usually a recipe for unity! How is it, then, that we can have unity, fellowship, and shared ministry? In part, it is because this is a natural outworking of being followers of Jesus Christ.

*A new command I give you: Love one another.
As I have loved you, so you must love one another.
By this all men will know that you are My disciples,
if you love one another. John 13:34-35*

This is what makes it so wretched when there is dissension in a church, the process of discipleship is short-circuited and witness to the Lord compromised. So here is a second point of application, pray for God to increase our love for one another within this fellowship. And give Him thanks when it is manifest, for this is the stuff of revival!

The Christian Life

Wednesday, March 22: Read II Thessalonians 1

We find our model prayer in Verses 11-12. Paul and his team are praying for a small body of believers in Thessalonica:

With this in mind, we constantly pray for you that our God may count you worthy of His calling, and that by His power He may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

What is it that Paul has in mind? It is what he has just mentioned in the previous ten verses: the faith and love of the Thessalonian believers, their steadfast perseverance in the face of persecution, and their faith in the certain coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. So what is the substance of Paul's prayer, and I am suggesting it be a model for us. He is praying for this body to be found worthy of God's calling. What is God's calling to the saved child of God? There are many aspects to this calling, but let me use II Corinthians 5:15 as a very good summary:

“ . . . those who live (as the result of being born again) should no longer live for themselves but for Him (the Lord Jesus Christ) who died for them. . . ”

So Paul is praying that this group of believers would be found, by God, to be living for Christ. The word translated “count worthy” has its origin in the market place. It means to get an amount of commodity equal in value for the money paid. It means when each of our lives is put on the divine scales, it will balance out with God's call to live for Him. Wow! Any kind of personal introspection would lead any of us realize that at times we fail. What a challenge! On the other hand, what a great prayer request for believing children, grandchildren, and our church fellowship—that God would find them and us measuring up!

The Christian Life

Thursday, March 23: Read Ephesians 1

I hope you have been considering, since yesterday, the challenge of living a life that God Himself will find to have *measured up*. (Actually the idea in the text is to be of equivalent weight. In our day, we might use the similar idea of measuring up.)

Just a couple of very practical things for today:

- We need to be very clear on exactly who is the arbiter of whether or not we have *measured up*. Who gets to decide? All too often, I get the impression that we think that we get to decide! The text in II Thessalonians 1 sets us straight. It is God alone who is going to decide:

...that our God may count you worthy.

That being the case, this is its own matter for prayer when spending time with the Lord. Ask Him if you are living up to your calling in Christ. He will let you know.

- Now to our reading for today in Ephesians 1. Part of our calling, who we are in Christ, can be found in Ephesians 1:4-f. These verses describe the identity of every child of God, and include the fact that “in Christ”: we are holy and blameless, adopted as sons, accepted in the Beloved, redeemed, forgiven of our sins, and any number of other spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ. Here is what might be considered one of the great paradoxes of the Christian life: it is God’s intent that we mature into what we already are in Christ.

The Christian Life

Thursday, March 23: Read Ephesians 1

Continued

Hebrews 10:14 says it this way:

*By one sacrifice, He has made
perfect forever,
those who are being made holy.*

Perfect, yet being made holy. If we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are perfect and yet we need, through the Word of God and the Spirit of God, to have our lives transformed so we would become like Him.

Now you see a truly important aspect of prayer. We are not to pray that our problems would go away but, rather, we are to pray for the grace to live consistently with our identity in Christ. And when that is the case, we are living consistently with our identity in Christ, our problems may actually be part of God's answer.

Who needs this kind of prayer? Each of us, our extended families, and our church fellowship need this kind of prayer. What a measure of God's glory we would reflect to our community should we manifest our true identity in Christ!



The Christian Life

Friday, March 24: Read Ephesians 2

Do you see the truth that this II Thessalonians 1:11-12 prayer is more *packed* than we thought? Not only have we introduced prayer, to live “*worthy*” of our calling, but now we move on to two related phrases: “*every good purpose*” and “*every act prompted by faith.*” What are those about? I can show the source of good purposes:

...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Philippians 2:12-13

I can also show you the source of works that would be prompted by faith: We are

...created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. **Ephesians 2:10**

Do you see this? All too often we think that God saved us and now it is up to us to live the Christian life as best we can. On the contrary! If we are walking in the Spirit, then God is going to be at work with respect to the purposes that well up within. We are going to be prompted to exercise faith in the carrying out of certain works, and all this by the God who dwells within us as He manifests Himself through us. Do we do this in our own strength? Absolutely not. Look again at I Thessalonians 1:12. It is by His power! This opens a mighty new prayer front for us. We would put ourselves in a position (in fellowship with God, walking in the Spirit, trusting in the truths of His Word) so that His power would bring to fruition that which He has put in our hearts and has led us to do. Do you see it? Purpose and works brought to fruition. This is a mighty prayer to finish what has been started. What a great focus for our fellowship as we seek to finish well and bring glory to God. God’s glory will be the focus of our next devotional.

The Christian Life

Monday, March 27: Read II Corinthians 3

As we move into Verse 12, Paul says “*We pray this so that . . .*” The word translated “so that” is a conjunction that indicates purpose. Paul is telling us the purpose or intent behind his prayer. It is so that the name (think reputation) of the Lord Jesus Christ would be glorified in the life of each believer. To glorify means to elevate and then to point to that which has been elevated.

Put the last few days together. When we appropriate the power of God to live a life worthy of His calling, and when we fulfill those purposes for which He has gifted and enabled, and when our faith leads us to complete acts far beyond our own abilities, then we are showing the world what God can do through those who will trust and follow after Him. And this brings glory to God! Let it never be said of this church fellowship that we labor for our own glory, but rather that we labor to give glory to our Lord and Savior.

This would have been a fine place to stop this prayer, but there is one more extraordinary thing. It goes on to say,

. . . that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him. . .

How could this be? Did God not firmly say, “I will not share My glory with another. . .” in Isaiah 42:8? He did, but for those who are following after Him, living the “worthy” life we talked about, then consider this:

. . .and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed in His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. II Corinthians 3:17-18

Do you see it? God will not share His glory with a competitor, but will manifest it in the life of His followers! This is how we are glorified—in Him!

The Christian Life

Tuesday, March 28: Read Job 31

For the past few days, I have been developing for you I Thessalonians 1:11-12 in the hope that you might use it as a model prayer. It has wide applicability, but I find it to be particularly compelling in terms of family. Perhaps you are wondering, how do I use this as a model? Let me give you an example, using a hypothetical granddaughter named Katie.

Heavenly Father, in light of Jesus' soon return, I pray for Katie's walk of faith and perseverance through trial. Specifically, I pray that her walk would measure up to Your calling on her life. Teach her to trust You and walk in the power of the Spirit that the works you have prepared for her before the foundation of time would be accomplished to her blessing and Your glory. And Father, as she walks with You, I trust you to transform her into the woman You want her to be, a woman who brings credit to Your name and reflects Your glory to all that know her. As Paul prayed for those on his heart, I pray for the one You have put on my heart, in Jesus name!

There is an infinite amount of variation from these verses, but the point is simply to show you how using this as a model can focus your prayer efforts for others.

Now, there is one more topic regarding prayer I would like to have you consider in the next few days. There are times when those going through a very difficult time will say to me, "I have given up praying." This happens when the trials have been both prolonged and severe. At times we all wonder if God is really listening and whether He can really reach into our existence and act? (See Job 31:35-36) In fact, we are potentially one crisis away from facing this kind of challenge. So how do we prepare ourselves? One answer is to ask and answer the question—"Prayer, Why Bother?"

The Christian Life

Wednesday, March 29: Read Jeremiah 33

We raised the question yesterday: Prayer, Why Bother? We aren't going to be afraid of dealing with this question, for Christianity is at its best when dealing with hard and seemingly hopeless situations. If God could find a way to save us, He is not going to have any difficulty dealing with the hard questions we might bring to Him. Consider the following as a partial answer to this question:

- Throughout Scripture, prayer is interwoven in the lives of God's people. God expects us to call to Him, and He promises to answer in a remarkable and profound way:
"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know." Jeremiah 33:3
- Crying out to God is not the problem. What I want to encourage us to do is to make sure it is the cry of the believer in distress, even the cry of a discouraged believer, but not the turning away of the skeptic.
- But how do we avoid feeling as if God has forsaken us? There is something that every child of God must know, and must settle in His or her thinking.

God loves His own! Every child of God is accepted in the Beloved, that is, accepted in Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:6) We are grounded in the love of Christ. (Ephesians 3:17) The love of God is wide enough to cover every circumstance we will ever face, long enough to cover every day we will ever live, deep enough to cover every pit in which we find ourselves, and high enough to keep us seated with Christ in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 3:18)

Best of all, once we come to realize this—we can count on the fact that God never changes, there is no shadow of turning in Him. (James 1:17) That means the love of God for His children is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We'll continue answering this question tomorrow.

Christian Life

Thursday, March 30: Read Job 42

We'll continue where we left off yesterday, answering the question: Prayer, Why Bother?

- Sometimes we feel like events are completely outside of anyone's control. Maybe it is fate or the cosmic juggernaut just grinding on. I know why we sometimes feel like that, but how does that line up with the Word of God:

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of Him. John 5:14-15

- Obviously, we are not to conclude things are outside of God's control. But, that immediately raises another question, how do we know what is according to His will? The easy answer to that is: anything that clearly lines up with His Word is in His will. But how about things that are not Biblically black and white, praying for healing for a sick neighbor or that job for a family member and a host of other items that we do not find explicitly stated in the scriptures? My advice is to pray for what the Lord seems to put on your heart and remember as one theologian put it, prayer doesn't change the plans and purposes of God but it does move His hand. And what a privilege to be involved with the plans and purposes of God.

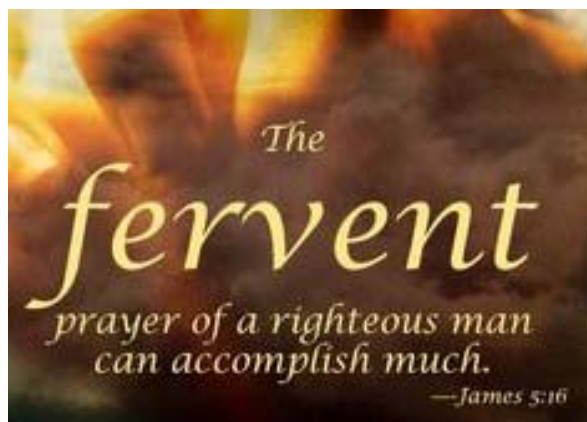
Christian Life

Thursday, March 30: Read Job 42 Continued

- One final thought—sometimes, we realize that we are in the wrong for doubting God's understanding of our situation and doubting His ability to act. Like Job, we have gotten to the point of wondering if God is even listening and, like Job after being questioned by God in Chapters 38-42, we suddenly realize we have sinned. We have gotten it wrong. God loves us, has everything in hand, and is acting in keeping with His purposes. What do we do when we realize our error? Why we need to pray just as Job did in Job 42:5-6:

*My ears had heard of You but now my eyes
have seen You. Therefore I despise myself
and repent in dust and ashes.*

We simply address our unbelief and get back to offering the fervent prayer of a righteous man that can avail much! (James 5:16)



In the Beginning

Friday, March 31: Read Genesis 27

For this last day of March and into April, we are going to return to the book of Genesis and follow the unfolding of the Abrahamic Covenant and the eventual creation of a nation who is God's very own

There is one item of background you need to know as you try to come to grips with the narrative of Chapter 27. The Lord told Rebekah,

"Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

Genesis 25:23



In the Beginning

Friday, March 31: Read Genesis 27 Continued

This Word of prophecy from the Lord Himself predicted that one nation would come from Esau and the other from Jacob. Furthermore, Esau would serve Jacob. In other words, the Abrahamic promise would come through the line of Jacob and not that of Esau.

Consider once again our reading for today. What do you think of the manipulative way that Rebekah dealt with her husband, and Jacob's willing participation in the deception? There is simply no way to justify their behavior is there? Here is a principle for us to consider; under no circumstances do we ever have to plot and scheme in order to come into the blessing that God has promised. It is given in grace and will come to us in His timing. Ours is simply to learn to trust Him one day at a time. This is the meaning of "resting" in the Lord.

Now, if you are like me, sometimes we just want to speed things up a little. How well does that work out for Jacob and Rebekah? Jacob is forced to flee for his life for a period of many years. He is isolated from his family. He makes a mortal enemy of his brother and his close relationship with his mother is broken. All of this to grasp (that's what the name Jacob means) something that God had every intention of giving him anyway.

Proverbs 28:25 will be proved in our lives one way or the other:

The greedy stir up conflict, but those who trust in the LORD will prosper.

VISTOSO

Community Church

He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit...*John 15:5*

1200 E. Rancho Vistoso Blvd., Oro Valley, AZ 85755 ☎ 520 825-0652