

# Daily Devotional

April 2017



I wait for the  
LORD,  
my soul  
waits,  
and in His  
Word  
I put my  
hope

Psalm 130:5

## Foreword

In the last day of our March devotions, we returned to our study of the Book of Genesis. We continue in Genesis this month following the story of Jacob and then Joseph. In the middle of the month, we pause for two days of devotions on Easter before returning to Genesis. Then at the end of the month, we leave Joseph as the second in command of all of Egypt to return to our study of Philippians beginning a study of Chapter 3.

As we have in our previous studies in Philippians, we will work our way verse by verse through Chapter 3. For this reason we will be reading quite a few chapters of the Bible to supplement our readings in Philippians. Make sure to read the Scripture each day—think about the truth of these Scriptures and then see if this devotional can provide a little bit more insight.

In His grace,



Kevin Redig



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

# In the Beginning

## Monday, April 3: Read Genesis 28

First, let's consider the message given to Jacob,

*He (Jacob) had a dream in which he saw a stairway  
resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven. . .  
There above it stood the Lord, and He said. . ."*

Genesis 28:12-15

The message from God to Jacob affirmed the promises given to Abraham: the land of Canaan, many, many descendants, the Lord's watch-care over him, God's presence with him, and God's blessing to the whole world through him.

Here are two questions for you, keeping in mind Friday's reading from Genesis 27. Did Jacob demonstrate himself worthy of this blessing? Did he do anything to earn or deserve it? The answer to both questions is no! This is another of the endless examples, in both the Old and the New Testaments, of the grace of God to undeserving sinners. We are going to see that eventually Jacob becomes a man of faith, particularly near the end of his life. Along the way, however, the Lord graciously provides, disciplines, and protects him.

What an amazingly patient and gracious God is at work in our lives. Let me ask you one more question. Does Jacob's vow beginning in Genesis 28:20 seem more like someone who has recognized the nature of God's gracious intent to keep His promises or like someone who is striving to strike a bargain with terms advantageous to himself? How often do we do the same thing? It is not very attractive is it? How much better to come to God and say, "Heavenly Father we could never earn or deserve the blessings we have in Your Son and so we praise your name and give thanks to You. Help us to walk worthy of who we are in You as we receive whatever you have for us."

# In the Beginning

## Tuesday, April 4: Read Genesis 29

We have a saying that goes something like this, “What goes around comes around!” Or you might prefer, “*A man reaps what he sows.*” (Galatians 6:7) That certainly seems to be the case with Jacob. For after deceiving his father, in order to receive the blessing reserved for the firstborn, Jacob is himself deceived by his father-in-law who promises him one daughter as his wife and then gives him another. Jacob ends up working an extra seven years to marry the daughter of his own choosing.

What do you think? Is it going to end here with Jacob repenting of his deceit of Isaac and cheating of Esau or, is the struggle going to continue? The next few chapters show us the answer.

In the meantime, the family of Jacob is starting to grow with four sons born to Leah. This is the first time, since the Abrahamic Covenant was given to Abraham, that the promise of many descendants is starting to pick up a little bit of momentum. But still, we are a long way from having descendants as many as the stars in the sky or the sand on the seashore. I wonder how God is going to fulfill His Word.

As the story unfolds, we can certainly see that God is using imperfect people to fulfill His perfect plans. What an incentive for us in our day. We have the completed canon of Scripture and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We must take advantage of what we have, avoid the fruitless years of *grasping* for blessing, in which Jacob persisted, and just trust in the Lord to provide what we need.

*For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does He withhold from those whose walk is blameless.*

Psalm 84:11

# In the Beginning

## Wednesday, April 5: Read Genesis 30

Rather than looking for any particular principle in Chapter 30, we are just going to consider it as part of the ongoing storyline involving God's ways and man's ways. As far as man's ways go, we can identify two things:

- The competition between Leah and Rachel on winning favor and having the most children does not bode well. Bringing their servants into the struggle, in effect, gives Jacob four wives. This competition, at the most basic level of the marriage relationship, simply lays the foundation for family feuding.
- We also see that Jacob is up to his old tricks again, *grasping* to obtain as much as possible by way of material possessions, this time from his own father-in-law. And did you note how Laban revealed that simply being associated with Jacob is a source of blessing. Did Jacob really need to grasp at blessing? Do we?

Now where do we find God's ways in all of this? First, He is beginning to grow the progeny of Abraham. But more importantly, while all this overt activity is going on, Joseph is born without any special fanfare, other than the pleasure that Rachel has to finally have a son of her own. But in the plan of God, it is this Joseph who is going to play a key role in preparing the right kind of environment for this growing family to turn into a nation of many, many people. This is going to be independent of the efforts of man. In fact, as we shall see, it is going to be in spite of them.

As a final thought on this chapter, I was reminded of Proverbs 3:5-6. It is the exact opposite of the storyline in Chapter 30, and how beautiful in contrast it really is:

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."*

# In the Beginning

## Thursday, April 6: Read Genesis 31

Chapter 31 is so full of application for you and me, that I hardly know where to begin! Let's start by taking a look at Verses 19-20:

*When Laban had gone to shear his sheep,  
Rachel stole her father's household gods.  
Moreover, Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean  
by not telling him he was running away."*

This comes after Jacob is given both an order and a promise from the Lord Himself! God tells him to go back to Canaan and promised to be with him.



# In the Beginning

**Thursday, April 6: Read Genesis 31** Continued

You can see that Jacob decides to obey, in terms of going, perhaps because it is simply in his best interests to do so. But he doesn't think too much of God's promise to be with him. For, as the text makes clear, he acts in deceit by trying to get away without telling his father-in-law. What did he have to fear once God had said that He would be with him in his return to Canaan? Could anything actually prevent what God had promised to protect? How often do we feel the need to *help God out* by adding our own plans to His clear promises, just because His promises don't seem certain enough?

Not surprisingly, Laban comes after Jacob and catches him in a very vulnerable position. The foolishness of Jacob, in trusting in his own scheming, is fully exposed for Laban could have done any harm he wished. Jacob had no allies in the hill country of Gilead—except for One, of course! Now we see the one and only protector that any of us ever need. For God had warned Laban in a dream to do no harm to Jacob. So we see it was not all the schemes of Jacob that carried the day. It was the promises of God.

One more thing to note. What is up with Rachel stealing her father's household gods? Why does she want anything to do with them? Apparently, Jacob is so intent on grasping for wives and material possessions that he has forgotten to share his faith with those who are supposed to be dearest to him. Wouldn't you agree that Jacob's priorities are all wrong!

Let's take a moment to ask the Spirit to reveal any areas where our priorities might be equally out of line.

# In the Beginning

## Friday, April 7: Read Genesis 32 and 33

Several dramas occur in these two chapters. First, Jacob knows he cannot avoid Esau once he returns to the land, so he sends ahead messengers. If you remember, Esau promised to kill Jacob after Isaac died, and so Jacob is worried. When Esau comes to meet Jacob with a small army of followers, it does nothing to calm his fears.

I don't know about you, but to me his plot to protect at least part of his family seems somewhat pathetic in the face of 400 trained men. On the other hand, to his great credit, he turns to the Lord, and prays, clearly claiming God's promises to him. He does so with a certain humility that we haven't really seen before. (See Genesis 32:9-12.)

For the second item of drama, Jacob spent the night wrestling "*face to face*" with God. (Genesis 32:30) Despite being lame in the hip, as the result of his encounter, the blessing Jacob received from God should have given him great encouragement just prior to his encounter with Esau.

Lastly, there is the family reunion with Esau. It no doubt surprised Jacob how well it went. It shouldn't have! Didn't God say that He would be with him and hadn't God just blessed him? Once again, Jacob is surprisingly humble, which is good, but then reverts back to his old form. After committing to Esau to come to his home in Seir, he actually heads off in another direction to Succoth and on to Shechem. Perhaps he still did not trust Esau, but doesn't this also show a certain mistrust of God's ability to protect him?

Here is a lesson for us. The habits of the "*old man*" die hard. We need to constantly be on guard against them as God seeks to transform us to the image of His Son. To fail to do so, is to compromise our witness, as Jacob no doubt did with his own brother, as he once again acted deceptively to Esau.

# In the Beginning

## Monday, April 10: Read Genesis 34

Rather than deal with the sordid details of this chapter, let me make a few *big picture* observations:

- The first thing I see is the relentless way the world works on God's people. Rape becomes a request for marriage, and the plan to acquire the assets of these newcomers is described as an opportunity for prosperity. If God's people allow it, the world will always swallow them up. This is most certainly still true in our day.
- Simeon and Levi are having nothing to do with this offer, and come up with a plot to extract revenge. What do you think about killing every male in the city and carrying off all that remained as a way to deal with the situation? Here is a principle for you: It is very difficult to take the moral high ground when someone does to you the exact same thing you have done to others. Did not Jacob deceive both Esau and Laban in order to get what he wanted? Now Shechem simply took what he wanted? Notice how easily the sons of Jacob fall into acting in a deceptive manner. This does not bode well for the future, particularly for Joseph's future.
- Lastly, did you notice anywhere in the text where they took this situation to God and asked for His guidance? It doesn't seem as if this family of the covenant has a particularly close relationship with the Lord does it? Here is something we have seen, and will see many times in the future. God's promises to man are not fulfilled because of the faithfulness of man, but because of the faithfulness of God. The family is going to receive divine protection and grow, but not because they are such wonderful spiritual examples. Instead, it will be because God is faithful to His Word and will bring to fruition what He has promised.

# In the Beginning

## Tuesday, April 11: Read Genesis 35-36

Psalm 85:6-7 is a key passage on revival, and it says:

*Will you not revive us again, that your people  
may rejoice in you? Show us Your unfailing love,  
O Lord, and grant us Your salvation.*

I would suggest to you that Genesis 35 is a very early example of a Biblical revival. Consider the following:

- Although we often think of revival occurring among unbelievers, Biblically it always involves the people of God first. In Psalm 85, the psalmist is asking to “revive us again.” In Genesis 35, it is Jacob’s family, in particular Jacob, who leads the way in turning to the Lord.
- Note how there is a purification of the life:

*Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you,  
and purify yourselves and change your clothes.*  
Verse 2

I love the symbolism of changing one’s clothes to indicate a revived spiritual life.

- The change of attitude and response was widespread. It wasn’t just Jacob obeying orders, but:

*...all his household and all who were with him. . .  
gave all the foreign gods they had and the rings  
in their ears.... Verse 4*

All these items were, in turn, buried. Once again, this is great symbolism for the putting away of the old life and turning to live in devotion to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

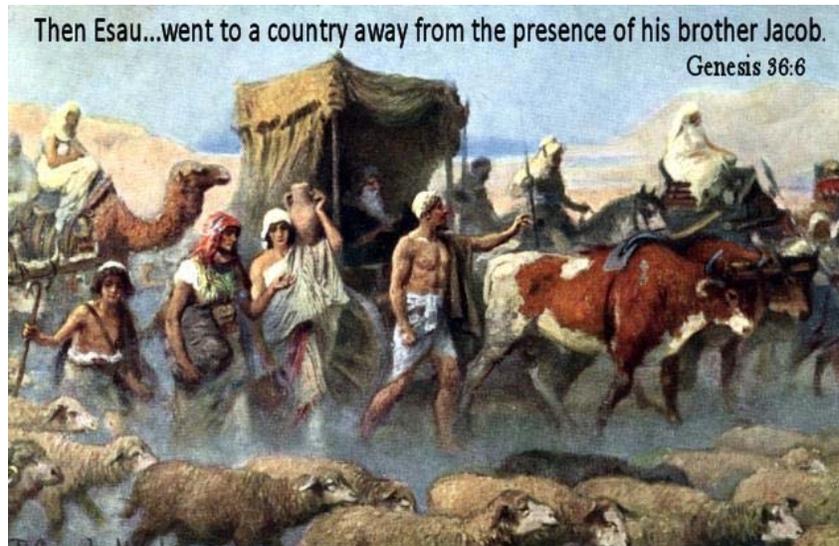
# In the Beginning

**Tuesday, April 11: Read Genesis 35-36** Continued

- And then they walked in obedience to the revealed will of God, traveling to Bethel and offering sacrifice to the Lord. God in turn comes and reveals Himself as God-Almighty (El Shaddai).

The blessing that is now revealed to Jacob, His revived follower, is instructive. God changes Jacob's name to Israel, which we know as the name of the nation to follow. But we often forget its basic meaning, "he struggles with God." How true for the man and the nation. God also reiterates the Abrahamic promises of a land and a progeny to come.

In closing, perhaps you are wondering why I had you read Chapter 36 as well as Chapter 35. For all his faults, Jacob has chosen to "*struggle*" with God. Esau never shows any signs of interest whatsoever. God can work through one, but not the other, no matter how capable or prosperous!



# In the Beginning

## Wednesday, April 12: Read Genesis 37

Today the story-line in Genesis shifts from Jacob to his son Joseph and, for the most part, continues with Joseph for the remainder of the book of Genesis. Most of the time, Joseph is portrayed as a spoiled brat who eventually gets straightened out. I think there are clues in the text that give exactly the opposite view of Joseph. In fact, the character flaws mostly reside with the other members of his family. I see Joseph as a remarkable young man given the environment of his dysfunctional family.

So let me introduce you to a *different* Joseph than the one who has so often been portrayed. On the one hand, the text tells us that Jacob favored Joseph and his brothers hated him—not a good family dynamic. On the other hand, we first meet Joseph bringing a bad report to his father about his brothers. This is where we first start to think of Joseph as a *tattletale*, but have you ever considered that he did it because he was responsible? His father's assets were being mismanaged and he simply told his father about it.

Then in Verse 14, when his father sends him on a mission, could it be because his father trusts him? And look how persistent he is, all by himself, as a young man. Rather than returning, after his brothers are not where they are supposed to be, he persists in tracking them down, undertaking a journey of many miles, by himself, in dangerous territory. And how about the dreams? It might have been wiser for Joseph to simply keep them to himself. But the dreams must have been very remarkable and so he simply shared them. Not surprisingly, they were not well-received by his brothers or parents, although it did give Jacob something to ponder. In short, at every step you are going to see a young man without guile and with a sensitive heart.

# Easter Reflections

## Thursday, April 13: Read John 13

We will now pause in the story of Joseph for two days of reflection leading to Easter Sunday.

Sometimes, the Gospel of John is attacked because it is so distinctly different from the other three Gospels. In contrast, I think it stands as a marvelous complement to the other Gospel accounts. For example: Matthew, Mark, and Luke all describe the establishment of the communion ordinance as part of what we commonly refer to as the *Last Supper* of Jesus and his disciples. John makes no mention of this whatsoever in his account, but instead is the only author to describe the way in which Jesus washed the disciples feet during this same *Last Supper*.



Continued on the next page.

# Easter Reflections

Thursday, April 13: Read John 13 Continued



Although different, the Gospel accounts are wonderfully complimentary and give us a more complete picture of the dramatic events associated with the close of Jesus' earthly ministry during His First Advent.

Since our reading today covers Jesus' foot-washing of the disciples, let me make a few observations:

- The washing of the feet symbolizes, not our salvation in Christ, but the need for the regular cleansing of whatever defilements we might pick up from this world in the form of sin. Of course, we deal with this through confession, so that our fellowship with God can be restored.
- Jesus washed the disciples' feet as an example of the humble service we should be ready to bestow upon others—particularly within the family of God.
- In Verses 16-17, Jesus uses the terms servant and messenger—both of which refer to us. Christ is the master and we are the servants. Christ is the One who has sent us to proclaim the message of reconciliation. The point Jesus is making is that we are not greater than our Master or the One who sent us. If Christ humbled Himself in this way, how can we do less?
- And then here is the application. Jesus Himself says,

*"Now that you know these things,  
you will be blessed if you do them."*

John 13:17

Do you believe this?

# Easter Reflections

## Friday, April 14: Read Isaiah 53

In our day, many of the ideas associated with the Gospel sound strange to the ears of the lost: things like the sinless acting as a substitute for the sinner, bearing the sin of another, the mandate of judgment for sin. In fact, I think it fair to say that these kinds of things are met with much skepticism by the lost world around us. So much skepticism, in fact, that it often causes us to hesitate to even try and explain them. This is one reason I love Isaiah 53. Ponder these powerful phrases from within today's reading:

*He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows* Verse 4

*He was pierced for our transgressions  
and crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that  
brought us peace was upon Him* Verse 5

*And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*  
Verse 6

*It was the Lord's will to crush Him  
and cause Him to suffer...* Verse 10

*My righteous servant will justify many.* Verse 12

This chapter could be tucked away almost anywhere in the New Testament, couldn't it? And yet the book of Isaiah was written in the Eighth Century B.C. God gave the Jews 700 years to ponder the meaning and substance of the above Scripture before it came to pass. The substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ didn't come into being at the whim of some theologian, but rather has been the means by which God decided to deal with the sin problem of man from eternity past. For it apparently has always been the way of our sovereign, omnipotent God to declare what He is going to do ahead of time, then do it, and then to ask us to accept, by faith, what He has accomplished. Ponder what Christ did for you at the cross, as you pass through Good Friday on our way to Easter Sunday!

# In the Beginning

## Monday, April 17: Read Galatians 5

I would like you to consider a very basic issue with respect to the possible behavior of Christians. After reading Genesis 37 last week, do you think that Jacob's brothers are believers or not? Are they saved with a home in heaven reserved for them?

There are those, based upon their behavior, who would say no. However, the Bible typically does not focus on behavior as the criteria for salvation, but instead upon faith. For example, it was Abraham's faith that allowed him to be righteous before God (Genesis 15:6) and not giving his wife away on two separate occasions in order to save his own skin. Furthermore, it is very difficult to write them off as unsaved when the 12 gates of the eternal New Jerusalem are inscribed with "*the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel.*" (Revelation 21:12)

Is it possible that God would have the gates of the eternal city inscribed with the names of unbelievers? On the other hand, if they are believers, they certainly have some problems that are evident to all. Their jealousy of Joseph can perhaps be explained, but what about selling him into slavery, and then carrying out an elaborate deception to deceive their father for what turns out to be many years? And consider their hardness of heart in the face of Joseph's pleading for his very life as documented in Genesis 42:21. So the *take-home* point for us to consider is that it is possible for Christians to be jealous, cruel, and hard-hearted. That is why in the New Testament Paul says, "*You, my brothers*"... (a reference to fellow believers in Jesus Christ), "If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other." (Galatians 5:13-15) This type of behavior is as ugly today as it was in Joseph's day. Much better to walk by faith, by the Spirit in contrast to the flesh, as did Joseph. (Galatians 5:16)

# In the Beginning

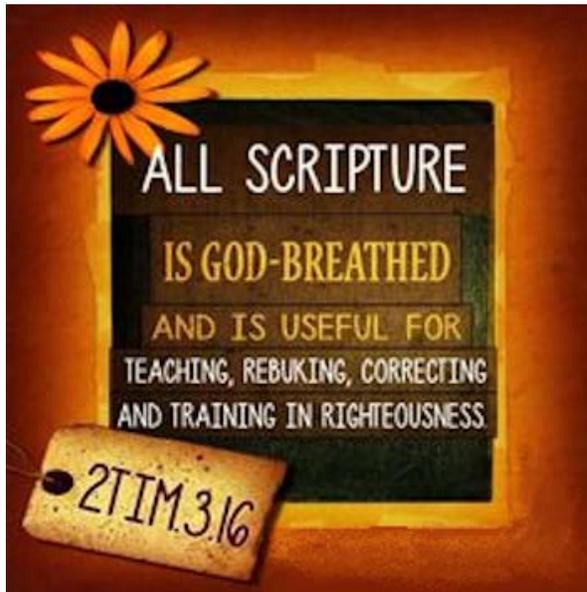
## Tuesday, April 18: Read Genesis 38

Genesis 38 is very strange to say the least. First of all, we have been waiting since Genesis Chapter 12 for God to fulfill His promise to give Abraham many descendants and to cause a great nation to come from him. The promise moves through just one of Abraham's children, and then one of Isaac's. This is a very slow way to build a nation.

Then, just when things seem to be picking up with Jacob's 12 sons, we see just how much dysfunction there is in the family as the boys sell one of their own brothers into slavery in Egypt presumably never to be seen again. How could God ever make anything out of this mess?

To make matters worse, the whole sordid tale of Genesis 38 comes along. Space in the Bible is precious, and this chapter doesn't even fit the flow of the narrative! Aren't we going to find out what happened to Joseph? How about with Jacob and the family? Why is Chapter 38 even in the Bible?

As always, God has preserved for us in Scripture, exactly what He wants us to know.



Continued on the next page.

# In the Beginning

**Tuesday, April 18: Read Genesis 38** Continued

I am not going to go through the narrative of Chapter 38. Rather, I am going to suggest why it has been inserted into the flow of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. Consider the following:

- We have seen Jacob's family is dysfunctional and this chapter shows just how dysfunctional. Reuben has already slept with his father's concubine and now Judah marries a Canaanite woman and is living apart from his family with the people of Canaan.
- The rest of the chapter is about how indistinguishable is the life of Judah from the life of his godless uncle, Esau, as described in Chapter 36. And, it is the line of Judah through which Jesus will eventually come.
- I think Chapter 38 is inserted so that we would understand that unless God took drastic steps to get Jacob and his family out of Canaan, they would soon become completely amalgamated by their pagan surroundings.

With this background, you won't be the least bit surprised by the events of the next few chapters when God orchestrates events such that Jacob's entire household ends up in Egypt. God places this family in a place even avoided by the Egyptians, so that they can become the nation that God has planned.



Here is a closing point of application for us: unless we establish our own method of separating ourselves from the world around us, we too will become conformed to it—in time!

# In the Beginning

## Wednesday, April 19: Read Genesis 39

Notice how, after the *insertion* of Chapter 38, we again pick up the story of Joseph as a slave in Egypt. The narrative of Joseph is just fascinating. So often when Joseph is introduced in Chapter 37, he is labeled as an arrogant and spoiled child. I tried to dissuade you of that idea, and instead suggested that perhaps it was because Joseph was unusually responsible as a young man that Jacob put him in charge of overseeing his property. The so-called “*coat of many colors*” actually has the connotation of a long coat, one worn by a supervisor and not a laborer.

See which description of Joseph, responsible person versus spoiled brat, fits the narrative of Chapter 39. Although a slave, Joseph is soon in charge of Potiphar’s whole household. Although faced with a severe temptation for a young man, he resists on purely moral grounds:

*How then could I do such a wicked thing  
and sin against God?* Genesis 39:9

The Hebrew of this passage is very clear, Potiphar’s wife tempted him day after day, and yet he stood firm. Is this the behavior of a spoiled child or a mature, godly young man? And we also see that, even after being thrown into prison, it is not too long until once again Joseph rises to a supervisory position.

Here is the lesson for us: when the Lord is with you, you can accomplish all manner of success, irrespective of the circumstances in which you find yourself. Furthermore, you tend to draw the attention of others, which actually provides a good opportunity to bear witness to the power of God in your life, as Joseph is going to do shortly before Pharaoh. One question to ponder before tomorrow—Joseph did exactly the right thing and then went to prison for it! How do you cope with that?

# In the Beginning

Thursday, April 20: Read I Peter 4

Joseph displayed exemplary character while managing Potiphar's household, as well as significant spiritual maturity. And what does he have to show for it? He has increased personal hardship and the loss of what liberty he had! I think most of us would take this pretty hard—apparently not Joseph. Where is God in all of this? How could He let something so unfair happen? I Peter 4 helps us answer this question. Did you notice how perfect a fit this chapter is for Joseph's situation? The Word of God is like that. For example, consider Verse. 4:

*They (unbelievers) think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.*

Potiphar's wife just couldn't understand why Joseph didn't join her in a little tryst, and eventually heaped abuse upon him in the form of a false accusation. Look how well Joseph understood the principle of accountability in Verse 5.

Here is another thing to consider. Joseph did suffer unjustly, but was the solution to give into temptation? Hardly, for then any suffering that came his way would be deserved. I Peter 4 addresses that issue as well:

*If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer, or thief, or any other kind of criminal. . .*

At least Joseph is not in prison for adultery with another man's wife. By this point, we should perhaps consider if Peter has any other words of wisdom for us. He does:

*So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good."*

That's exactly what Joseph did, and it is a mighty challenge for us to follow his example!

# In the Beginning

## Friday, April 21: Read Genesis 40

The lesson I want us to extract from Chapter 40 can be summarized by Psalm 118:8:

*It is better to take refuge in the Lord  
than to trust in man.*

That's as true for us as it was for Joseph. Chapter 40 starts with two important officials from Pharaoh's court landing in jail because they had somehow offended their master. After a period of time, both men have dreams that they are unable to interpret. As you read, the Lord reveals the meaning of both dreams to Joseph. (I would not have wanted to give the baker his interpretation, would you?)

Here is the part I want you to note: Joseph believes that God has given him a reliable interpretation, "*when all goes well with you. . .*" But he places his trust in the cupbearer to be the one to get him out of prison:

*...remember me. . . mention me to Pharaoh  
and get me out of this prison.*

Do you see the subtlety here? Joseph is looking for a *human* solution. God has had his hand upon Joseph the whole time, but Joseph tries to expedite getting out of prison. Who could blame him? But, apparently, this is not God's plan. You know, we often do the same thing. How does it generally work out when we try to *force the issue* and work things out on our own? Perhaps no better than it did for Joseph. For the chapter closes with these words following the restoration of the cupbearer to his position:

*The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph;  
he forgot him.*

So I close as I began:

*It is better to take refuge in the Lord  
than to trust in man.*

# In the Beginning

**Monday, April 24: Read Genesis 41**

Two full years! That is how much time has elapsed since Joseph put his hopes in the cup-bearer. We don't know anything about this time. But, we know that God is at work behind the scenes, and, shortly, He is going to bring Joseph to the fore. Pharaoh has two vivid and troubling dreams. None of his advisors can interpret these dreams. Now the cup-bearer remembers Joseph and brings him to the attention of Pharaoh. After all this time, listen to the very first words that Joseph speaks to the most powerful man in the world:

*"I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh,  
"but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."*



# In the Beginning

**Monday, April 24: Read Genesis 41** continued

Joseph may have been immature when sold into slavery, but he certainly appears to be a man of exceptional poise and faith by this time. Do you suppose it has something to do with the trials he has been through?

To further demonstrate the spiritual progress in Joseph's life, he not only lays out a plan of action for Pharaoh, but impresses him to the point that Pharaoh asks:

*Can we find anyone like this man,  
one in whom is the spirit of God?*

This is quite a testimony from the mouth of a pagan king regarding this young man, and recent prisoner, standing before him. And keep in mind, Joseph is not a recent seminary grad, not someone who has had all the privileges of a good home and solid training. Rather, he has been raised in a dysfunctional home, sold into slavery, and unjustly imprisoned for years. Isn't it remarkable what God can do with a person who is willing to let God be God and to learn to trust Him? He can do the same with us?

How do I know Joseph learned to trust God? Look at what he named his two sons: Manasseh, because God has made me forget all my trouble, and Ephraim, because God has made me doubly fruitful in the land of my suffering!

*We are going to leave Joseph for a short time; keeping in mind that we are leaving him as the second in command in Egypt. I wonder if the family will ever come back together? Could Joseph forgive his brothers? In the meantime, we return to the New Testament and begin where we left the book of Philippians.*

# Return to Philippians

## Tuesday, April 25: Read Philippians 3

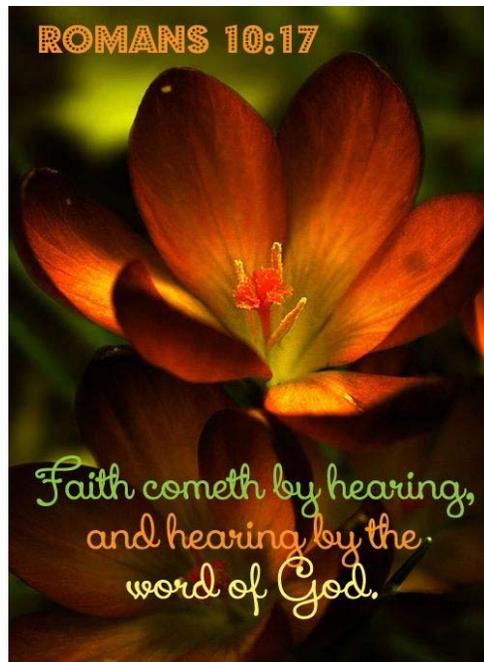
It is going to take a long time to get through Chapter 3 if I go one verse at a time. Nevertheless, there is something I feel compelled to share with you right in Verse 1. For I think this verse lays out an important aspect of what it means to be a good teacher and what it means to be a receptive congregation. Notice what Paul says:

*It is no trouble for me to write the same thing to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.*

Philippians 3:1

I think this tells us that one aspect of being a good teacher is repetition—in as many different ways and from as many different angles as possible. The goal is to constantly cause those who sit under teaching to be refreshed with the truth in as many different ways as possible. As for the congregation, I hope they realize that there is a form of spiritual safety in hearing the Word proclaimed over and over. *For faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God!* (Romans 10:17)

Did you catch the implication of that?



# Return to Philippians

Tuesday, April 25: Read Philippians 3

Continued

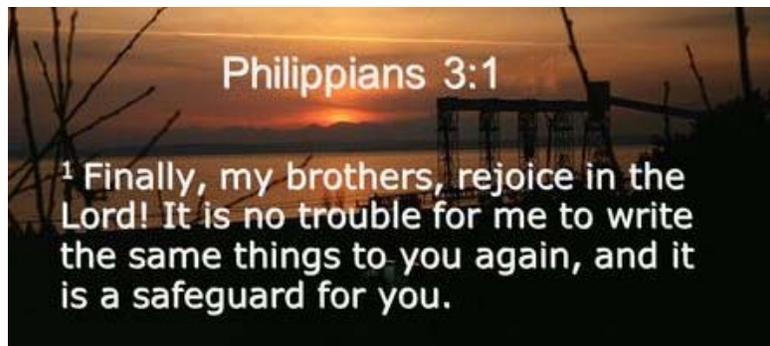
Hearing the Word stimulates faith. You may have heard something many times before, when all of a sudden it clicks. You see it as truth from God and you are ready to accept it by faith. And Paul isn't the only one who feels this way. Consider what Peter wrote:

*So I will always remind you of these things. . . I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body. . . And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things. II Peter 1:12-14*

In summary, I don't know where I came across this, but I think it is a fair statement when it comes to God's Word:

*That which cannot be over-learned,  
cannot be over-taught.*

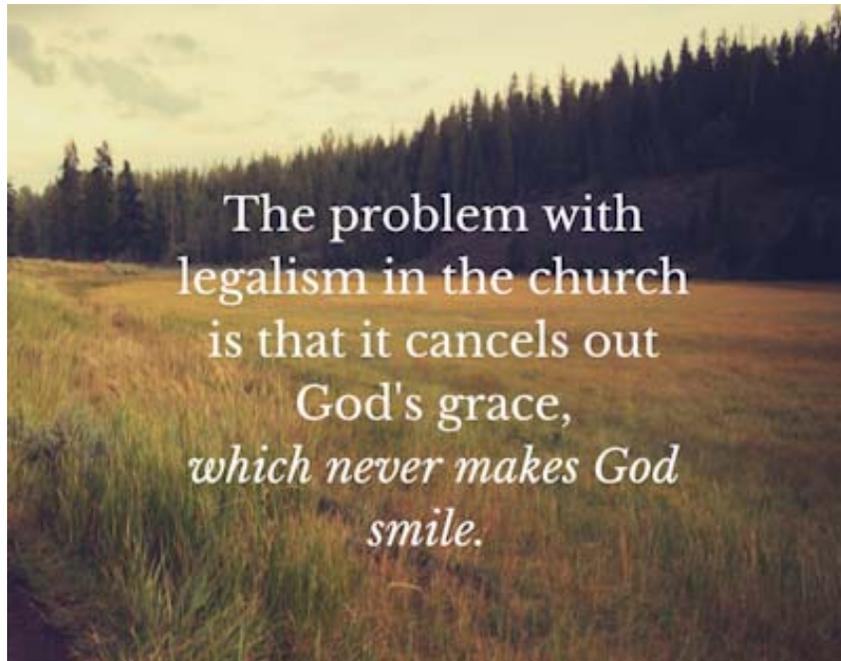
Now you know the intent behind these devotionals. As we review things that have been taught in the past, it is no trouble for me and it is a safeguard for you.



# Return to Philippians

Wednesday, April 26: Read Galatians 3  
(Philippians 3:2-4)

Paul doesn't mince words, "*watch out for those dogs,*" when he describes the legalistic Jews of his day. (Philippians 3:2). And there is more to legalism than just trying to push the Mosaic Law. To be legalistic is to add any system of works to the Gospel message of salvation through faith in Christ. To do so, is to act as if the work of the cross is not sufficient to save, as if we have to add our efforts to those of our Savior in order to make it adequate to save.



# Return to Philippians

Wednesday, April 26: Read Galatians 3

(Philippians 3:2-4) Continued

In Galatians Chapter 1, Paul calls this no Gospel at all; and as you can see in Galatians 3:1-2 he is very clear:

*You foolish Galatians! . . . Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?*

Now it is important for us to realize that legalism so easily creeps into our thinking. Anytime we think God owes us something because of what we have done, we have allowed legalism to cloud our thinking. In Philippians 3, Paul has given us a very nice means of detecting legalism when he describes God's people as those who:

*...worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.*

Do you see it? We can test our Christian walk for legalism simply by holding our lives up to this passage. Does our worship consist of a rigid *order of service* or is it inspired by the Holy Spirit? Are we talking (or thinking) about what we have done for the Lord or are we preoccupied with what Christ has done for us? Lastly, do we take pride in our gifts, service, and orthodoxy or do we constantly guard against the influence of the flesh in our lives?

It is worth it to be on guard lest we be like the foolish Galatians, who started well and then succumbed to the urge to add their own *two cents worth* to the plan of God. He doesn't need our help. Rather, we need His life manifest in ours!

# Return to Philippians

Thursday, April 27: Read Titus 3  
(Philippians 3:9)

In Titus 3:4 we see this truth about our salvation:

*But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy.*

In Philippians 3:9 we have the same truth from the other standpoint:

*. . .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.*

Put the two together and we learn, it is not our righteousness that saves us but the mercy of God, and that through Jesus Christ. In fact, the only way for any of us to have a truly righteous standing before God is to have the righteousness that He gives when we place our faith in the person and work of Christ.



**The gospel is not "you do," but "Jesus did."**

# Return to Philippians

Thursday, April 27: Read Titus 3

(Philippians 3:9) Continued

Underline it! “...the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”

If this is really true, then why do so many people try to work their way, surrender their way, and commit their way into heaven? Apparently, there is just something about us either as human beings, or societally, that causes us to think that we need to *work for* God’s blessing, which is what religion is all about. We must realize ourselves, and then communicate to others, that when it comes to our relationship with God we must view things differently.

First, the Bible teaches that we are separated from God to such an extent (so lost) that there is nothing we can contribute to our salvation. Second, God’s work of salvation through Christ is so complete, it needs no additions to help it along the way. In short, to receive the salvation that is available to us through Christ, we have to come to the same point that Paul reached:

*...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. . .*

Philippians 3:7-9

# Return to Philippians

Friday, April 28: Read Isaiah 43

(Philippians 2:13-14)

*...one thing I do: forgetting what is behind...*

What is it that Paul is forgetting? And why is he having to work at it? Let me suggest the short answer to what he has to forget is sin! Do you remember his history? Before coming to Christ he persecuted Christians, throwing them in jail, separating families, and much worse. Now he is in the midst of trying to walk in newness of life, and being greatly used by the Lord in the process. Yet you know how the Devil can whisper in your ear: "You should feel so ashamed. You should feel so guilty. . ." Paul, as we all do, needs to not only forget his failures before coming to Christ, but he also needs to forget those failures that occurred after becoming a Christian. In case you don't think Paul had any failures, just read Romans Chapter 7.

Forgetting is simply a matter of confessing sin and then letting it go by resting in the efficacy of the cross. All of us are going to have to decide what looms larger in our thinking, our sins or the cross? Now I know sometimes it is not quite that simple because the guilt keeps coming back and we have to work at it for a time. That's why I had you read Isaiah 43. Did you spot the specific verse I had in mind? Listen to what God says in Verse 25:

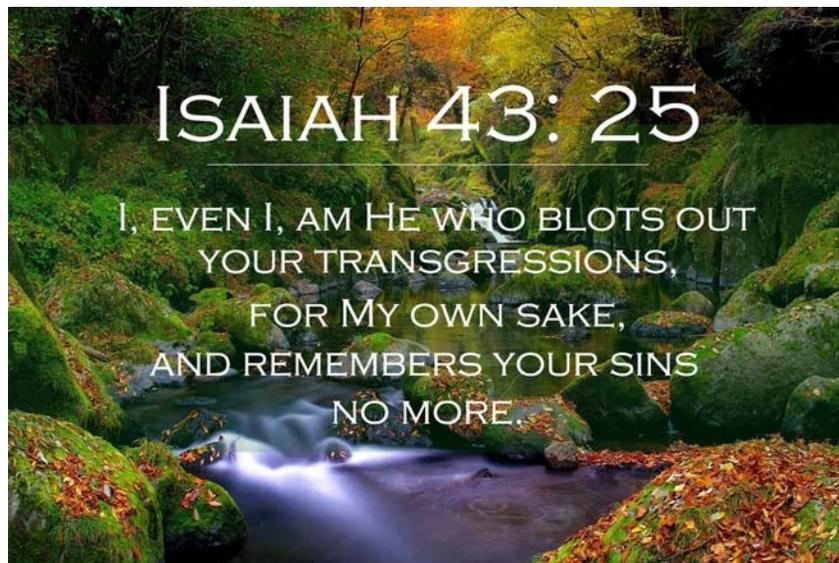
*"I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions,  
for My own sake, and remembers your sins no more."*

# Return to Philippians

Friday, April 28: Read Isaiah 43

(Philippians 2:13-14) Continued

God blots them out because of the payment made at the cross and therefore they are no longer a hindrance to our fellowship with Him. And so, like Paul, we have good reason to forget what is behind. For no failure is too large to hold us back in the plan of God, if we will come to Him and claim the forgiveness available at the cross. Now with this in mind, knowing we can forget what is behind, we can focus on what lies ahead? Come back on Monday!



VISTOSO  
  
Community Church

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

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