

May 2020
Daily Devotional

The grass withereth,
the flower fadeth:
but the word of our

God

shall stand for ever.

ISAIAH 40:8

Vistoso Community Church

Foreword

We begin this month with readings supporting our discussions on the Mission and Disciplines of the Christian Life.

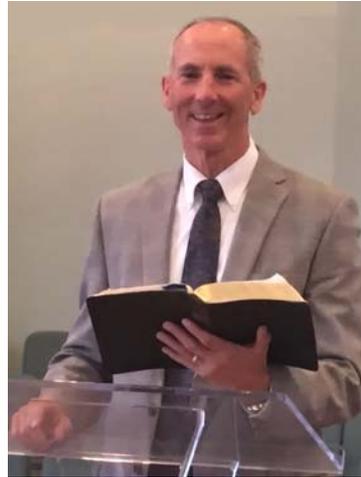
I hope you will be blessed and challenged by this new set of devotionals as we begin with our mission—to go and make disciples. Then we close out the month by continuing our readings in Genesis and Ephesians.

I trust we will enjoy fellowship around the Old Testament, the New Testament, and God's *mission* for His Church!

In His grace,



Kevin Redig



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

Mission and Disciplines

Friday, May 1: Read II Peter 3

What exactly does our mission entail? What does it mean to *make disciples*? I think the Scriptures reveal that there are several components to disciple-making. First, through the proclamation of Gospel truth and the convicting ministry of the Spirit, it is bringing a person to the point where they ask:

What must I do to be saved? Acts 16:30

Should they respond by faith to the person and work of Jesus Christ, then conversion, the first part of disciple-making, has occurred. A lost soul has been brought into the Kingdom of God! After that there is the growth aspect. Consider Peter's final words to the churches to which he ministered:

. . .grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. II Peter 3:18



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Mission and Disciplines

Friday, May 1: Read II Peter 3
(Continued)

And then one more component from II Timothy 2:2:

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

Did you catch it? Those who are disciplined are, in turn, to disciple others. Here is my summary of what it means to follow through on our God-given mission:

To make disciples is to cooperate with the Spirit of God in holding out the truth of the Gospel that lost men and women might become part of the family of God. And then, to continue the process by doing everything possible to foster growth in "grace and knowledge." Make no mistake—disciples are to, in turn, produce disciples!

When I look at the church in America and hold it up against our Mission, again, I would suggest that we have a *mission problem*. What happens when a military unit loses sight of its mission? They stop training, which in time means they can't shoot straight and meet the physical rigors of combat, and they neglect their equipment. In short, they suffer a loss of readiness. How about the church? What happens when it loses sight of its mission? Same thing! It becomes politically correct, entertainment substitutes for preaching the Word, exchanges the Gospel that can eternally save for a social gospel. In short, the Church suffers a lack of readiness to fulfill its role as God's witness to a lost and spiritually-needy world! Troops that are found to be non-combat ready should feel a certain shame; so, too, should the church that has ceased to be the salt and light that God intended!

Mission and Disciplines

Monday, May 4: Read Luke 8

Let's review what it looks like to be *mission-minded*.

Now the man from whom the demons had departed begged Him that he might be with Him. But Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your own house, and tell what great things God has done for you." And he went his way and proclaimed throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him.
Luke 8:38-39

This newly-saved man just wanted to be with his Savior. Of course, this is very understandable and analogous to the church fellowship that sees itself as a place of refuge for Christians, where the congregation can *hunker down* while the world around them falls apart. But look at the answer that Jesus gives: Go tell others what God has done! And the man goes, not just where Jesus tells him to go, but beyond! That's what it looks like to be fully caught up in our mission!

Here is a question for you that I hope brings some conviction. Do you see your current mission in life as one of being retired (or preparing for it)? If so, that would make us a *retired church*. Where is the sense of mission in that? How much better to see ourselves as a church with the one mission of making disciples that just happens to be made up of retired persons. That would mean that being retired is a current stage of life which allows more time to hold out the Word of life to those with whom we recreate and socialize and our extended families. Praise the Lord He has put us on mission in sunny Arizona.

In any event, if soldiers deployed around the world are prompted by their creed to "always place the mission first," can we, as Christians with a singular *great mission*, do anything less?

Mission and Disciplines

Tuesday, May 5: Read Ezekiel 33

The Great Commission is a very well known passage of Scripture. But, perhaps somewhere in the back of your mind you are thinking, "You have made a strong case for our mission as Christians, but you have built it all on just one verse of Scripture!" First, there are many more New Testament references to our singular mission (Acts 1:8 and Luke 24:44-48 are two examples). Then, consider this very powerful statement of mission in the Old Testament and its application in our day. Here is what we can glean from Ezekiel Chapter 33:

- In Verse 2, we are introduced to *the actors on the stage*: the sword, the watchman, and the people.
- The tension within the storyline is developed in Verses 3-6. Will the watchman be faithful because his deliverance depends upon it? (Verse 6) Will the people respond to the grace of God in repentance because their deliverance depends upon it? (Verse 5)
- This narrative has as its background the physical realm. Would the watchman be faithful to warn the people of the city of the approach of a band of marauders? Will the people respond in order to fight off their attackers?
- However, in context, it is meant to convey a spiritual message. Prophets like Ezekiel and Jeremiah were Israel's spiritual watchmen. The first issue is would they be faithful to convey God's message to the people? The second, would the people respond to the message in repentance? As always, there are consequences for all associated with obedience or disobedience.

Perhaps you are thinking: What does this have to do with the Church and the day in which we live? We'll make the application in tomorrow's devotional. In the meantime, give it some thought and see what conclusions you reach.

Mission and Disciplines

Wednesday, May 6: Read Genesis 33

Perhaps you are thinking yesterday's narrative in Ezekiel is just too far removed from our day and doesn't really have any application to us.

Consider this to see if you might change your mind:

- The actors on the stage were the sword, the watchman, and the people. Do we have a category of *at-risk* people in our day? Of course, every member of the human race is born lost and on the broad road headed to destruction. (Matthew 7)



- Is there pending judgment for this group, that is the sword?

. . .it is appointed for men to die once, but after this judgment. Hebrews 9:27

- How about the watchman, who fills that role?

Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us. . . II Corinthians 5:20

The drama today is identical in nature: Will we as watchmen be faithful to declare the message of the Gospel and in doing so warn the people? Will the lost respond before it is too late?

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Mission and Disciplines

Wednesday, May 6: Read Genesis 33
(Continued)

Then, as a final point to consider, look at the identical attitude on God's part. In Ezekiel 33:11, God says,

"I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live."

And what is God's message in our day regarding the lost?

. . . God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

I Timothy 2:3-4

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise. . . not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

II Peter 3:9



The spiritual parallels are so strong they are impossible to miss. So, what is the take-home lesson?

Not only has God always given a mission to those who are His, that mission is wrapped up in His desire to *deliver* that which His hand has created!

What a remarkable privilege that we have to be given such a high calling (our mission). What a privilege that we have the opportunity to be engaged in rescuing those

who will otherwise perish for all eternity!

Mission and Disciplines

Thursday, May 7: Read Acts 2

Today we move into the disciplines of the Christian Life, things like worship, prayer, and Bible study. Let's begin with an understanding of the balance between our singular mission and our many disciplines. By this I mean that we have one mission to make disciples of all nations, but we have many disciplines. Here is the principle:

The mission/discipline distinction is not one of priority or importance, but one of focus and organization.

Let me show you by continuing to use our analogy of soldiers. We have already seen their mission: to defeat the enemy in close combat. So what kind of mission-ready soldiers do you have if they fail in the disciplines associated with being a soldier—can't shoot, can't find their way, can't carry their combat load over distances, and so on? On the other hand, it is possible to forsake the mission for the love of a particular discipline! An example is the soldier who spends all his time at the firing range but doesn't want to shoot at anything but bullseyes.

Are you seeing the application? Are we really ready for the mission if we don't know God's Word, how to pray, or how to engage in worship with other Christians? Of course not! But then, there is the Christian who has pages of Bible study notes and has never shared the Good News with anyone. Both are out of balance!

Consider it this way. Without worship, you are not really a disciple yourself because you are not preparing for your mission. Without disciple-making, your worship is contradictory because it springs from failure of mission (disobedience).

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Mission and Disciplines

Thursday, May 7: Read Acts 2
(Continued)

Who is the most effective disciple-maker? One who is fully capable in the disciplines of the Christian Life. That's the story of the early Church.

Disciplines: And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Acts 2:42

Mission: Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ. Acts 5:42



Mission and Disciplines

Friday, May 8: Read Luke 10

In order to introduce our first discipline, I would like you to consider the following hypothetical. Imagine for a moment that, in order to both encourage you in your walk and to guide your efforts for the remaining days you have on this earth, you were going to have a short face-to-face meeting with Jesus. At this meeting He is going to pass on to you the *one thing* He would like you to keep in mind. What do you suppose it would be?

Interestingly enough, the Bible tells us what it would be in Luke 10:38-f. Before we begin to unpack this passage, let me remind you of the differences in the terms mission and discipline. Our mission is the big picture task that the Lord has given us to accomplish, individually and, in particular, corporately. As we have seen, that mission is to represent Him to a lost and dying world so that the lost, for whom Christ died, would hear the good news of the Gospel from us, turn to Christ, and believe.

On the other hand, the disciplines of the Christian Life are those habits and practices in which we engage every day in order to become conformed to the image of Christ (that's the vertical aspect of the Christian life). The disciplines help us be both prepared and fully engaged in our mission of reaching the lost (that's the horizontal component of our Christian life). So please don't let these terms cause confusion. It is as simple as thinking about the daily disciplines that will help us accomplish our mission from the Lord.

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Mission and Disciplines

Friday, May 8: Read Luke 10

(Continued)

So with that said, what is the *one thing* in terms of a daily discipline which the Lord is communicating to us? I can tell you one thing it is not—excessive busyness!

But Martha was distracted with much serving. . .

Luke 10:40

Most churches would love to have as many Marthas as possible. To her credit, Martha did welcome Jesus into her home and then went to work putting her gifts of hospitality into practice. One problem, the Lord of glory was in her home and she was too busy to pause to hear what He might have to say. Perhaps you think I am being too hard on Martha? Not only does the text say she was *distracted*, there is also only one imperative verb in the whole passage: that is Martha's *command* to Jesus to order Mary to help. When your ministry efforts lead you to boss Jesus around, something is out of balance! More on Monday.



Mission and Disciplines

Monday, May 11: Read John 17

So Martha was involved in doing *important* work for the Lord. (It really was for the Lord!) Now look at what Jesus said to her:

**“But one thing is needed,
and Mary has chosen that
good part, which will not
be taken away from her.”**

Luke 10:42



This passage should really get our attention. Jesus not only identifies the *one thing needed*, but He also calls it the *good part* and something that cannot be *taken away*. We have just found our first discipline of the Christian Life! What was Mary doing? She was sitting at the feet of Jesus and hearing, literally to hear with understanding, what He had to say.

Consider two points on this marvelous little narrative:

- As we seek to follow Jesus as His disciples, we need to be constantly on guard against the tendency to allow the good to be the enemy of the best. Here is an example. There are times when focusing upon the Lord through prayer, reflection, and Bible study is the most important thing we have to do! To do anything else, at that point, is to let the good be the enemy of the best.
- Although it may be a part of *sitting at Jesus' feet to hear His Word*, I want to be certain that you understand you cannot just reduce this to Bible study.

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Mission and Disciplines

Monday, May 11: Read John 17
(Continued)

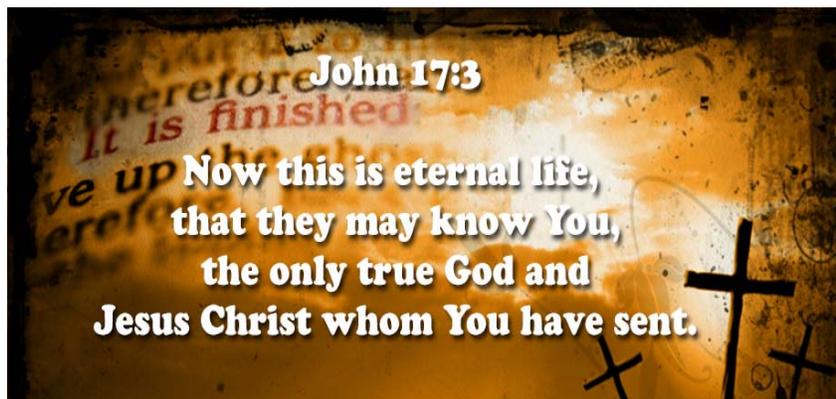
I have pointed you to the following many times:

“But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.” John 5:38-40

This is what can happen when you come to the Word as a medium of scholarship—to get facts, figures, and quotes. The Scriptures must be seen as the written Word behind which stands the Living Word! It must not be seen as a medium of scholarship, but one of fellowship with our Lord and Savior. Notice how eternal life defined in this way is relational:

“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” John 17:3

By way of application, I encourage you to try to open your daily quiet time with a simple prayer based upon John 17:3. You will be blessed by the results.



Mission and Disciplines

Tuesday, May 12: Read John 15

I am trying to build a case that the first discipline of the Christian Life is to daily sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to what He has to say! We saw it in Luke 10, but is it anywhere else in Scripture? How about John 15:5:

"He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

Could it be that *to abide* is very closely related to *sitting at His feet and listening?*" The word translated *abide* is a command in the Greek. Notice how, apart from abiding, we can accomplish nothing in terms of fruit. Furthermore, note the repetition of the term *abide* in Verses 4-10 in today's reading. Repetition emphasizes importance. The word *abide* means to remain in a particular location, to wait, to dwell. Can you see how, when these are applied relationally, they are very similar to the idea found in Luke 10 of giving Jesus our regular, focused attention?

The concept of grafting a branch into the vine can be very helpful. For, when a branch is grafted into a vine, it must first be tightly bound followed by a period of waiting while internal changes occur. These changes involve the *growing* of the woody fibers of the vine into the branch and vice versa. Do you see the beautiful picture of what happens when we regularly come to the Lord and listen—receiving His mind through the study of His Word, listening to the voice of the Spirit, and meditating upon His ways and His thoughts? This, in turn, opens the way for His life to be manifest in our lives in the form of bearing fruit. Until this happens, there is no way for us to bear real fruit that is pleasing to the Lord. Until this grafting happens, the branch is simply not ready to bear fruit. Do you desire for your life to bear fruit? Begin by focusing upon abiding in the true vine that is Jesus Christ.

Mission and Disciplines

Wednesday, May 13: Read Luke 3

The first discipline of the Christian Life can be described as sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to what He has to say or abiding in Christ as a branch in the vine. There is one more thing before we move on. Consider John 15:9:

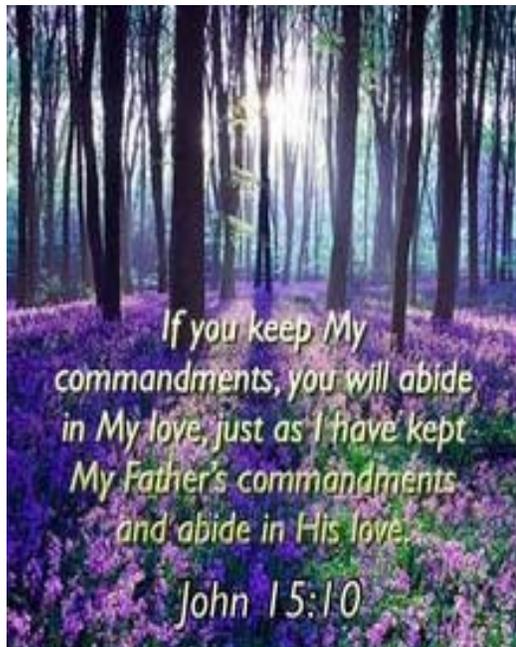
"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love."

This is an astonishing verse! 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!



Mission and Disciplines

Wednesday, May 13: Read Luke 3
(Continued)

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.

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. Our 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.

Norman F. 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.

In the Beginning

Thursday, May 14: 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.**

Genesis 35:2

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:

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

Genesis 35:4

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

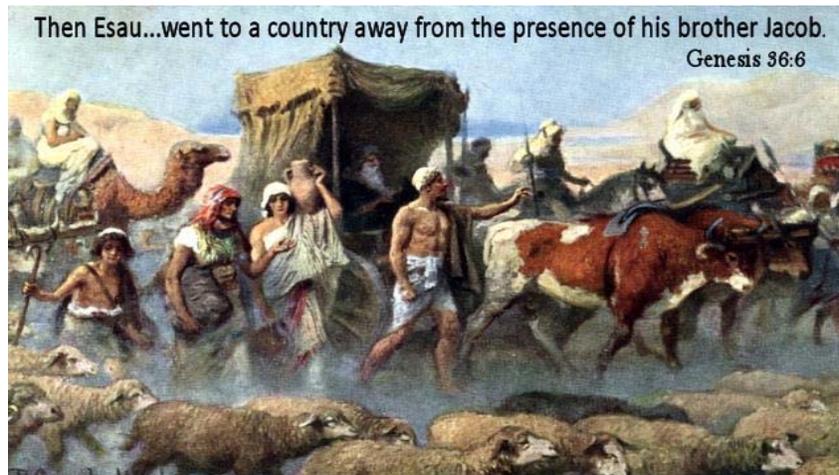
Thursday, May 14: Read Genesis 35-36

(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 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 that its basic meaning is *he struggles with God*. How true for the man and the nation. God also reiterates the Abrahamic promises of a land and 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

Friday, May 15: Read Genesis 37

In Genesis Chapter 37, the story-line shifts from Jacob to his son Joseph and, for the most part, continues with Joseph for the remainder of the book. Often 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.

Let me introduce you to a *different* Joseph. 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? 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, a journey of many miles, by himself, in dangerous territory.

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, so he simply shared them. Not surprisingly, they were not well-received by his brothers or parents, although they 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.

In the Beginning

Monday, May 18: Read Galatians 5

After reading Genesis 37 last week, do you think that Joseph's brothers are believers or not? There are those who would say no, based upon their behavior. However, the Bible typically does not focus on behavior as the criterion 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 the fact that he gave 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 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 many years? Consider their hardness of heart in the face of Joseph's pleading for his very life. (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 believers in Jesus Christ):

You, my brothers (believers) . . .**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. It is much better to walk by faith and by the Spirit in contrast to the flesh, as did Joseph. (Galatians 5:16)

In the Beginning

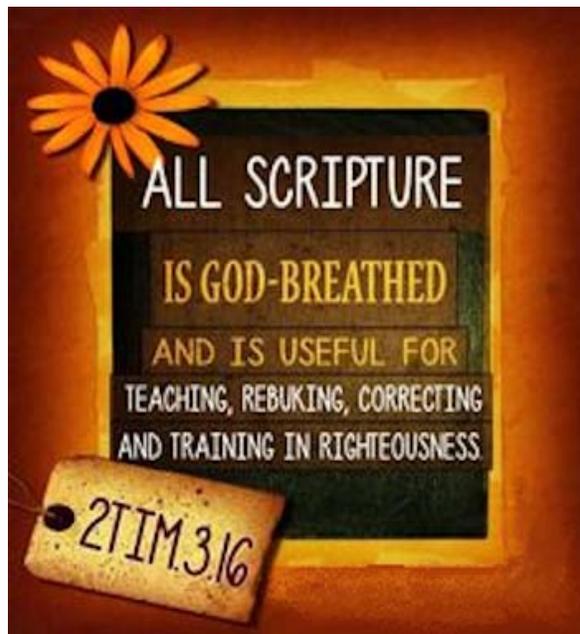
Tuesday, May 19: Read Genesis 38

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 Jacob and the family?

Why is Chapter 38 even in the Bible?



In the Beginning

Tuesday, May 19: Read Genesis 38 (Continued)

As always, God has preserved for us in Scripture, exactly what He wants us to know. 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, this 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, May 20: 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 Joseph was faced with a severe temptation, 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 Joseph day after day and yet he stood firm. Is this the behavior of a spoiled child or a mature, godly young man? 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 will soon do 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, May 21: Read I Peter 4

Joseph displayed exemplary character while managing Potiphar's household, as well as significant spiritual maturity. 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. . . I Peter 4:15

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. I Peter 4:19

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

In the Beginning

Friday, May 22: 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. 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. Genesis 40:14

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. 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 former position:

The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him. Genesis 40:23

So I close as I began:

It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. Psalm 118:8

In the Beginning

Monday, May 25: Read Genesis 41

Two full years! That is how much time has elapsed since Joseph put his hopes in the cupbearer. We don't know anything about this time. But, we do 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 cupbearer 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."**

Genesis 41



Continued on the next page.

In the Beginning

Monday, May 25: 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? Genesis 41:38

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 the names of 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!* (Genesis 41:51-52)

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 Ephesians.

Finishing Ephesians

Tuesday, May 26: Read Hebrews 2

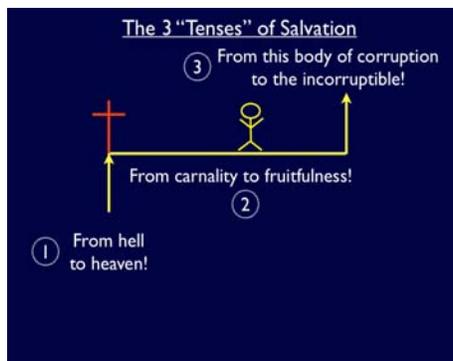
We are back to complete our investigation of Ephesians, with an admonition to:

Take the helmet of salvation. . . Ephesians 6:17

Our reading in Hebrews Chapter 2 reminds us:

We must pay careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. . . . how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? Hebrews 2:1,3

I want us to combine these two Scriptures and think about the importance of our salvation in the context of spiritual warfare and the importance of not *drifting away* from the so-great salvation that is ours in Christ. If you ask most people, including Christians, to define salvation, you are very likely to get an answer that centers on going to heaven. To see our salvation solely in terms of going to heaven at some future point is to have a totally inadequate view of what has been accomplished in the past, what God desires to do in the present, and what He has in store for the future! The Scriptures provide wonderful details on so much more. Consider our diagram of The *Tenses* of Salvation. Let's start with the first tense of our salvation, that which happened in the *past*, at the point we placed our faith in the person and work of Christ.



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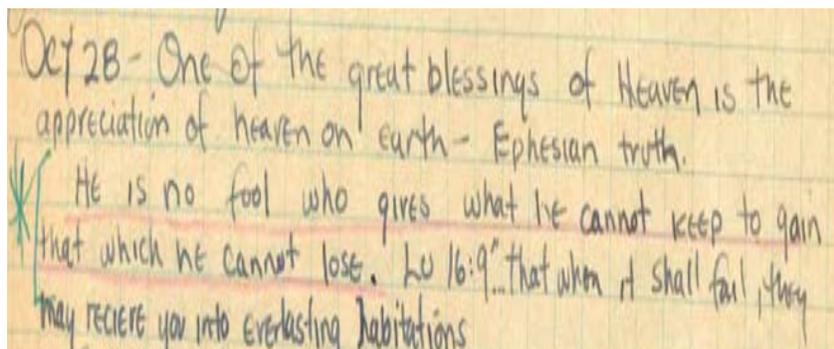
Finishing Ephesians

Tuesday, May 26: Read Hebrews 2
(Continued)

Just stand back in awe for a minute as you recall that when you believed, you:

- Received eternal life
- Were justified before a holy God
- Became a new creation in Christ
- Were adopted as a son or daughter
- Had an inheritance set aside in heaven
- Were completely accepted in the Beloved—Jesus Christ
- Were reconciled to God
- Were sealed with the Spirit unto eternity
- Were indwelt by the Spirit
- Became holy and blameless in God's sight

In reality, there is much more! If we regularly think through these things, they will definitely help us to stand firm in our daily spiritual battles. Is it any wonder that missionary Jim Elliot was able to face martyrdom for the sake of ministry after writing the following in his diary?



Oct 28 - One of the great blessings of Heaven is the appreciation of heaven on earth - Ephesian truth.

* He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose. Lu 16:9 "that when it shall fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations"

Finishing Ephesians

Wednesday, May 27: Read Philippians 1

We have just scratched the surface when it comes to *taking up the helmet of salvation!* How about the present *tense* of our salvation? With respect to the present, we are told to: redeem the time, abide in Christ, be holy as God is holy, walk worthy of who and what we are in Christ, be Jesus' witnesses, be His ambassadors, bear fruit to His glory, be transformed into His image and likeness.

On the one hand, what a glorious calling we have as believers in, and then followers of, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian Life is most certainly not a self-centered or easy life, but a life with such meaning and purpose! On the other hand, we have an impossible list—humanly speaking. That is the reason God has also provided: the indwelling of His Spirit within every believer, the filling and enabling of His Spirit, divine promises that connect us to everything we need for life and godliness, and His Word—divinely inspired and preserved through the ages. I would have my doubts about all of the above if it wasn't for a very precious verse found in today's reading:

. . .being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6

Who did all of the work in providing for our salvation from hell to heaven? Of course God did! How about when it comes to the Christian life in time—who is the prime mover? Once again, it is very clearly God who has committed to carry it on to completion. Our devotion may be up and down, but our God never wavers in His desire to conform us to the image and likeness of His Son and in providing us with the means to do so!

Finishing Ephesians

Thursday, May 28: Read Romans 8:18-39

Let's not move on before talking about our salvation in terms of what God desires to do in the future. This is the third tense of our salvation, something we commonly refer to as our future *glorification!* What can we anticipate:

- We are going to see our Savior in His glorified state.
- We are going to know Him fully as He knows us.
- We will have an incorruptible resurrection body that is just like our Savior's.
- We will be in the company of a great host of Saints.
- The last enemy, death, will be overcome and so no more death, sorrow, tears, or suffering.
- We will rule and reign with Him.
- We will be with Him where He is in glory for all eternity.

Let me remind you once again of these powerful words of Jim Elliot, a man who was martyred for his faith:

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.

Consider also Paul describing very similar sentiments in our reading for today:

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Romans 8:18

Finishing Ephesians

Thursday, May 28: Read Romans 8:18-39
(Continued)

As we ponder what God has planned for our future salvation, let me remind you:

- These are aspects of our salvation that are certain, but not yet our experience.
- We are to look forward to them—they are our confidence.
- These are certain because our God is faithful.
- We can rejoice in them, though we currently only see them through the eyes of faith and from a distance.

It is this *helmet of salvation*—the salvation that we have covered during the course of the last three days—that we are to put on so that we might stand firm against the wiles of the devil!



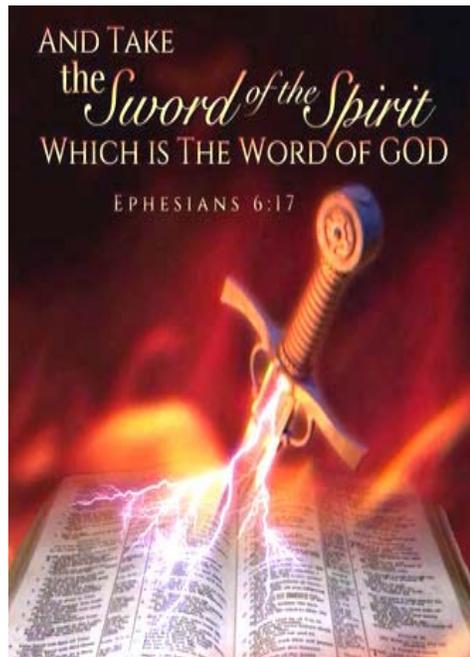
Finishing Ephesians

Friday May 29: Read Matthew 4

One more piece of the armor to go:

Take. . .the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.
Ephesians 6:17

First, let's differentiate between the *belt of truth* and the *sword of the Spirit*. If the *belt of truth* is the body of truth—the Word of God in its entirety—then the *sword of the Spirit* is the specific truth appropriate for a given set of circumstances. In other words, it is one thing to have a broad understanding of what the Bible says. It is another thing altogether to be able to apply Scripture to our specific circumstances.



There is no better example of how this is meant to function than the way our Savior responded to the temptation of Satan as described in Matthew Chapter 4.

After fasting forty days and forty nights, He (Jesus) was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Matthew 4:2-4

Finishing Ephesians

Friday May 29: Read Matthew 4 (Continued)

Consider how Jesus responds to this temptation as described in Verse 4: "*It is written. . .*" The grammar associated with the word translated *written* makes it clear that, although the words to follow come from Deuteronomy 8:3 and were written in the past, their impact continues to the present.

That is because the Bible is not a dusty tome, but something alive, vital, and powerful:

For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

In fact, Jesus didn't come against the sly temptation of Satan in His own power, but rather via the Word of God. That is because:

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. II Corinthians 10:3-4

The Word of God is going to decisively deal with the temptation from Satan—a temptation for Jesus to satisfy His own appetites outside of the will of God. Thus we are to do as He did:

. . .demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God (by holding it up to scrutiny against the light of God's Word), and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. II Corinthians 10:5

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