

..... **Daily Devotions**
Devotions – August 1-7, 2021
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Sunday, August 1, 2021

A Flourishing Tree

Text: Proverbs 11:28

"Those who trust in their riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf."

I've always had a collector's heart. As a kid, I collected stamps, comics, and baseball cards. Now older, I sometimes wonder, "Do I *really* need another stuffed sheep? Of course, it's not about *need*. It's about the allure of something new. Or sometimes, it's the tantalizing draw of something old, something rare. Whatever captures our imagination, we're tempted to believe that if we only had "X," our lives would be better. We'd be happy ... and content.

Except those things never deliver the goods. Why?? Because God created us to be filled by Him, not by the things that the world around us often insists will satisfy our longing hearts.

This tension is hardly new. Proverbs contrasts two ways of life: a life spent pursuing riches versus a life grounded in loving God and living generously. In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson paraphrases Proverbs 11:28 in this way: "A life devoted to things is a dead life, a stump; a God-shaped life is a flourishing tree."

What a picture! Two ways of life: one flourishing and fruitful, one hollow and barren. The world insists that material abundance equals "the good life." In contrast, God invites us to be rooted in Him, to experience His goodness, and to flourish fruitfully. As we're shaped by our relationship with Him, God reshapes our hearts and our desires, transforming us from the inside out.

Let us pray: *Father, thank you for the good gifts you give. Help me to keep putting my trust in you rather than in the stuff of this world. Amen.*



Monday, August 2, 2021

Prayer Eggs

Text: Habakkuk 2:3

"Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and not delay."

Just outside my kitchen window, a robin built her nest under the eaves of our patio roof. I loved watching her tuck grasses into a safe spot and then hunker down to incubate the eggs. Each morning, I checked her progress; each morning there was nothing. Robin eggs take two weeks to hatch.

Impatience isn't new to me; I've always strained against the work of waiting, especially in prayer. So many things took far longer than I thought they should. Decades ago, Catherine Marshall wrote, "Prayers, like eggs, don't hatch as soon as we lay them."

The prophet Habakkuk wrestled with waiting in prayer. Frustrated at God's silence with Babylon's brutal mistreatment of the southern kingdom of Judah, Habakkuk commits "to stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts," to "look to see what God will say to me." God replies that Habakkuk is to wait for the "appointed time" and directs him to "write down the revelation" so the word can be spread as soon as it is given.

What God doesn't mention is that "appointed time" when Babylon falls is six decades away, creating a long gap between promise and fulfillment. Like eggs, prayers don't often hatch immediately, but rather incubate in God's overarching purposes for our world and for our lives. It is truly difficult to wait while God works!

Let us pray: *Dear God, help me to trust you to work while I am waiting. Amen.*



Tuesday, August 3, 2021

A Friend in Failure

Text: Acts 15:38

"Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them."

On November 27, 1939, three treasure hunters (accompanied by film crews) dug through the asphalt of the Hollywood Bowl amphitheater in Southern California. They were looking for the Cahuega Pass treasure, consisting of gold, diamonds, and pearls rumored to have been buried there some seventy-five years earlier.

They never found it. After twenty-four days of digging, they struck a boulder and stopped. All they accomplished was a nine-foot-wide, forty-two-foot-deep hole in the ground. To say the least, they all walked away dejected.

To err is human; we all fail sometimes. God's Word tells us that young Mark walked away from Paul and Barnabas on a missionary trip "and had not continued with them in the work." Because

of this, "Paul did not think it wise to take him" on his next trip which resulted in a strong disagreement with Barnabas. But in spite of his failings, Mark showed up many years later in surprising ways. When Paul was lonely and in prison toward the end of his life, he asked for Mark and called him "helpful to me in my ministry." God even inspired Mark to write the gospel that bears his name.

Mark's life shows us that God won't leave us to face our errors and failures alone. We have a Friend who is greater than every mistake.

As we follow our Savior, He will provide the help and the strength we need.

Let us pray: *Jesus, thank you for being there whenever I want to talk to you. I praise you for the comfort and hope only you can give. Amen.*



Wednesday, August 4, 2021

A Wide, Sweeping Grace

Text: Isaiah 44:22

"I have swept away your offenses."

Alexa, Amazon's voice-controlled device, has an interesting feature: it can erase everything you say. Whatever you've asked Alexa to do, whatever you've asked Alexa to retrieve, one simple sentence - "Delete everything I have said today" - sweeps it all clean, as if it never had happened. It's too bad that the rest of our life doesn't have this capability! Every misspoken word, every disgraceful act, every moment we wish we could erase---we would just speak the command ... and the entire mess would disappear.

There is good news, though. God does offer each of us a clean slate. Only, He goes far deeper than merely deleting our mistakes or bad behavior. God gives redemption, a deep healing that transforms us and makes us new. "Return to me," he says, "I have redeemed you."

Even though Israel rebelled and disobeyed time after time, God reached out to them with lavish mercy. He "swept away their offenses like a cloud, sins like the morning mist." He gathered all their shame and repeated failures and washed them away with His wide, sweeping grace.

God will do the same for all our sins and blunders. There is no mistake He cannot mend, no wound He cannot heal. God's mercy heals and redeems the most painful and shameful places in our soul...even the ones we have hidden away for so very long. His mercy sweeps away all our guilt, washes away every regret.

Let us pray: *So many regrets, so many things I'd do differently. Lord, you tell me that you can forgive and heal me. Thank you for your mercy and grace. Amen.*



Thursday, August 5, 2021

Plod On!

Text: Judges 6:14

"Am I not sending you?"

I think God loves to use the people the world might overlook.

William Carey was raised in a tiny village in the 1700's and had very little formal education. He had very limited success in his chosen trade as a blacksmith and lived in poverty. But God gave him a passion for sharing the Good News and called him to be a missionary.

Carey learned Greek, Hebrew, and Latin and eventually translated the first New Testament into the Bengali language. Today he is often regarded as the "father of modern missions," but in a letter to his nephew, he offered this humble assessment of his abilities: "I can plod; I can persevere."

When God calls us to a task, He also gives us the strength to accomplish it, despite our limitations. In Judges 6:12, the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and said, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior." The angel then told him to rescue Israel from the Midianites who were raiding their towns and their crops. But Gideon, who hadn't earned the title of "mighty warrior," humbly answered, "How can I save Israel? I am the least in my family." Still, God used Gideon to set His people free.

The key to Gideon's success was in these words: "The Lord is with you." As we humbly walk with our Savior and trust in His strength, He will give us the strength and power to accomplish what is only possible through Him.

Let us pray: *Thank you for empowering me, my Lord and my strength. Please help me to follow you closely. Amen.*



Friday, August

6, 2021

Text: II Samuel 9:11b

"Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons."

Tom worked for a law firm that advised Bob's company. They became friends ... until Tom embezzled thousands of dollars from the company. Bob was hurt and angry when he found out, but he received wise counsel from his vice president, who was a believer in Christ. The VP noticed Tom was deeply ashamed and repentant, and he advised Bob to drop the charges and hire Tom. "Pay him a modest salary so he can make restitution. You'll never have a more grateful, loyal employee." Bob did, and Tom was.

Mephibosheth, a nephew of King Saul, hadn't done anything wrong, but he was in a tough spot when David became king. Most kings killed the royal bloodline. But David loved King Saul's son, Jonathan, and treated Saul's surviving son as his own. His grace won a friend for life. Mephibosheth marveled that "he deserved nothing but death from my lord the king, but you gave your servant a place." He remained loyal to King David, even when David's son Absalom chased David from Jerusalem.

Do you want a loyal friend for life? Someone so extraordinary may require you to do something extraordinary. When common sense says punish, choose grace. Hold them accountable but give the undeserving a chance to make things right. You may never find a more grateful, devoted friend. Think outside the box . . . with grace.

Let us pray: *Dear Father, I have received extraordinary grace from you. Help me to show that grace to others . . . especially to those with a repentant spirit. Amen.*



Saturday, August 7, 2021

United in Separation

Text: Genesis 13:8

Let's not have any quarreling between you and me . . . for we are close relatives.

Thrown into a project with his colleague Tim, Matt faced a major challenge; he and Tim had very different ideas of how to go about it. While they respected each other's opinions, their approaches were so very different that conflict seemed very possible (and imminent). Before conflict broke out, though, the two men agreed to discuss their differences with their boss. He put them on separate teams, which turned out to be a very wise move. That day, Matt learned this lesson: being united doesn't always mean doing things together.

Abraham must have realized this truth when he suggested that he and Lot go their separate ways in Bethel. Seeing that there wasn't enough space for both of their flocks, Abraham wisely

suggested parting company. But first, he stressed that they were "close relatives," reminding Lot of their relationship. Then, with the greatest humility, he let his nephew have the first choice, even though he, Abraham, was the senior man. This was, as one pastor described it, a "harmonious separation."

Being made uniquely by God, we may find that we work better separately to achieve the same goal. There's a unity in diversity.

May we never forget, however, that we're still brothers and sisters in the family of God. We may do things differently, but we remain united in purpose.

Let us pray: *Loving God, help me to work together with others in unity. Help me to discern when it's best to serve separately. Amen.*

