

As our congregation entered into its first “Future Grace” Giving Campaign in April of 2004, a devotional guide called “28 Great Chapters of the Bible” was created to help prepare our hearts for the building project God was calling us to undertake. For twenty-eight days, individuals, families and small groups set aside time each day to reflect on a chapter of Scripture, followed by questions designed to draw out its meaning as well as its personal and congregational applications. Looking back, we recognize that intentionally immersing ourselves in God’s Word was individually enriching and collectively unifying. In the months and years following, God, our Provider, and Jesus, our Shepherd, faithfully led us to complete the buildings we have gratefully used for His glory over the past two and one-half years.

Four years later, here we go again! God’s providence has brought many new faces into our church family, creating an immediate need for more educational and gathering space. As we begin the Future Grace Giving Campaign, Phase Two, we have compiled another daily devotional guide from which to draw living water over the next four weeks. From Genesis to Revelation, we selected 28 passages that clearly sound God’s call to believe, follow, obey, and even suffer for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We invite you to use the questions for reflection, the ideas for engaging children, and the prayers of response to help you make the most of this new season in our church’s history. We pray that, in these pages, you will clearly perceive and take pleasure in the glory of God as it is reflected in the face of Jesus Christ, and that during this month, you will be moved to a greater love and passion for being a disciple of Jesus and building His kingdom.

Prayerfully yours,

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Walking With Jesus Through the Word

28 Devotions for Disciples



WEEK ONE

Day One ☁️ God's Call to Blessing

Genesis 12:1-8 (Holman Christian Standard Bible)

1 "The LORD said to Abram, 'Go out from your land, your relatives and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, I will curse those who treat you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.' 4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran. 5 He took his wife Sarai, his nephew, Lot, and all the possessions they had accumulated,

and the people he had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, 6 Abram passed through the land to the site of Shechem, at the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 But the LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'I will give this land to your offspring.' So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him. 8 From there he moved to the hill country east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and worshiped Him."

Reflection

What command and what promise does God give Abram? What were Abram's qualifications? When God called Abram to leave everything familiar to him to journey toward an unknown destination, what was Abram counting on? What is the significance of the altars Abram built?

God called Abram to move beyond his comfort zone. How have you responded to God when He has called you to move beyond your comfort zone? To what [place, people, role, priority, change] is God calling you?

How do you see God calling our church into unknown territory? Which of His promises can we embrace? As Abram connected God's presence on his journey with the priority of worship, how can our corporate worship take on a richer, fuller meaning?

Father, thank You for calling me to something greater than myself. You have called me to follow You wherever You lead me, to a whole new way of living, filled with values and priorities that will often conflict with this culture. By Your grace You have not left me to my own imagination and ingenuity. Your presence is real and constant and as Proverbs 16:9 says, "The mind of man plans His way, but the Lord directs each step."

Engaging Children

What was the first thing that God asked Abram to do? Have you ever had to move away from friends or family? What was it like? What did you not like about it? Moving was hard, but Abram obeyed. What are some difficult things that God asks you to do? Ask your parents to tell you about a time in their lives when they had to obey God even when it was difficult.

Day Two A Call for Whole-hearted Love and Commitment

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 (New Living Translation)

1 “These are all the commands, laws, and regulations that the LORD your God told me to teach you so you may obey them in the land you are about to enter and occupy, 2 and so you and your children and grandchildren might fear the LORD your God as long as you live. If you obey all His laws and commands, you will enjoy a long life. 3 Listen closely, Israel, to everything I say. Be careful to obey. Then all will go well with you, and you will have many children in the land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD the God of your ancestors, promised you. 4 Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone!” 5 And you must love the LORD

your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength. 6 And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands I am giving you today. 7 Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away on a journey, when you are lying down and when you are getting up again. 8 Tie them to your hands as a reminder, and wear them on your forehead. 9 Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

*Note: “The Shammah” was recited at least two times each day: “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!” (NASB)

Reflection

What is the first truth to be believed? The first duty to be done? Why were these instructions and precepts so necessary in the Promised Land? How significant are they in the 21st century?

What is the most powerful motivation for reverent obedience to God? Count the number of times the word *all* is used, then evaluate what it reveals about your heart and lifestyle. Respond to this thought: *To love God with all my heart and mind, I must know Him.*

Why do you think there is such a generational emphasis to this passage (both future and past)? How can Grace Community Church take responsibility for keeping these truths in the forefront of each other's minds?

Lord, You are the only living and true God. I am learning every day that there is none like You! I want to love You with my whole heart, but You know the snares that threaten every moment to distract and divide it. Stamp Your perfect commands and promises on my heart; then I will write them down, put them to memory, live them out and speak them before others as a reminder that we know and serve the only One worthy of our absolute love and complete obedience.

Engaging Children

Does God's Word have a most important place in your heart and in your home? Is there a place in your house where you can post a favorite Scripture? Is there a Scripture you can memorize and say when you first wake up in the morning or right before you go to bed? Talk with your family about a plan to read part of the Bible together over the next month or year.

Day Three ☞ God Has Spoken: Choose Life

Deuteronomy 30:11-20 (New American Standard Bible)

11 “For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. 12 It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ 13 Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ 14 But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it. 15 See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; 16 in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God

may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. 17 But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, 18 I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. 19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, 20 by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.”

Reflection

Why does it matter that the “Word is very near you”? What is the connection between the “heart” (verse 17) and obedience or disobedience?

Reflect on the incredible truth of verses 11-14: How has God clearly spoken about how we should live in this world? What priority do you give to God’s Word? Does it correspond to its supreme value? If not, what else are you turning to?

If a key goal of our church is to encourage one another to choose life and obedience daily (Heb. 10:24-25), how should this be reflected in the priorities of our church? In our participation as individual members?

O God, we deserve only death but You give life, and in Your mercy You make Your commands plain to us. Now give us the strength to obey. Prevent our sin from blinding us to Your Word’s clear call, and the world from enticing us as if we could find pleasure anywhere but in You. Our hearts are prone to wander, Lord; keep them from turning away, and help us choose life in Christ.

Engaging Children

What does God promise those who love Him and follow His commands? Do you ever get a reward when you obey your parents? How about consequences for disobedience? God wants us to enjoy obeying Him because we love Him, and His commands are not meant to be a burden. Ask your parents how you can show them that you enjoy obeying.

Day Four The Word, Our Delight

Psalm 1:1-6 (New International Version)

1 “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, whose leaf

does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. 4 Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, or sinners in the assembly of the righteous. 6 For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”

Reflection

What does it mean to “delight” in the law of the Lord? What are the different realities of the “wicked” and the “righteous” that the Psalmist presents in these verses?

What would it look like for you to “meditate on the word day and night”? How can we firmly plant our lives in the Word of God?

Imagine a church filled with people who are firmly planted in the Word. What kind of results might we see from this within our church? In our city? In the world?

Lord, I am humbled by the charge of this passage to be one who delights in Your law and meditates on it day and night! Lord, give me the desire, give me the discipline, and show me how to be this kind of follower of Your Word. May the fruit of my life be evidence of Your truth abiding in me. Amen.

Engaging Children

What things make you happy? What do you delight in? What does verse 3 say we are like when we enjoy God’s Word? Walk outside and look at the trees in your yard or neighborhood. What are some reasons you think God compares a person who finds happiness in God’s Word to a tree?

Isaiah 40:21-31 (Holman Christian Standard Bible)

21 “Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been declared to you from the beginning? Have you not considered the foundations of the earth?

22 God is enthroned above the circle of the earth; its inhabitants are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like thin cloth and spreads them out like a tent to live in. 23 He reduces princes to nothing and makes the judges of the earth to be irrational.

24 They are barely planted, barely sown, their stem hardly takes root in the ground when He blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind carries them away like stubble. 25 ‘Who will you compare Me to, or who is My equal?’ asks the Holy One. 26 Look up and see: who created these? He brings out the starry host by number; He calls all of them

by name. Because of His great power and strength, not one of them is missing. 27 Jacob, why do you say, and Israel, why do you assert: ‘My way is hidden from the Lord, and my claim is ignored by my God?’ 28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? Yahweh is the everlasting God, the Creator of the whole earth. He never grows faint or weary; there is no limit to His understanding. 29 He gives strength to the weary and strengthens the powerless. 30 Youths may faint and grow weary, and young men stumble and fall, 31 but those who trust in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint.”

Reflection

What does this passage reveal about God’s perspective on Himself? What is revealed about God’s perspective on each of us?

If you read verses 29-31 apart from the broader context, what is the focus? How does the relatively narrow focus of verses 29-31 change when you consider the broader context of the passage? Do you find the broader focus encouraging or discouraging? Why?

The pressure of life can cause us as individuals and as a church to feel weary, powerless, faint, and prone to stumble and fall. During days of challenge, how can Grace Community Church use the truths of this passage to align the way we feel with the truth of God’s revelation?

O God, You see and know all without limitation yet understand the limitations of Your people. How readily our feelings define our perspective. In Your grace, You have given us truth as context for our feelings. Your truth tells us how to feel; our feelings do not tell us what is true. Heavy realities of life weigh on us. Open our minds to You, to Your work, and to Your ways. Grant us a clearer view, O God, so that we may gain perspective for soaring, for running, and especially for walking. Lock our eyes on You, incomparable, unequal, everlasting, and enthroned above all.

Engaging Children

Can you name someone who is stronger than you? What about stronger than your Dad? Can you name someone who is stronger than God? Can you see the stars? Do you know all their names? Do you ever get tired and sleepy? This passage tells us that no one is equal to God. He has all power, knows all things, and never gets tired. Pray right now and give praise to God for His greatness.

Day Six ☞ The Great Invitation (R.S.V.P.)

Isaiah 55:1-11 (New International Version)

1 “Come, all who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. 2 Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen to me, and eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. 3 Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. 4 See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples. 5 Surely, you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor. 6 Seek the LORD while he may be found; Call on

Him while he is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. 8 ‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the LORD. 9 ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. 10 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, 11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth; It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.’”

Reflection

Why would God repeat *come and listen* so many times? Record all the invitations and commands in this passage—who is being addressed and what qualifications are given? List everything God reveals about Himself—which of His qualities, statements or promises make the biggest impression on you today?

What might the free offer of *wine and milk* and *rich fare* represent? What changes in the mind, emotions and will are affected by receiving and “consuming” them? Reflect on the *urgency* of your response to God’s enticing invitation.

What have you observed God’s Word accomplishing in our fellowship at Grace Community Church? How does this passage relate to your personal and corporate role in evangelism and missions?

Dear LORD my God, You have my attention! I hear Your irresistible invitation to abundant and never-ending life in right relationship with You. Thank You for coming near so I can find You and know You and enjoy You. Thank you for including me in Your amazing plan for all peoples to perceive and take pleasure in Your glory forever!

Engaging Children

Go outside to see all the blooming trees and flowers. Who sent the rain and sunshine and makes these plants grow? How do Christians grow? God uses His Word, the Bible to help us grow up spiritually. Think of something God has taught you from the Bible, and tell your parents.

Isaiah 61:1-11 (New American Standard Bible)

1 “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; 2 To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, 3 To grant those who mourn in Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified. 4 Then they will rebuild the ancient ruins, they will raise up the former devastations; and they will repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations. 5 Strangers will stand and pasture your flocks, and foreigners will be your farmers and your vinedressers. 6 But you will be called the priests of the LORD; You will be spoken of as ministers of our God. You will eat the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast. 7 Instead of your shame you will have a double

portion, and instead of humiliation they will shout for joy over their portion. Therefore they will possess a double portion in their land, everlasting joy will be theirs. 8 For I, the LORD, love justice, I hate robbery in the burnt offering; and I will faithfully give them their recompense and make an everlasting covenant with them. 9 Then their offspring will be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples. All who see them will recognize them because they are the offspring whom the LORD has blessed. 10 I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, my soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. 11 For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes the things sown in it to spring up, So the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.”

Reflection

Who is acting in this text and what is being done? Compare verses 1-3 to verses 10-11 and then to Jesus’ words in Luke 4:16-21. What does Jesus offer that alleviates the afflicted, the broken-hearted, the captives, and the mourners, and why?

The garments of salvation offered here promise renewal and comfort to the broken. What are specific ways that you can apply this gospel today if you, or someone you know, is hurting?

How can we at Grace Community Church embody this promise to those who need it most?

Who are the afflicted, the captives, or the mourners in Nashville and how should we respond to them?

We marvel at Your boundless lovingkindness, O Lord. God of heaven, You care for broken creatures on earth; God of justice, You give mercy to the unjust; God of abundance, You give freely to the empty who offer nothing in return. Coming to us in our naked brokenness, captivity, and mourning, You wrap us securely in the garments of salvation. We worship You, God of our salvation, and ask for the strength to love others as You have loved us. Amen.

Engaging Children

Do you enjoy playing dress up or wearing costumes? When we become a Christian, God dresses us in His salvation and His righteousness. These verses were written by Isaiah, a prophet who lived more than 700 years before Jesus Christ lived on the earth. Think what Isaiah meant, then turn to read Luke 4:16-21 to find the answer.



Walking With Jesus Through the Word

28 Devotions for Disciples



WEEK TWO

Day Eight ☞ Confidence without Presumption

Daniel 3:8-18 (Holman Christian Standard Bible)

8 “Some Chaldeans took this occasion to come forward and maliciously accuse the Jews. 9 They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, ‘May the king live forever. 10 You as king have issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music must fall down and worship the gold statue. 11 Whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire. 12 There are some Jews you have appointed to manage the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men have ignored you, the king; they do not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up. 13 Then in a furious rage Nebuchadnezzar gave orders to bring in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king. 14 Nebuchadnezzar asked them, ‘Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, is

it true that you don’t serve my gods or worship the gold statue I have set up? 15 Now if you’re ready, when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music, fall down and worship the statue I made. But if you don’t worship it, you will immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire—and who is the god who can rescue you from my power?’ 16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king, ‘Nebuchadnezzar, we don’t need to give you an answer to this question. 17 If the God we serve exists, then He can rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire, and He can rescue us from the power of you, the king. 18 But even if He does not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up.’”

Reflection

In this passage, what type of power did each of the following have: 1) Nebuchadnezzar, the king, 2) The king’s lackeys who reported the incident, 3) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Who was the most powerful? Who was the least powerful? Why?

What makes you feel powerless in life? How does your relationship with God impact your sense of power in life? How does the knowledge that God can intervene in your life change your view? How do questions about what God will do impact you?

How do we as a church live with confidence in God without becoming spiritually presumptuous [arrogant, conceited]? What faith-filled declarations should we make based on the example we discover in this passage?

All powerful King, we come to You as constrained people. We feel powerless more often than we feel powerful. You, O God, are our hope. We confess that You exist. We confess that You can intervene to alter the circumstances of our lives. Even as we confess our belief, we ask You to help our unbelief. Grant us grace to stand with resolution in faith to trust that You are both willing and able to do your good will in our lives.

Engaging Children

What were these three young men being asked to do? Why did they say no? Were they willing to suffer for their obedience to God? Have you ever suffered for worshiping God? Many people in our world still face punishment and sometimes death for believing in Jesus. Ask your parents if they know of other countries where Christians are persecuted. (For more resources see “Kids of Courage” at www.persecution.com/link)

Matthew 9:27-38 (New Living Translation)

27 "After Jesus left the girl's home, two blind men followed along behind him, shouting, 'Son of David, have mercy on us!' 28 They went right into the house where he was staying, and Jesus asked them, 'Do you believe I can make you see?' 'Yes, Lord,' they told him, 'we do.' 29 Then he touched their eyes and said, 'Because of your faith, it will happen.' 30 Then their eyes were opened, and they could see! Jesus sternly warned them, 'Don't tell anyone about this.' 31 But instead, they went out and spread his fame all over the region. 32 When they left, a demon-possessed man who couldn't speak was brought to Jesus. 33 So Jesus cast out the demon, and then the man began to speak. The crowds were amazed. 'Nothing like this

has ever happened in Israel!' they exclaimed. 34 But the Pharisees said, 'He can cast out demons because he is empowered by the prince of demons.' 35 Jesus traveled through all the towns and villages of that area, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 He said to his disciples, 'The harvest is great, but the workers are few. 38 So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields.'"

Reflection

Upon seeing the great need of the people, what does Jesus do? What is His instruction to His disciples in light of the plight of these people? Why didn't the people Jesus healed keep quiet?

Do you see a "ready harvest" in your home, office, neighborhood, and city? Are you a willing worker in these fields? Why or why not?

How are we, as a church, to carry out Jesus' call? Describe how you have seen Jesus' power changing lives at Grace Community Church. Take a moment to pray about your role in the mission work of our church (e.g. giving, going, praying, sending).

Lord, give us the compassion of Christ for those who are around us. Many are hurting, sick, confused and lost. Give us a passion for them; give us the selflessness to reach out to them; give us the courage to speak boldly of You to them. Holy Spirit, do this great work through us.

Engaging Children

Did you know that all Christians are called to missions? You may not be a missionary in a foreign land (or in the United States), but you can share God's love with the people in your home, school, neighborhood, and church. Who do you know that needs to hear about Jesus? How can you show God's love to someone today? Take some time today to pray for a missionary family that you know.

Matthew 16:13-26 (New International Version)

13 “When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say the Son of Man is?’ 14 They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.’ 15 ‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ 16 Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ 17 Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. 18 I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.’ 19 ‘I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’ 20 Then He warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ. 21 From

that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. 22 Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. ‘Never, Lord!’ he said. ‘This shall never happen to You!’ 23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but things of men.’ 24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. 26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?’”

Reflection

Why is the second question Jesus asked the disciples so significant (verse 15)? What kind of Messiah was Peter expecting, and why was Jesus’ response to him so strong? What is Jesus trying to drive home regarding what a disciple loses and gains?

Who do you say Jesus is, and how is that answer impacting your life? How are you most tempted to “save” the life you want (even if it means sacrificing your soul)? In the realm of daily life, what do you think denying yourself or losing your life looks like?

How does Peter’s confession in vs.16 provide a principle that can keep Grace Community Church centered? What perspective on values and priorities should Jesus’ “gain and forfeit” argument give our congregation?

Lord, You have used this passage to remind me that You are the only One who can save my soul. Forgive me for all the ways I have followed the “Jesus I want” rather than the “Jesus who is.” Grant me the grace to deny my lesser aspirations and expectations, so I might follow Your superior ones. Change my dreams to conform to Your will and design for my life.

Engaging Children

If you could have anything you wanted for your next birthday, what would it be? Can you give that thing to God in order to pay for your salvation? Of course not! Ask your parents to explain how God gave us the gift of salvation through His only Son.

Day Eleven ☞ A Lofty Claim, a Lasting Comfort, A Last Command

Matthew 28:16-20 (Amplified)

16 “Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed and made appointment with them. 17 And when they saw Him, they fell down and worshiped Him; but some doubted. 18 Jesus approached and, breaking the silence, said to them, ‘All authority (all power of rule) in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.

19 Go then and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you, and behold, I am with you all the days (perpetually, uniformly, and on every occasion), to the [very] close and consummation of the age.’ Amen (so let it be).”

Reflection

What is the basis for Jesus’ lofty claim that He has all authority both in heaven and on earth? What words provided lasting comfort for those who were awakening to the reality of Jesus’ absolute right and rule? Consider how Jesus’ last command to “go” is both a charge and an encouragement?

To what extremes are you willing to go to obey Jesus? When a person becomes a new disciple, in what new ways does he/she relate to each person of the Godhead (Father, Son, and Spirit)? Why is baptism a part of becoming a disciple, and what does it symbolize?

Since Jesus has the right to be worshiped by all the peoples of the earth, what decisive steps should Grace Community Church members take to embrace the unreached ethnic groups of the world, and build up the church among every people? What assures us that we have the ability to obey and teach *everything* Jesus commanded?

Lord Jesus, I try to imagine the hearts of those who traveled to meet You at the mountain in Galilee, and what they saw that made them all fall before You in worship. I am comforted by how You came near to reassure those who still doubted it was really You. I am convicted by how lightly I take Your command to obey and proclaim ALL of Your teachings, not just the ones I understand or desire. Most of all, I am empowered by the reminder that there will never be a moment when You are not with me until the day when I see Your great glory for myself!

Engaging Children

Imagine that your mom or dad was leaving for a trip and would be gone for a long time. What things do you think they would say as they left? When Jesus left earth and ascended into heaven, He left us with very important words. He commanded us to share God’s love and the good news of Jesus with other people. What other important thing did He tell us that is written in the second part of verse 20?

Day Twelve Wealth, Impossibility, and the God of the Possible

Mark 10:23-31 (New American Standard Bible)

23 “And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, ‘How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!’ 24 The disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, ‘Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’ 26 They were even more astonished and said to Him, ‘Then who can be saved?’ 27 Looking at them, Jesus said, ‘With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are

possible with God.’ 28 Peter began to say to Him, ‘Behold, we have left everything and followed You.’ 29 Jesus said, ‘Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, 30 but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last, first.’”

Reflection

What is it about wealth that makes it a potential roadblock to the kingdom of God? Verses 29-30 promise “a hundred times as much . . . in the present age” to those who make sacrifices for the gospel. Is this a promise of more material wealth? If so, what does it imply about our priorities and what about those “persecutions”? If not material wealth, what does the promise mean?

What in your life keeps you from absolute reliance on God? What else do you put your trust in (e.g. financial security, possessions, work, family)?

God has blessed our congregation in amazing ways, but how can we make sure that we continue to trust in Him rather than in what He has given us—our buildings, our property, our assets, our numbers? What should our church leave behind for the gospel’s sake?

God of the possible, we thank You for the grace that breaks through our tendency to worship the creature over the Creator and the gifts over the Giver. Keep us from a confidence located anywhere but in You, and inspire us with a trust in Your grace so powerful that we give up anything for the sake of the gospel. Knowing that the last will be first, we ask that You would humble us as Christ was humbled. Amen.

Engaging Children

What is the kingdom of God? How does a person enter His kingdom? Can anyone enter? Find something in this passage that looks “impossible.” What special promise does Jesus give in verse 27?

Day Thirteen Love in Action

Luke 6:27-38 (New American Standard Bible)

27 “But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. 30 Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. 31 Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. 32 If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit

is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. 35 But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. 37 Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. 38 Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”

Reflection

From this passage, what are the actions that we are exhorted to take in order to live out love? Circle or write down all of these verbs. What empowers us to do what Jesus commanded?

What makes loving our enemies so difficult for us? How is something this radical to be done? Describe how God has bountifully “returned” what you have given (e.g. time, energy, love, money).

As a church body, how do we hold to the standard set out in this passage? What can Grace Community Church do to create an environment of generosity, mercy, blessing and restoration?

God, this type of life that You have called us to is supernatural. It is beyond our capacity in our own strength. Remind us of the mercy and love that You offer us and help us to follow Your lead. Holy Spirit, give us the ability to love, to offer mercy, give generously, pardon, bless and pray for those who, in our minds, might not even deserve it. Do a great work in our hearts. We need You, Father. Amen.

Engaging Children

How hard is it to love your friends and family? What about your enemies? Think of a situation where you can treat someone else the way that you would want to be treated. Ask God to help you show His love to all people, whether it's easy or hard.

Day Fourteen ☞ Faux Treasure, Designer Treasure

Luke 12:22-34 (Holman Christian Standard Bible)

22 “Then He said to His disciples: ‘Therefore I tell you, don’t worry about your life, what you will eat; or about the body, what you will wear. 23 For life is more than food and the body more than clothing. 24 Consider the ravens: they don’t sow or reap; they don’t have a storeroom or a barn; yet God feeds them. Aren’t you worth much more than the birds? 25 Can any of you add a cubit to his height by worrying? 26 If then you’re not able to do even a little thing, why worry about the rest? 27 Consider how the wildflowers grow: they don’t labor or spin thread. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these! 28 If that’s how God clothes the grass, which is in the field today and is

thrown into the furnace tomorrow, how much more will He do for you—you of little faith? 29 Don’t keep striving for what you should eat and what you should drink, and don’t be anxious. 30 For the Gentile world eagerly seeks all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 But seek His kingdom, and these things will be provided for you. 32 Don’t be afraid, little flock, because your Father delights to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Make money-bags for yourselves that won’t grow old, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Reflection

What does this passage identify as fake treasure? What is identified as true treasure? What are the key differences between the two?

List the things that are worrying you most today. How do you find balance as you address the real needs of today (what to eat, what to wear, what to save, how to plan for tomorrow, etc.) with the priorities of the kingdom of God?

As a church, how can we help each other to deal with the real and pressing needs that cause us to worry while at the same time exhorting each other to focus on spiritual priorities? What does it mean for Grace Community Church to “seek His kingdom?”

Loving Father who understands our struggles, we want to pursue Your kingdom priorities. The worries of this life poke us in the eyes and make it hard for us to envision inexhaustible treasure in heaven. We feel as vulnerable as sparrows and wild flowers in this world. Unless You sustain us, we are doomed; we have no backup plan. The world parades its valuables before us and entices us to trade our lives for trinkets. Lord God, You have given us the ultimate exchange, our lives for Your life. In You we have all; we lack nothing. Our good fortune in Christ defies our imagination. You designed the ultimate treasure in Christ. By grace, You gave that designer treasure to us.

Engaging Children

Parents: Have a scavenger hunt with your children. Ask them to find items in your house, and bring them to you. Think of some things that are easy to find, and others that will take a bit more work. Ask them, “What comes to mind when you think of treasure? A treasure is something so valuable that people search for it, and work to find it. What do these verses say about treasure?” Discuss with your children the difference between laying up earthly treasure and heavenly treasure, and how the things we love become the treasures of our hearts.



Walking With Jesus Through the Word

28 Devotions for Disciples

WEEK THREE

Day Fifteen ☞ The Test of Discipleship

Luke 14:25-35 (New International Version)

25 “Large crowds were traveling with Jesus; and turning to them he said: 26 ‘If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. 27 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 28 Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? 29 For if he lays a foundation and is not able to finish it everyone who sees it will ridicule him, 30 saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to

finish.’ 31 Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. 33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. 34 Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? 35 It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Reflection

What point is Jesus making by saying to “hate” your family members and your life? How do each of the three parables relate to the imperative to give Jesus our supreme love and loyalty?

How do these words of Jesus provide an evaluation of your commitment to Christ? Have you literally calculated some specific costs of following Jesus as His disciple? What does that look like for you?

What are the implications for Grace Community Church to make disciples in such a consumer-oriented culture? How does the “salt” analogy impact our discipleship and programming priorities?

Lord, You have tested my heart with these words. You have exposed my love for other things. Purify my soul, so I might cherish You more and commit myself to growing as Your disciple. As I am counting the costs, Lord, I believe You are worthy of all my adoration and devotion. Let me be known as Your disciple in all my circles, and let Grace be known as a true disciple-making church in our community and across the world.

Engaging Children

What does it cost you to become a Christian? God’s love and forgiveness through Jesus’ death on the cross are a free gift. There is nothing you can do to earn or pay for your salvation. As a follower of Christ, though, God calls you to belief, repentance, and obedience. Can you think of any command in the Bible that you need to obey, or a sin you need to turn away from? How can obedience and repentance be costly to you?

Day Sixteen ☞ Instructions for a Joyful, Fruitful Life

John 15:1-11 (New International Version)

1 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.
2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit,
while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so
that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already
clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4
Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. No branch
can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine.
Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in
me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man
remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit;
apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does
not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown

away and withers; such branches are picked up,
thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain
in me, and my words remain in you, ask whatever
you wish, and it will be given to you. 8 This is to my
Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing
yourselves to be my disciples. 9 As the Father has
loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in
my love. 10 If you obey my commands, you will
remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s
commands and remain in His love. 11 I have told
you this so that my joy may be in you and that your
joy may be complete.”

Reflection

What is the relationship between the “gardener,” the “vine,” and the “branches”? For what reason does the persistent gardener prune the branches that are bearing fruit? What kind of fruit can be expected when we remain connected to the “true vine” and how does it give glory to the gardener?

What was Jesus’ *motivation* for His promises and warnings to each of us? What has Jesus promised those who make His love and His Word their permanent dwelling place? How does Jesus advise those who expect to thrive apart from Him?

How can our congregation be certain that we are praying correctly and productively? What *fruit* gives evidence that Grace Community Church is continuing in Jesus’ love, bringing due glory to God, and unfailingly enriching the world?

Thank You Lord for continuing Your work in our lives as a loving Creator: cultivating peace, quietness, confidence, goodness and unfailing love as Your followers enjoy a continual feast and draw life from Your Word. Today I will not insist on authority or superiority, but I will humbly and happily allow You to work through me so the world will see a “splendid vine” (Ezekiel 17:8) and give You glory.

Engaging Children

Go outside and find a branch that has fallen to the ground. Compare it to the branches that are still on the tree. What is the difference and why? How many times does Jesus use the word “remain” (or abide, continue, dwell) in these verses? Ask your parents to help you list the results of remaining in Jesus?

Day Seventeen ☞ Death, Resurrection, and the Christian Life

Romans 6:1-14 (New American Standard Bible)

1 "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? 2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed

from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, 13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace."

Reflection

Since salvation comes only by grace and not by anything sinful humans can do, so why does it matter how Christians act/ behave? We rightly talk a lot about the death of Christ that removes our sin debt, but how often do we consider the meaning of His resurrection for us?

How does the resurrection of Jesus affect your *daily life* as a Christian? Verses 12-13 suggest that we fail to live as those who have died to sin when we willingly submit ourselves to sin's reign. What are some ways or situations in which you "present" yourself to sin? How can you present your body (e.g. eyes, feet, hands, mouth) to God for righteousness instead?

At Grace Community Church, how should the hope of the resurrection affect our attempts to encourage each other? To shape our message to the community?

Lord of life, You alone have broken the powerful cycle of death once and for all. Because of Your work in us we choose life. Jesus, my finite mind has difficulty processing that I was "crucified" with You, but to be "raised" with You is beyond me! As I meditate on that amazing idea, I'm filled with hope and peace. Help us now to live not just in hope for the future, but in victory over sin now. Amen.

Engaging Children

What is sin? Why does our sin separate us from God? What has God done through Jesus Christ to pay for our sin? After a person becomes a Christian, does he continue to sin? What is one verse in this passage that can help you to not give up on the struggle with sin?

Day Eighteen Disciples Are Made Alive in Christ

Ephesians 2:1-13 (New American Standard Bible)

1 “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace

you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. 11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called ‘Uncircumcision’ by the so-called ‘Circumcision,’ which is performed in the flesh by human hands—12 remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

Reflection

What does this passage reveal about our condition apart from Christ and the importance of remembering our former condition? What is the connection between wrath and love in verses 3-4? What is the connection between grace and works in verses 8-10?

How does knowing your true condition *before* salvation make God’s mercy real and meaningful to you? What are the practical implications of being made alive in Christ? How does knowing the truth that we are “created in Christ Jesus for good works,” shape our perspective of grace and works?

How should this passage shape the way Grace Community Church views and guides our conversations about sin? About salvation? How should we approach evangelism at our church in terms of prayer, worship, preaching and teaching?

Father, You are holy, righteous and just; and yet You are full of mercy and compassion. Praise be to You for showing compassion on me, even in my former state of sin and alienation from You. Let the incredible power of this reality sink in. Let my soul absorb it. I once was lost, but now I am found. Let this reality of Your grace in my life move me to pursue the works You created me for with joy and hopefulness.

Engaging Children

Parents: Tell your children that when you call their name you want them to come running to you. Have your child go as far away from you as possible, but still within earshot. Call children by name, and give them a big hug when they arrive. Have them sit in your lap or right next to you and explain to them how we are all far away from God because of our sin, but because of His love and mercy He gives new life to those who have faith in Christ and brings us near to Himself just like you did.

Ephesians 5:11-21 (New American Standard Bible)

11 “Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 13 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: ‘Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’ 15 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore

do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. 19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

Reflection

What kinds of choices do these verses present to us? In what ways does Paul challenge us to “live wisely”? What are some examples of fruitless deeds of darkness? What is the light that will shine on our deeds?

What is the impact of living an *exposed* life, and what makes vulnerability with others most difficult for you? How can understanding God’s will help you make the most of every opportunity in these times?

What does a church that is filled with God’s Spirit look like? How does submission to one another exalt Jesus? How does corporate worship encourage and build our faith as a community?

Lord, this passage is such a radical call to live in the light and move out of the darkness. Father, enable me to live that vulnerably. that I would seek to live in the light and flee from the darkness. Use the words from sermons, responsive readings, and our worship songs to speak life into our hearts. Produce the fruit of a godly people in our church as we submit to one another in the fear of Christ. Amen.

Engaging Children

What is your favorite song from church or Sunday School? Sing it with your family, and then explain to them why it is your favorite. What does this song tell other people about God?

Day Twenty Ambassadors in the Battle

Ephesians 6:10-20 (Holman Christian Standard Bible)

10 “Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by His vast strength. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the tactics of the devil. 12 For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens. 13 This is why you must take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand. 14 Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest, 15 and your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace.

16 In every situation take the shield of faith, and with it you will be able to extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is God’s word. 18 With every prayer and request, pray at all times in the Spirit, and stay alert in this, with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints. 19 Pray also for me, that the message may be given to me when I open my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel. 20 For this I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I might be bold enough in Him to speak as I should.”

Reflection

What does this passage reveal about God’s strength? About our strength? About the strength of our enemy?

In what ways does your life feel like a spiritual battle? As you think about your life as a Christian, in what ways do you live as an *ambassador* of Christ? What is your responsibility as God’s representative in the context of a *battle*? How well are you doing? What changes would cause you to be more effective?

How can we, as a church, make known the mystery of the gospel more effectively? How can we do so with greater boldness? What might help people be more willing to open up to others and speak the words of the gospel in daily life?

O God who has already won, help us to live today in victory. The battle rages around us but You have equipped us. All we require, You have given. We fight as more than conquerors in a cosmic contest raging in the heavenly realms. Fortify our hearts to act with boldness even if our knees shake. Your life in us is our strength. How marvelous that You give us Yourself. All-powerful Commander, armor us up today for a great fight. Sovereign King, grant us wisdom and boldness to serve as gospel ambassadors. Whether as soldiers or as ambassadors, let us do that for which this day calls. Let us fight; let us speak, but in all, let us honor You.

Engaging Children

Draw an outline of a person. Now draw and label the pieces of armor that are described in this passage. Why do we need to wear this armor of God? After we are dressed in our armor, what does verse 18 tell us to do?

Day Twenty-One Sons and Daughters of Obedience

Colossians 3:1-11 (New International Version)

1 "Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your heart on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. 5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7 You used to walk in these ways,

in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11 Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and in all."

Reflection

Take a few moments to list some of "things above" that we should seek after. If we have been united with the life of Jesus' (i.e. crucified, buried and raised with Him) why is it so difficult to keep our minds on what really matters?

What is the difference between the two lists of sins in this passage? What does it mean to "put to death" sin? What kinds of qualities characterize the "new self"?

Of what profit are racial, cultural and social distinctions for those in the body of Christ? How can Grace Community Church demonstrate to our city what it means to be united by the indwelling Jesus?

God of heaven, because of Your risen Son, we have become sons and daughters of obedience; yet we continue to be pulled away from You by desires for things that lead to nothingness. Give us the boldness to face sin as an enemy and call on Your authority to "kill" it. Thank You for Your indwelling Spirit who continually awakens us to what is real and true, and who persistently reminds us that our lives are safely hidden away in heaven until the day when we will share in Your glorious return.

Engaging Children

What kinds of things do you think about? How much time do you spend thinking about playing, eating, sports, electronic games, and schoolwork? Is it wrong to think about earthly things? What do you think it means to "set your mind on things above"? What could you do to think more about Christ?



Walking With Jesus Through the Word

28 Devotions for Disciples



WEEK FOUR

1 Timothy 6:10-21 (New International Version)

10 “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. 11 But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13 In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you 14 to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable

light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen. 17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 19 In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. 20 Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, 21 which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. Grace be with you.”

Reflection

How does this passage speak to the power of money? What comparison is made between our relationship with worldly riches and godly riches? How is money connected to trust in God and obedience? What is the “good confession” Paul mentions in verses 12-13?

What is God’s desire for your perspective to be regarding your possessions? What changes might you need to make to live in light of this? How have you been pursuing the qualities in verse 11?

This passage redefines what is valuable. Are there ways that our life as a church still reflects the world’s definition of value? How can we collectively embody God’s perspective on what is valuable in our community?

Blessed and only Sovereign, Your grace removes us from our blind and helpless captivity to the fleeting pleasures of sin, and transfers us to Your eternal kingdom of light and life and fullness and meaning. Re-form our lives and priorities to reflect this new reality, we pray, and protect us from the enticing offers of that which cannot satisfy. Amen.

Engaging Children

How much money do you have right now? Do you love it? What does this passage say about the love of money? What are God’s instructions to the rich? How can you share the things that God has given you?

2 Timothy 3:10-17 (New King James Version)

10 “But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long suffering, love, perseverance, 11 persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. 12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. 13 But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. 14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have

learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God*, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

* Note: breathed out by God, ESV; God-breathed, NIV

Reflection

How do you reconcile *endurance* in persecutions and God’s *deliverance* from them? What does verse 13 state about spiritual deception and the importance of sound biblical teaching? What is the significance of the phrases “all Scripture” and “inspiration of God” in verse 16?

Which role models are you currently following regarding lifestyle, work, theology, marriage, parenting, finances, etc.? Describe how Scripture has guided you, taken you to task, put you right or trained you this week?

How does verse 15 speak to our personal and congregational accountability for prioritizing Scriptural teaching? How should Grace Community Church members help each other become more mature and competent for whatever God asks us to do?

Lord, thank You for giving me the Scriptures, which reveal Your heart, character and instruction in words I can understand. Your Word is my daily companion. Over and over again, when I’ve needed instruction, Your Spirit has illuminated the truth appropriate to my circumstances. When I’ve needed the light shined on my sin, Your Word has convicted me. When I have found myself in despair, the Scriptures have brought me hope and healing. And Lord, I would ask You to help me discern rock-solid mentors from misleading gurus as You mold my life in such a way that You would be able to use me as an example to others.

Engaging Children

The Bible tells us that Timothy was taught God’s Word by his mother and his grandmother. Who has helped you learn about God and His Word? Ask your parents who taught them about God. Take time now to thank God for the people in your life who have taught you about Him. Write a thank you note to someone who has helped you learn more about God and His Word.

Hebrews 10:19-25 (Holman Christian Standard Bible)

19 “Therefore, brothers, since we have boldness to enter the sanctuary through the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that He has inaugurated for us, through the curtain (that is, His flesh); 21 and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in

pure water. 23 Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works, 25 not staying away from our meetings, as some habitually do, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

Reflection

What does this passage tell us about the basis of our access to God? Why can we be bold? On what basis do we draw near? Why can we have full assurance? Can we really have a pure, clear conscience?

If you wanted to explain the basis for your spiritual hope to someone else, how would you do so? Do you ever waver in this hope? Why? How does God’s promise and God’s faithfulness impact your confidence? How would your confidence change if your access and current standing with God depended on you?

As a church, what can we do to increase our specific expressions of love and good works? What practical things should we do or avoid doing when we meet together to encourage one another? In what practical ways does the “drawing near” of the day of Christ spur us on?

Never would we have dreamed, O God, of the privileged access You have granted us. Only Your grace made this miracle possible. Now in Christ we stand boldly inside the curtain with clean hearts and clear consciences. We marvel at this stunning reversal of fortunes. Outsiders have become insiders; enemies have become beloved children. Your Spirit prompts us to increasing love and expanding good works. In spite of progress, we grieve over the distance yet to go. We long to be transformed into the image of Christ. Our brothers and sisters in Christ spur us on. Increase our commitment to those in the Body of Christ with whom we share life. Keep us from settling for little when You have promised us much, in our relationships with You and with each other.

Engaging Children

How do you feel when your parents or a teacher tell you that you’ve done a good job? Does it make you want to do even more? The Bible tells us that we should think about how to help each other love God and our neighbors. What are three ways that you can encourage your friends and family “to love and good works”?

James 2:1-17 (New American Standard Bible)

1 "My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. 2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, 'You sit here in a good place,' and you say to the poor man, 'You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,' 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? 5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? 7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? 8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,' you are doing well. 9

But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. 11 For He who said, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,' also said, 'DO NOT COMMIT MURDER.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. 14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself."

Reflection

How is the sin of partiality so deeply opposed to the heart of the gospel? What reasons does James give for opposing favoritism?

As you meditate on this passage, how are you guilty of violating the sin of partiality? Ultimately, what is the most powerful argument you can employ to keep yourself from judging someone?

In what ways do you find this passage relevant to American Christianity? How should Grace Community Church allow this passage to shape our values?

Lord, my judgmental heart and attitudes of partiality have hidden themselves from me, but now Your Word has laid me bare. O, Lord, change my heart and give me the compassion of Christ to love the rich and the poor, the wise and the simple, and the one appearing righteous and the one whose sin is known to all. Lead me to love all people in a way that brings honor to You.

Engaging Children

Do you ever play favorites? Are you nicer to people who are most like you? Have you ever judged someone by the way that they look or talk? Why is it wrong to judge others? What does it mean to be poor, yet rich in faith? Would you rather be rich with things or rich in faith? Why?

Day Twenty-Six Following our Great Shepherd and Guardian

1 Peter 2:21-25 (English Standard Version)

21 “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps. 22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued

entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. 25 For you were straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

Reflection

Why is it uncommon to hear that discipleship will also include suffering, and not just praise or reward? In what ways was Jesus despised, abused, or condemned unjustly? Why didn't He stop His persecutors or defend Himself?

What makes us think we have the right to react sinfully or settle the score when offended or treated unfairly? How did Jesus show us that we can entrust ourselves to God when we suffer unjustly?

Describe the way Jesus guides and guards His church today. What advantages can Grace Community Church expect by submitting to Him as our righteous, compassionate “overseer”?

Jesus, Suffering Servant, You were completely innocent, but took on my punishment when I was utterly guilty. Therefore, I can trust You to lead my life and protect my soul while I'm living in a world so full of evil. Though I trust that You will bring justice for all at the right time, I need Your power to bear up under any suffering You call me to endure, and in Your power will actively seek to bless those who hurt me. Please be my leader and protector today. Amen.

Engaging Children

Parents: Play a round or two of “Follow the Leader” with your children. When you're done, talk to them about how Christ lived a sinless life, and died on the cross to take away our sins. Talk with them about how Jesus suffered without fighting back or being angry. How can we follow His example?

Day Twenty Seven Holiness, the Gift of God

2 Peter 1:2-11 (New American Standard Bible)

2 “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; 3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. 5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your

perseverance, godliness, 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; 11 for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.”

Reflection

Verse 5 introduces the call for holiness with “for this reason,” but what is the *reason*? If holiness is the effect, what is the *cause*? What principles about “sin” does this passage offer?

How should we face each day, knowing that God has already given us what we need to live in godliness? What is your part in the goal of living out a useful and fruitful life?

In our discipleship efforts at Grace Community Church, how can we balance the offer of forgiveness with the requirement of holiness? How can we help each other grow in the character qualities mentioned in verses 5-7?

Gracious God, we acknowledge You as the source of all good in me. With confidence in Your promises and sorrow over my sins, I pray that You will complete the good work begun in me. As I look at the character qualities in this passage, I realize that Jesus is an exquisite picture of all of them. As I gaze on Him, transform me. Give me a fruitful life, lived in light of eternity. Amen.

Engaging Children

Make a list with your family of some of the “precious and magnificent promises” that God has made to you. Post your list somewhere so that you can remind yourself of these promises. Spend time thanking and praising God for all that He has done for you.

Day Twenty-Eight Living with the End in Mind

Revelation 22:8-21 (Holman Christian Standard Bible)

8 “I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. When I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had shown them to me. 9 But he said to me, ‘Don’t do that! I am a fellow slave with you, your brothers, the prophets, and those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.’ 10 He also said to me, ‘Don’t seal the prophetic words of this book, because the time is near. 11 Let the unrighteous go on in unrighteousness; let the filthy go on being made filthy; let the righteous go on in righteousness; and let the holy go on being made holy. 12 Look! I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me to repay each person according to what he has done. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. 14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. 15 Outside are the dogs,

the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. 16 I, Jesus, have sent My angel to attest these things to you for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright Morning Star.’ 17 Both the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ Anyone who hears should say, ‘Come!’ And the one who is thirsty should come. Whoever desires should take the living water as a gift. 18 I testify to everyone who hears the prophetic words of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book. 19 And if anyone takes away from the words of this prophetic book, God will take away his share of the tree of life and the holy city, written in this book. 20 He who testifies about these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming quickly.’ Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! 21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.”

Reflection

What does this passage tell us about the future? About the fate of people? About the coming of Jesus? About how things will end?

Jesus always invites us to Himself. In your life, to what do you sense Jesus saying, “Come” and in what do you need His presence?

As we pray “Come quickly, Lord Jesus,” how does our sense of urgency as a church change? What does His coming compel our fellowship to do more of . . . and less of?

Eternal Alpha and Omega, we stand in time with the knowledge that You stand outside of time. We perceive beginnings and endings; You see all as current realities. Nothing in our finite, created space limits You. How can the infinite fit into the finite? How can God unbounded live in us? These things double up our minds with questions yet satisfy our souls with promise. Liberate Your creation, O Lord. Free us today from small thinking and finite living. Stretch our capacity for expansive living as we await Your coming. Come quickly, Lord Jesus, come.

Engaging Children

Have you ever been waiting for your grandparents to come visit, and you knew that they were bringing you a present? How did you feel? Was it hard to wait? Were you happy to see them? The Bible tells us that Jesus will come again. When He does He will reward those who have trusted in Him. Are you excited when you think about Jesus’ return? Why or why not?