

GOD • COMMUNITY • PURPOSE

40 DAYS OF *Prayer & Thanksgiving*

A DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

"As a deer thirsts for streams of water, so I thirst for
you God" Psalm 42:1 (NCV).

MAY 11 - JUNE 19

Imagine

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A DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

God calls His people to live out adventures of faith. Abraham was called to go to settle in a place that he had never seen and where he knew no one. Noah was called to build a ship in a land locked area and the people around him were left scratching their heads and eventually dog-paddling to their death. Moses was asked to take three million people on a forty year camping trip so they would learn to put all of their trust in the Lord's provision.

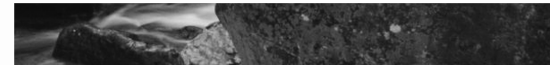
It didn't stop when Jesus came to earth. Fishermen were asked to leave their nets and boats, and to begin fishing for men. Peter was called to walk on the water. Pharisees were asked to forgive and show grace. Disciples were asked to deny themselves the things of this world, and to take up their crosses and follow Him.

The journey of faith continues in 2009. Just living this life keeps us challenged. In addition to being faithful, God calls us to do greater things as groups of believers than we could ever do as individuals.

Deer Creek is seeking to reach the most people for Jesus Christ that we possibly can. Jesus left us with that command (Matthew 28:19-20). The next few years will be an adventure for Deer Creek and all of our ministries. The eventual move to the land in Monee, and all of the steps from here to there, will teach us to trust the Lord. Let's embrace the adventure to which God has led us, meeting it with faith and prayer, seeking His will, His direction, and His provision.

I pray that the next forty days will unite us in that pursuit.

Rejoicing Always,
Randy Roberts, Pastor



Day 1, May 11

God – for His will and wisdom to be made known

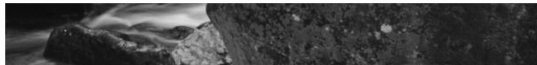
John 7:37-39 (NLT):

"On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, "Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.'" [a] (When he said "living water," he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, [b] because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.)

Wow! What a promise! Christ tells His followers that after He is resurrected from the dead, God's Spirit will permanently live inside of them. The desire for real purpose and eternal significance inside of every person cannot be satisfied with power, money, beauty, fame or even service in the church. But those who know and follow Jesus will find internal - and eternal - fulfillment. Here our Lord promises that His Holy Spirit will be like a spring of water in a parched desert that quenches their greatest thirst.

Prayer:

Dear Father, thank you for giving me and our church your Holy Spirit. Teach us as a people to trust in your spirit and the wisdom and counsel and fulfillment that only He can offer. I ask you to provide me and my family and my church with the wisdom we need to draw on the Spirit's unlimited power when we face obstacles and adversity. Infuse us with courage. May we never despair, for we know your precious promises are always true. Amen.



Day 2, May 12

1 Peter 4:7

"The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray."

There is an urgency to be ready for the day of Christ' return. Our culture makes it easy and obvious to see how people could be unprepared for the end of time. Some of us are so distracted that we might not know when it begins.

In order to be in tune with God, His timing and what He is up to in the world, we must pray. But our schedules, demands and passions keep our mind occupied with other things.

The text above suggests that we can't even pray to God if we don't remove the clutter. We need to have a clear and controlled mind. During these next 40 days we need to find a place of solitude and a time of day when we can focus upon God.

Prayer:

Father in Heaven, help me to clear my thoughts of distractions that keep me from being focused on You and what you are doing in the world around me. Help me to see your hand move and prepare the way for me in my schedule, my relationships and my commitments. Provide a time and place for me to detach from the world around me and connect more directly to Your Spirit. Amen.



Day 3, May 13

Proverbs 2:3-6

"...and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding and if you look for it as for silver, and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding."

How wonderful it is that we are promised wisdom, knowledge and understanding if we diligently seek God in our lives. This wisdom and knowledge is a treasure that is worthy of our seeking with great passion in our life. Like silver that is refined, the knowledge of the things of God is so worthy of our seeking.

Prayer:

Father, as we seek Your will in our lives, in our marriages, in our church, we thank You Lord for the promise that You will give us wisdom. We are nothing without You and perfected in You. Your purposes in our lives matters, and we seek understanding and cry out to You for your insight. Thank You, God, that You are our refuge in difficulty, and our joy in life. We love You, Lord, and praise You for caring enough to provide the treasure of truth and understanding. Amen.



Day 4, May 14

Psalm 51:12

"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me."

The Chicago Cubs won the World Series in 1908. They have tried to duplicate that feat each year since, without success. But somehow they keep trying, ever hopeful that their next season will be the one.

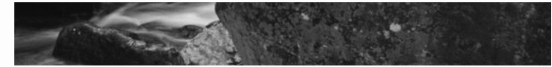
Thomas Edison tried thousands of materials for the filament of his light bulb before he found something that worked.

Those examples are unusual. It is far more common for us to give up when we don't find success, to tire of the effort, to abandon the work. It is difficult to work toward a goal, day after day, with no progress in sight - to struggle for something that never seems to get any closer. When the end result isn't clear, it's hard to maintain our efforts.

The writer of the Psalm knew that situation, the loss of hope, the feeling that there was no end to the task. But he also knew something else. He knew that his hope could be renewed and his joy re-ignited. He knew that God could restore his soul and lift his spirit. So he went to God and asked for the joy and sustenance he needed. May we do likewise.

Prayer:

Lord, we want to live lives that glorify You, lives that give witness to Your grace and Your power to change hearts. We want to be Your instruments of peace and justice, giving to the world what You have given to us. But it's hard, Lord. The world doesn't want to listen, doesn't want to know You. We get frustrated and we feel like giving up. So we come to You, as the psalmist did, and ask for what we need...Restore to us the joy of Your salvation and grant us willing spirits, to sustain us. Amen.



Day 5, May 15

Galatians 3:14

"He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."

Hebrews 11:1

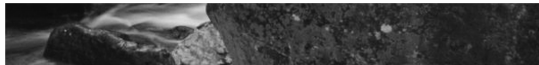
"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Should living by faith determine my feelings, or should feelings determine my faith? Both have side effects. When feelings determine faith, faith is on shaky ground. Feelings are of this world, and Satan is quite adept at manipulating them for his benefit so they will say to me, "I do not feel saved; I am sinful, dark, weak, poor and sad."

However, the Christian life is based upon faith in my relationship with God and His promise that through His grace I will be saved - that, in Christ, I am holy, strong, rich, joyful and walk in the light of His love. Because faith is not based on feelings, true happiness comes from a daily choice to "...walk by faith and not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7) according to God's will.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, Give me strength today to live by faith in Your word and not in my feelings that may betray me. I thank you for your saving grace and that whosoever would call upon Your name would also be saved. Help me to have faith and patience that the plans for our new church campus will come to fruition in Your time. Help me to see that all the challenges we face as a church are opportunities for You to work miracles within our lives and the lives of others. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.



Day 6, May 16

Proverbs 3:5 & 6

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

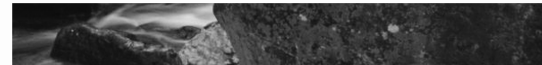
Giving your life to Christ means that you give up having the final say about what you do, what you say, whom you hang around with, how you spend your time and your money. It means that every aspect of your life is now under new management. Your preferences are gone, His prevail. Your actions, your thoughts, and your will are to be conformed to His. You have to give up control.

That's one of the hardest things for us to do. Our culture, our history, and our natural inclinations tell us to take charge, to stand up for our rights, be strong. When we do that, we win, right?

But Jesus says to follow His lead, to acknowledge our frailty, to let Him take charge. And when we do that, we really win.

Prayer:

Lord, we want to follow, we truly do. We want to walk with You into that future which You have made ready for us. But we are so limited in our understanding. We make so many mistakes as we try to figure out what You would have us do. Please make our path crystal clear, Lord. Help us to hold on to Your hand, and walk safely and joyfully at Your side. Amen.



Day 7, May 17

Matthew 26:42

"My father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

When we read about Jesus, praying on the night He is to be betrayed, we sense our Savior seeking God's guidance and will. He didn't want to go through the cruelty that He knew awaited Him. But He was willing to accept God's purpose, even in suffering.

He struggled with what His human body would go through and we see him going to His Father with tears of blood. Our Savior experienced all the sin of the world so that the world may know that it was the will of our Heavenly Father that His Son be sacrificed for all.

Prayer:

My Savior, you sacrificed everything for me because you loved me. May I remember this sacrifice and love so that I may share the good news of our risen Savior. Amen.



Day 8, May 18

2- God - He is worthy of Worship & Praise □

Psalm 145:3

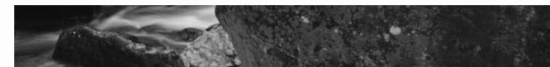
"Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised: His greatness is unsearchable."

I have been trying to work out for the last few weeks (realizing that I'm not in my 20's anymore). I've chosen to follow a running plan that will have me running nine miles a week by the end of eight weeks. One thing that has really helped is that, when I come home after running, my son, Joel, runs up to me and says, "Yay, Daddy!" Now, I understand that Jacki taught him to say that, but it warms my heart to see him throw his arms up and tell me how awesome it is to see me.

When I think about Joel's encouragement to me, I think about the way I should praise God. I need to look at God the same way that Joel looks at me. He's not quite two years old and he thinks that I'm the most awesome guy in the world. I need to tell God every day that He is incredible and He is the One that I love. To borrow a quote from my son, I need to look up to the skies and say "Yay, God!" He is truly worthy of our praise.

Prayer:

God, thank you for loving me so much that you sent Jesus to die for my sins. I praise you with all that I am and I desire to serve you every day of my life. Help me to be growing closer to you every day. In Jesus' name, amen.



Day 9, May 19

Psalm 33:1-3

"Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him. Praise the Lord with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully and shout for joy."

As believers, it is right and good for us to praise Him! He is the source of our salvation, the source of both our rescue from death and the gift of new life. Life forever! He deserves our praise, our best praise! We are forgiven, free to sing anew without hesitation or concern for the thoughts of others. We can praise Him now with our best, with skill, with excellence in all we do. Shout His praises with great joy as He shines the bright light of salvation on the path to glory for all who believe in Him.

Prayer:

Dear Father, through your Son, we have everything that we will ever need or want. It is so right to give You praise! Praise you, Lord! Thank you, God! You are so good, so perfect, so loving. Our hearts sing with joy, shout with praises and give You glory for Your perfect love for us.



Day 10, May 20

2 Corinthians 9:11

"You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."

You have been blessed by God. If you doubt this, just consider the fact that, because you live in the United States, you are wealthier than about 90% of the world. Even if you are struggling to pay bills, looking for a job, or seeking to find a significant other for a long-term relationship the very independence to do so is a blessing.

The wealth that we have is not measured by the house we live in, the car we drive, or how much money we have in the bank. The text promises that we will have something to give to someone else.

Make a short mental list of all of the things that you have. Forget for a moment where your life may lack something. The voids don't help us or anyone else worship God.

Now, of the items on your list of possessions, what is there that you can share or give to another? The reason God gives us anything is so that He might be glorified in our lives in the first place. When we practice generosity to bless others, God ends up being praised.

God makes us rich in the things that matter. He may not give us everything we want, but God will give us everything we need to be able to be generous and give to others.

Prayer:

God, help me to be content with what I have. Everything I have has come from You. You have given me (*list some of the things God has poured into your life*). These are in my life so I can worship You by sharing them with others. Thank You for giving me the opportunity to be generous. Amen!



Day 11, May 21

Ephesians 1:7

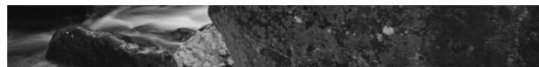
"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding."

When I was a kid back in the 50's, my mom collected "green stamps" every time she went to the grocery store. My brother and sisters and I would then have the job of licking these sheets of stamps and pasting them into the blank pages of a little booklet, about the size of a paperback book. After several booklets were filled up, we'd all pile into the Pontiac and Mom would drive to the Redemption Center, where these otherwise worthless booklets would be traded in for treasures like a new badminton set, a toaster, or maybe a couple folding lawn chairs.

So when Paul tells us in this passage that we have "redemption" in Jesus, I often think back to those trips to the "redemption center" of my childhood. While Mom redeemed otherwise worthless stamp booklets for gifts for her family, Jesus provides Redemption that is so much more precious. Because of our sins we were without hope, separated from God. But because of His grace, God sent His only Son to die for us, to redeem us from lives that would have ended in eternal punishment. My siblings and I were delighted to walk out of the redemption center with a new croquet set that might last a summer or two. When we are baptized into Christ we enter into a new life, an intimate relationship with him that will last eternally. Surely our God is worthy of our love and our praise.

Prayer:

Father, Let me always remember the great and gracious gift that You have given to me, the redemption of my soul through the sacrificial death of Your precious Son. Let me praise You for the way You are working in my life, and for Your continuing to offer redemption to those whose lives lack meaning, or joy, or hope. As Deer Creek steps out in faith to be used by You, I pray Father that You guide our course, that You lead us in our decisions, and that this congregation of believers will be fully used by You to bring the good news of redemption through Jesus to so many who need to know Your Son. Amen.



Day 12, May 22

Deuteronomy 4:39

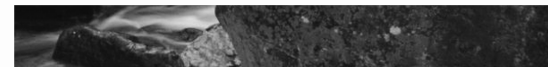
"Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other In the course of our everyday living, we all too often forget that the Lord is God of all; heaven above and the earth below. We go about our daily tasks with sometimes little or no acknowledgement of His presence and authority in our lives. This leaves us open to falling prey to intentional sin."

We place material things and earthly relationships at the forefront of our thoughts and they temporarily take the place of God in our lives. Even some of the most devout Christians fall prey to moments of selfish thought. Selfishness leads to sinfulness.

We can avoid the misery that is the direct result of intentional sin, by keeping our focus on Who He is and on His continued presence in our lives.

Prayer:

Lord, I ask that You fill my thoughts each day. Help me to see You in my home, my job, and my relationships with others. Let me sense the power of Your majesty and the splendor of Your love each day as I relate to people and look to meet my own needs. Father, grant me an awareness of You from the moment I open my eyes in the morning until I close them again at night. In the name of Jesus, amen.



Day 13, May 23

3- Our Community - Our Trust and Faith in God's Providence

Psalm 24:1

"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;"

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

"You are not your own; you were bought at a price."

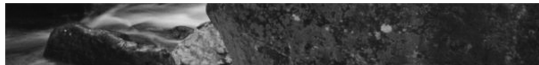
When two children want the same object, you will often hear both of them say, "Let go! This is mine." Some of us grow up and continue to play that game. We want more time or money for the time we invest. ("This is mine - I deserve it.") We want more from a relationship. ("You owe me!")

Can you imagine how our possessiveness is perceived by God? He is watching from Heaven and wants to remind us, "Let go! That is mine." Everything in the world is the Lord's. We are simply managers of all we have.

The interesting thing is, we do not even own ourselves. God bought us through the blood of Jesus Christ on the cross. We are His. How does God want you, His son or daughter, to live? Where does God want you to go? What does God want you to say? He paid for you. You are His.

Prayer:

God and Father, I acknowledge that nothing I have is my own. Everything is yours. God, I also commit my life to you. It is Yours, also. Order my steps this day. Help me to do and say only that which is pleasing to you. Amen!



Day 14, May 24

Psalm 39:4-7

"Show me, O Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath. Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it. But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you."

When we are asked to help a friend with something, we might respond, "if I have the time." Our time is short and limited. The truth is that we either make time for what we consider important, or we never plan on how to spend our time. The result can be that urgent matters replace the higher priorities in our lives.

As we consider how brief our life is, we need to plan when we will give ourselves to the most important matters. Busyness is not always holiness. Gaining wealth, only to die and leave it in the hands of others, is not stewardship. There are many pursuits in life that will leave us empty when our days come to an abrupt halt.

Let's focus today on pursuing God. Let the rewards of this life pass through us as a conduit of blessing of others. Our efforts will be rewarded when our hope is in Him!

Prayer:

God, teach us to manage our days. Tomorrow is not guaranteed. Help me to give my life to eternal matters. Use my job and my resources for Your glory. All that I possess is Yours and at Your disposal. As I have freely received, let me freely give. My hope and trust are not in my holdings, but in You, Lord, who holds me in Your hand. Amen.



Day 15, May 25

Numbers 13:31-33

"But the men who had gone up with him said, 'We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are.' And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, 'The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.'"

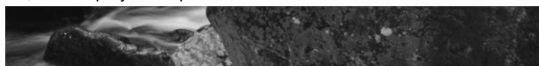
When Joshua and Caleb returned from their explorations of the land of Canaan, they eagerly and enthusiastically urged the Israelites to trust God's promise and to enter and occupy the land He had provided for them. But others doubted, forgetting or ignoring God's miraculous provision through which they had escaped slavery in Egypt and journeyed through the desert. Instead, looking at the challenges ahead, they considered themselves to be "grasshopper," hopelessly ill-equipped and outmanned. Because they were trusting themselves rather than relying on God's strength, they retreated. The remaining years of their lives were spent wandering in the desert until the whole generation of doubters had passed.

As we at Deer Creek look to the challenges ahead of us, let us not allow discouragement and doubt to lead us to view ourselves, as did those contemporaries of Joshua and Caleb, as "grasshoppers." Yes, the challenges are real—selling our building, securing the future of the Deer Creek School, relocating to temporary quarters, raising the money needed, planning and completing the construction of our new building, and doing all of this in a uncertain economy. But these challenges are not an obstacle to God.

After 40 years of futile wandering, the Israelites did cross the Jordan. The hostile nations were still there. The battles still had to be fought. But, now trusting in God, His people were victorious, and God's promises were fulfilled. And God will be faithful to us now, as we trust in Him rather than in ourselves.

Prayer:

God, without You we can do nothing. As we trust in Your strength, You will be faithful and keep Your promises. We desire, as a congregation of believers, to be used by You to bring others in our community into a saving and intimate relationship with You. Help us to faithfully cross our Jordan, relying on You to bring the victory. We thank You for Your son, who has won the great victory over death for us, and we pray in His precious name. Amen.



Day 16, May 26

Hebrews 12:1-3

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

In these verses, the writer of the book of *Hebrews* gives us two important ideas to help us in our Christian walk. As independent and self-sufficient as I try to be, I admit that it really is motivating when others offer me a word of encouragement, particularly when that support comes from those who have already worked faithfully in the field in which I am now laboring. When we remember that others have already faced challenges similar to our own, or even greater, and have faithfully served and persevered, then we are strengthened to carry on, as the writer puts it, in the race marked out for us.

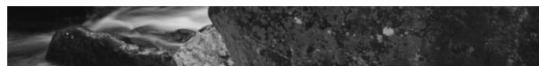
Who are the people in the great cloud of witnesses encouraging you today? In *Hebrews*, the writer reminds us of the ancient heroes of our faith, heroes who were obedient and unwavering, even unto death. For many, family or friends had a role in bringing us along in our faith, and their words and prayers are still encouraging us.

Certainly all of us who are part of the Deer Creek family can look into the crowd of witnesses and find faces of those from this body of believers, both past and present, who have mentored and encouraged us as we ran our own race of faith.

Finally, we must set our eyes on the goal of our race of faith - Jesus. When I used to run distances for exercise, I would always envision the end of the run, the bush or fence or intersection that said, "you're finished." The writer forcefully reminds us that we must focus sharply on Jesus to avoid going off course. Let us keep our eyes on Jesus, remembering his great gift to us, and let us faithfully serve Him so that those who follow will count us among the "great cloud of witnesses" as they, in turn, run the race God sets out for them.

Prayer:

Our Father, I thank You for those who have had a part in bringing me to know You and love You and trust You. Thank You for reminding me to keep focusing on Your Son, serving and honoring Him with my life, in gratitude for His great and sacrificial gift for me. Help me, Father, to run my own race faithfully and joyfully, and allow me to do so in such a way that others will take encouragement from me, as I have from others. And may Jesus have all the glory and honor. Amen.



Day 17, May 27

Mathew 7:34

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

When I was a young boy of eight, I had this terrible fear of going to Sunday school. I remember hiding from my father on Easter morning in order to avoid going to church. That morning I made my escape, leaving the house slightly before everyone got into the car, and proceeding to my safe harbor - behind the neighbor's garbage cans!

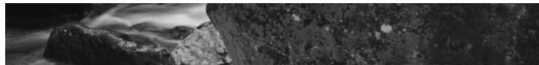
As my parents gathered the family they noticed that I was missing. They called and went back into the house for me, but I was nowhere to be found. The search continued outside and my brother and sisters joined in. As I watched the family scouring the neighborhood, time seemed to stop. I became more nervous about being found and about how upset my father would be.

Well, it did not take long for my older brother to yell out "I found the little squirt" and the army of our household was upon me. To say the least, father was upset and punishment was in order. I can assure you I never hid from him again.

Do you hide from our Heavenly Father? Maybe because of things you have done, or fear, or lack of trust? Jesus tells us not to worry about tomorrow and that we are to trust in God.

Prayer:

Oh my Lord, may I seek You and feel Your strength when things are not certain and my fears overwhelm me. Amen.



Day 18, May 28

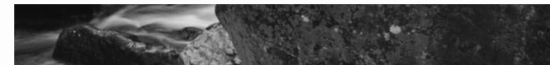
Proverbs 16:3

"Commit to the Lord whatever you do and your plans will succeed."

Whatever we do will succeed if it is committed to the Lord? That's what it says! What is on your agenda today that you need to give to the Lord? What will your family face this week that needs to be committed to the Lord? What will be the projects and tasks that you will have to handle at work that need to be committed to the Lord? What is the vision to which God is calling Deer Creek that must be committed to the Lord?

Prayer:

God, Your knowledge of success for us is perfect. You are perfect. Your allowing us to succeed in the things that we commit to You is fantastic. God, we acknowledge that our understanding is finite and You are infinite. Only You know how to have us succeed with what is best for us. And with trust we know that You will provide all that we need, all the resources we need as men and women that love You, as a church seeking to tell others about You, and as a people seeking to be with You in eternity. Praise You, Father! Praise You, Lord! Thank You for encouragement. We believe that blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him (Jeremiah 17:7). Amen.



Day 19, May 29

4- Our Community -

Our spirit of love and unity as we move forward

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Jeremiah 29:11-13

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

A few years ago I listened to a pastor say, with the best of intentions, that the congregation should "be about the business of building the church of your dreams!"

I know what he meant. He simply wanted to inspire his flock to support their church. But what he said was wrong. It's never been about building the church of our dreams – it's always been about building the church of God's dreams. Our own preferences don't even enter into the equation. It's His church, not ours. Our only task is to be faithful and follow the guidance He gives us.

Prayer:

Dear God, you have blessed our church with love and unity. This we do not take for granted. Your Word helps us to know Your heart. We take great joy in Your desire to prosper us, to give us hope and a future just as You did to those in exile in the days of old. Help us to seek You with all of our heart, to know You. Listen to our seeking You Lord, we pray. Keep us as one in You, move us forward in the spirit of love and unity. Prosper Your church for Your purposes, Lord. We love You. Amen



Day 20, May 30

Romans 15:5,6

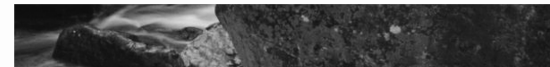
"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

One of the oldest maxims of war is "divide and conquer." Victory is never achieved by those who are fighting amongst themselves. Satan knows this. He is never more pleased than when he can turn discussions into arguments, preferences into divisions, misunderstandings into conflicts.

But we who are one in Christ must be ever on guard against our enemy. We must deny him the foothold he desires. When we place the needs of the Kingdom above our own needs, when we work together in unity of purpose and in Christian love for one another, we become truly the body of Christ, and the gates of Hell cannot stand against us.

Prayer:

Lord, we sometimes get sidetracked in our walk with You. We get distracted by things that aren't really important. And we focus on the superficial ways in which we differ, forgetting the fundamental ways in which we are the same. Help us, Lord, to be truly one in You, to conform our wills to Yours, and walk in the light of Your grace. Amen.



Day 21, May 31

Ephesians 3:20

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us."

"So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (1 Corinthians 12:27). We of the Deer Creek Christian Church are one body, a community, under the Lordship of Christ (having Christ in the control tower). We learn from Paul that our desires should be limited only to that which we believe God wants us to have, and that which God wants us to achieve.

We can be content in knowing that God wants to stretch us to achieve for His glory. Christ gave each of us a goal: "Therefore go and make disciples..." (Matthew 28:19). Setting goals for the Christian is simply planned, organized stretching, under Christ's Lordship. Our challenge is to deal with the fear of being stretched beyond our imagination and to rely on His power within us. We must persevere in completing the goals we have set in His name, which means stopping, not because we are tired, but because the task has been accomplished.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, help us as one body to overcome our doubts and fears of moving forward with earthly plans of building a new church in a new location so as to accomplish Your heavenly goal of reaching those who are lost. Help us to understand that we can do all things under the Lordship of Christ, and to feel a total commitment of all that we have to persevere in carrying out Your work. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.



Day 22, June 1

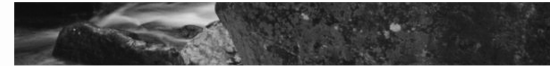
Psalms 133:1

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!"

Unity doesn't flourish in churches as it should. People disagree over unimportant issues and cause division within the body. Unity is vital because the church can be viewed as a positive example to the world around us. Unity causes the body to move and function as one, with purpose and commitment as we reach out to the community. Unity revitalizes ministry by drawing in new servants that reinforce the ministries we have in place. Living in unity doesn't mean that we agree on everything, but it does mean that we agree on our purpose here on earth.

Prayer:

Father, Give me the ability to come together with my brothers and sisters so that we may be an example of your love to the world around us. Help me and Deer Creek Church function as one in you. Give us the desire to move together as one, demonstrating Your attitude towards the world around us. Give us a united heart for Your will here on earth. In Jesus' Name, amen.



Day 23, June 2

John 17:20-21

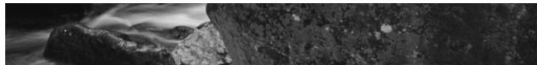
"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

I ran track in high school. One of the events that I competed in was the 4x100 meter relay. At one meet, we were winning the race before two of my teammates dropped the baton. It fell out of our lane and we were disqualified. After that, our coach made us practice the baton handoff over and over to where I was sick of it. We never dropped the baton again that entire year because we learned to work together.

If we don't work together as the church, we will fail at fulfilling our purpose here on the earth. Our responsibility is to love one another and show the world that we are unified under the cross of Christ. The church is a beautifully broken collection of people from differing backgrounds who unite under a single cause and a singular purpose. Let's remember that as we look to the future of Deer Creek Christian Church.

Prayer:

Lord, we ask that You help us to love those around us. Help us to look past our conflicts with our brothers and sisters in Christ and focus on being united. Thank You for Your Son, Jesus. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Day 24, June 3

5- Our Purpose - to produce mature disciples of Jesus Christ ☐

Philippians 3:8-9

"I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him..."

Are we ready to make this our story? Paul did! Everything we have or hold as rubbish ... compared to knowing Christ?

Knowing Christ is greater than all of our failures!

Knowing Christ is greater than all of our successes!

Knowing Christ is greater than knowing any other person!

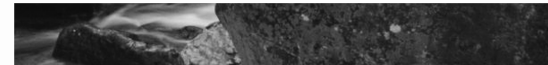
Knowing Christ is greater than being known by everyone!

Knowing Christ is greater than all the wealth in the world!

Knowing Christ is all that matters when this world is gone!

Prayer:

Father our culture is counter to Yours. Our economy is the opposite of Yours. Our accounting system is different than Yours. Where we live says grab for all that we can. Our economy fosters hoarding, building wealth, and keeping what we get for ourselves. Your accounting says give more and we will have more. What does this mean? Paul refers to the surpassing greatness of knowing You. Help us to know You, to give over to You those things that You allow us to use. When You have our heart God, when You *really* have our heart...then You will be able to work with us. Strengthen us, Lord, to be Yours in spirit and action. In Your word, we *have heard the truth*, give us courage as believers growing to love You more....to *now live the truth*. In Jesus' name, amen.



Day 25, June 4

John 15:5

"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."

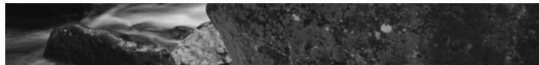
I have a wonderful TV set. It brings news from around the world, allows me to see events that take place thousands of miles away, keeps me informed and entertained. But only if it's plugged in. Without electricity it is nothing more than a giant paperweight. It just takes up space. It has great potential and great capability, but until it is connected to its power source, it serves no purpose.

I am the same. Unless I am "plugged in" to my spiritual power source, Jesus Christ, I am useless.

As a church, let us always remember that, on our own, we can do nothing. We may desire to make great strides for the Kingdom, to reach the lost, to witness for our Lord. But that can only happen when we make our connection to Him our first priority. Otherwise we make great strides toward nothing – we reach the lost and find we have nothing to give them.

Prayer:

Lord, remind us at every step that when we trust to our own understanding, rely on our own strength, and follow our own wisdom, we fail. And also remind us that when we trust and obey, seeking Your path, striving to be faithful rather than successful, then Your Kingdom advances and we fulfill our purpose. Amen.



Day 26, June 5

John 15:16

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last."

When I sign a contract with my employer, I agree to give him my time, my talent, and my training, and he agrees to give me my salary. And, from that point forward, a part of my life is no longer strictly mine – I do the will of someone else.

In the summer of 1999, I entered into another kind of contract - with God. I agreed to turn over to Him my sin, my guilt, and the death and condemnation that I deserved. In return He gave me forgiveness, unmerited love, and eternal joy. I think I came out way ahead on that one.

But, by accepting that wonderful covenant, I accept the fact that I am bought and paid for. My life is no longer my own. And I am required, not requested, to give my time, talent, and effort to the work of my new boss, Jesus Christ. And there is much work to be done.

Prayer:

Lord, all I am I lay at Your feet. Grant me the wisdom to see Your will for my life, and the courage to pursue it. Amen.



Day 27, June 6

Isaiah 6:8

*"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?'
And I said, 'Here am I. Send me.'"*

Sometimes it's just that simple.

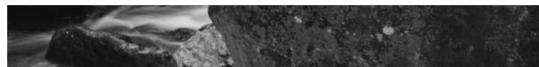
God points out a need, and you take care of it. Not the government, not the church deacons, not the Pastor – You.

No committee, no planning sessions, no budget projections. Just one person doing what they are led to do.

I believe that when we pray for some need to be met, for God to handle some situation, He often answers by saying, "Well, what have you got planned for this afternoon?"

Prayer:

Lord, I am convinced that You will equip me for any task You set me. I trust that, even though I may be untrained and inexperienced, You can use me for Your purposes. And that, in whatever You may have me do, if I follow Your leading, I work to Your glory. I wish to be a tool in Your hand, Lord. Keep me sharp and close by. Amen.



Day 28, June 7

Matthew 28:19 & 20

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

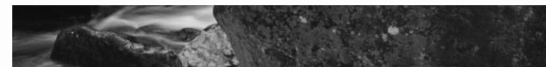
As a member of Deer Creek Christian Church, I may ask, "Why is it my purpose, mission or goal to go out and talk to others about God, Jesus, and joining a body of Christ. Isn't that a bit brazen, and intrusive into someone else's business? Isn't it enough that I tithe and donate my time and efforts to my church?" The answer is clearly, "No, it is not!"

First of all, "the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" by taking away our sins. "No one who is born of God will continue to sin because God's seed remains in him" (1 John 3:8 & 9). But what of those who do not know Him and thus continue to sin? They have no hope for salvation unless someone, a Christian, shows them the way.

This is where you and I come in. "He who does what is right is righteous, just as He is righteous. Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother" (1 John 3:7 & 10). What better way to show love for our neighbor than, through actions and in truth, introduce him to God and His church. As important as it is to tithe and work in various church ministries, it is our Commission from God to lead the lost to baptism and knowledge of the ways of our Lord.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, help us to move beyond our fears and wet the tongues of those who thirst for You. Help us to complete Your circle of love by loving our neighbors enough to bring them into the fold of Your love where their sins will be erased, and they in turn will love You. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.



Day 29, June 8

Romans 12:2

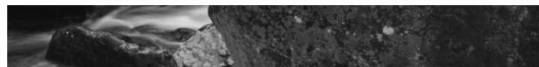
"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will."

One of my favorite cartoons from childhood is "The Transformers." This show fascinated me because each of the robots could change into something else (a truck, car, airplane, tank, etc.) I loved watching Optimus Prime lead the Autobots against Megatron and the Decepticons. The Transformers toys sometimes had very complex instructions for how to change from one form to the other, but I would diligently read the directions so I could memorize it. It was often amazing to see how one toy could have two totally different forms.

How much fun is it to watch someone's life be completely transformed by the saving blood of Christ? I love seeing the lives of people who have given themselves to Christ and watching them change into the person that God created them to be. Our purpose at Deer Creek Christian Church is to produce mature disciples of Jesus Christ. Let's strive together to let God transform our thoughts and actions to line up with his plans for us.

Prayer:

Father, transform me. Change me from who I am now into who You desire me to be. Rid me of all sin and bring me a new life. I love you! In Jesus' name, Amen.



Day 30, June 9

Luke 14:27

"And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

True Christianity is hard. A life given over to Jesus is a cross to bear. It requires effort and concentration, work and sacrifice.

In many parts of the world following Christ puts one's life in danger. There are places in which evangelism is a capital crime. And it seems that the Christians in those parts of the world nearly burst with faith. Their lives are filled to overflowing with the Spirit. The cross they bear, and the grace by which they bear it, is obvious to all.

In America, we live in a society in which it is pretty easy to be a Christian. No one is tossed into jail for reading a Bible. No one gets fired from their job for attending a church service. Oh, the media might snicker at us, and our politicians may patronize us, but we generally pay no real price for our faith. So, it is tempting to drift along with an "easy" faith, a faith that makes no demands, requires no sacrifices, causes us no distress.

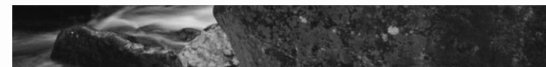
Our Enemy is subtle. He knows that a faith that never faces difficulty never grows strong. He knows that a faith that never requires anything from us can never give anything to us.

So our cross is of a different kind, not as obvious, but no less heavy.

We must constantly resist the urge to stay comfortable, constantly be on guard against taking the easy road, constantly seek to reach a world that, though it may not persecute us, also doesn't take us seriously. That task is not as clear-cut as that faced by some, but it is no less a burden. And carrying it requires no less of God's grace.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to realize that it must be our goal to radically change this world, not just live at peace with it. It must be our goal to lead lives that are inspirational, not merely comfortable. It must be our goal to inform this lost world that "good enough" isn't good enough – that there is something better. Amen.



Day 31, June 10

Romans 1:16

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes..."

At times we forget what God has called us to do for Him. Sometimes we don't understand how God wants to use us to fulfill His purpose in reaching the whole world for Christ. I love to look at the new mosaic pictures in the school hallway. Have you seen them? They use hundreds of tiny individual pictures to create one larger picture.

This is what the body of Christ is like. As each of us understands that it is our purpose to share Christ with others, the overall picture becomes clearer. Some of us might say, "I can't talk about my faith to others. I don't know what to say." If this is your fear, remember that someone once said actions speak louder than words.

So look for opportunities to show your faith to others in unexpected ways. Don't look for what you can get out of sharing Christ. Look for what God can get out of your sharing. You are one picture in a huge masterpiece that God is painting. Go and fulfill the purpose God has given you.

Prayer:

Father, give me the courage and the opportunity to speak for you today. Help me to proudly carry the message of Jesus that has been sent to everyone. Let the power of the gospel change me and may the change be obvious to those around me. In Jesus' name, amen.



Day 32, June 11

6- Our Purpose - to love, serve and give with generosity and joy

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Colossians 3:23

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men."

Wow! Here it is. WHATEVER? Yep! Whatever...that means as a friend, an employee, a spouse, an elder, or deacon, or usher, or chair stacker. That means that we should give and serve with all of our heart ..

Prayer:

Father, Your word seems sparkling clear on how we should "do" things as if working for You. Some might ask why. Later in the very next verse we learn why. And it is for our benefit. Doesn't that figure? You figured it for our benefit. Your word says that "since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward."

That should be good enough for us Lord, an inheritance from heaven for working as if working for the Lord. It is the Lord Jesus Christ that we are serving. Praise You, Father, for You deserve this honor in our lives, in our generosity, in our witness for You. We love You, Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen!



Day 33, June 12

Ephesians 4:10-13

"It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

A world-class musician once remarked, "If I skip practice one day, I can tell the difference. Two days, and the orchestra can tell the difference. Three days and everyone can tell the difference." He knew that being his best required a constant struggle to improve.

We would not think very highly of one who declared himself a professional musician and then ceased to practice. Or of one who, having been hired into a company, never bothered to learn how to do his job. That's because we realize that a professional has an obligation to strive for improvement.

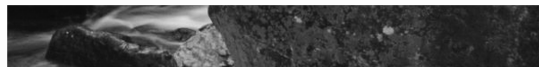
What about our "jobs" as disciples? Do we imagine that accepting Christ as our Savior excuses us from further growth? Jesus said, "If you love me, keep My commandments." His commandments included discipling others, teaching, witnessing, explaining - activities that require a maturity of faith that we each grow into.

We deepen our relationship with the Lord in the same way we deepen a relationship with anyone else. We need to spend time with Him, find out more about Him, work side by side with Him, read His word.

Accepting the Lord's grace is the first step. But it isn't the last.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to understand that our life with You is a life of growth and discovery, a process of becoming more like You every day, a joyful journey in which we change into the creations intended by our Creator. A journey that can end with the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master." Amen.



Day 34, June 13

Hebrews 10:23-24

"Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

It was a warm day and the hotel swimming pool was empty, not even a lifeguard to bother us. My mom and dad were seated at a table near us busily talking about the day's events. As my sisters and I played a game of keep-away in the shallow end, I noticed a young boy had entered the pool area by himself. Who did he think he was intruding on "our" pool area? But, then, all of sudden he jumped into the deep end of the pool. "Why would he do that?" I thought to myself, "Is he that good of a swimmer? I need to get back to the game of keep away, but wow, that little guy can sure stay under water a long time. He is just showing off!"

No, something was not right. I proceeded up the pool ladder and walked down to the deep end of the pool and my heart pounded as I looked down into the eight feet of water and saw a dark, motionless image at the bottom. I could swim, but was scared. So I jumped into the water, and held on to the side of the pool as I reached as far as I could - but only felt water.

I yelled to my father and he came to assist me. He told me that he would hold on to the side of pool and my foot and this would allow me to reach the boy. I was scared, but I knew that my dad would not let me go, so I quickly began the decent and could feel my father pushing on my foot. I was able to grab hold of a small hand and my father pulled us both out of the water. By this time my mom had run to the hotel to get the boy's parents. His mom was a nurse and administered CPR to her son and he survived. I remember how glad I was that I did not turn my back on him when he needed me.

So many times we are not sure why God has placed us in situations. Someone once told me that these are "divine appointments" in which we have a chance to love and serve others with our Savior at our side.

Prayer:

My Jesus, You have called me to love and serve others. I pray, my Lord, that I do not turn away from Your calling, but rejoice in serving Your lost sheep with You.



Day 35, June 14

Luke 12:37

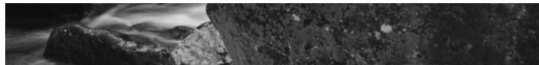
"It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them."

In the passage above, Jesus is talking about our basic approach to life. Are we anxious and lacking trust in God, constantly trying to gain control of things that often are beyond our control? Or do we trust God to provide and concentrate on honoring relationships by pursuing righteousness and serving others with our resources?

Two things tell us the answers to these questions: our heart and our pocketbook. Our heart can tell us if we are anxious, and our pocketbook can tell us if we are generous. Both tell us if we are trusting God. Be faithful stewards.

Prayer:

Father, give me the ability to trust You in all things. Help me live the life of love and service that Jesus modeled here on earth. Open my eyes so that I can see people as You see them. Open my heart so I might be compassionate and remove from me all of my self-centeredness so that my purpose and Yours become one and the same. In Jesus' Name, amen.



Day 36, June 15

1 Chronicles 28:9-10

"And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him he will reject you forever. Consider now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a temple as a sanctuary. Be strong and do the work."

These are the words of King David, as he charged his son Solomon with the duty to build the temple of the Lord. David had wanted to complete the temple himself, but God chose Solomon for that work. David had completed plans, secured materials, and directed the leaders and people to support the work, but it would now be left to Solomon to carry on and complete the task. And it would be a daunting task indeed that Solomon would undertake, requiring four years of further preparation, followed by seven years of construction before the temple was finished.

Aren't we at Deer Creek in a place similar to Solomon now? Much has been done before, with faithful Christians growing and generously supporting the ministries of Deer Creek Christian Church and School for 45 years. Now we are in a time like that facing Solomon, with new challenges ahead. We seek to honor God and continue to position our church to be used in growing His kingdom. We pray for God's help and wisdom in securing the future of the Deer Creek School, in helping to bring us a purchaser for our current building, and in guiding us through the period of transition and building that will follow. Those words of David fully apply to us today, charging us to acknowledge God, to serve him wholeheartedly, and to "be strong and do the work." David had led so far, and now it was time for Solomon to step up and carry out the work that God had in store for him. And he did so faithfully. Let's pray fervently that we may do the same.

Prayer:

God, thank you for bringing us into Your kingdom, and thank You for the faithful service of the "Davids" who have served You so eagerly and generously during the years here at Deer Creek. Help us, as David challenged Solomon, to be strong and do the work. We know that we are but instruments in Your hand. Help us to be devoted and willing instruments, and lead us as we face the challenges You have placed before our congregation today. We thank You for Your Son who gave His all for us. Amen.



Day 37, June 16

Romans 10:14

"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"

It has been said that the church of Christ is only one generation away from extinction. If one generation should fail to pass on the good news, it could disappear. Now, God isn't going to let that happen, but He will use us to prevent it. We are the agents of His plan. The world is perishing and we know how to stop it. We have the cure for all the ills of the earth - Jesus Christ!

If we had just read a terrific book, we'd tell all our friends about it. If we had just found a great restaurant, we'd tell all our friends about it.

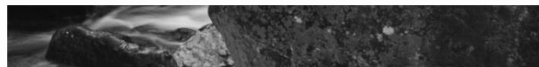
But we've just found the source of eternal joy, and we keep that information to ourselves! How strange.

And how sad.

I don't want even one person missing out on their salvation because I was not willing to point them to Jesus.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to so live our lives as to glorify You. Help us to show Your love through our actions, to speak Your truth through our words, to show Your path through our steps. Let our lives be a beacon to those around us, an example through which they might come to know You. May we be able to say, as Paul did, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." Amen.



Day 38, June 17

Ephesians 2:8

"For it is by grace you have been saved through faith...not by works, so that no one can boast."

James 2:24

"You see that a person is justified by what he does, and not by faith alone."

Well? Which is it? Come on, Apostles, get your stories straight! What's the formula? We need to know!

Some read James to be saying:

Faith + Works = Salvation

(If you believe, and it shows in what you do, then you are saved.)

And they read Paul as saying:

Faith + Grace = Salvation

(If you believe and accept God's grace, then you are saved.)

But perhaps the two writers are just focusing on different aspects of one equation:

Faith + Grace = Salvation + Works

(If you believe and accept God's grace, then you are saved and it shows in what you do.)

Perhaps works are a result of salvation, a natural consequence of the new life Christ gives us. In fact, if being followers of Jesus doesn't make a change in the way we live, we can be sure that we aren't following closely enough.

Prayer:

Lord, Your Word says that we are to be about the work of Your kingdom, doing the tasks which You have prepared beforehand for us to do. Grant us the perception to see our tasks, the courage to undertake them, and the grace to complete them. Amen.



Day 39, June 18

Ephesians 6:7 - 8

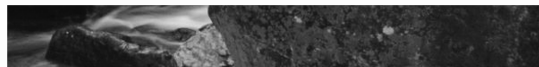
"Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does,..."

There are times when we wonder what purpose we serve in the body of Christ. We do know that God has asked us to serve one another. This can be a difficult task for us as we grow into the person Christ wants us to become.

In the church body, we seem to have a few different kinds of people. First, those who are putting in their time because that's what needs to be done, individuals who punch a kind of spiritual "time clock," but who just don't have their heart in it. Then we have those whose goal seems to be to get credit and recognition for all they do. These people have good intentions, but they get in the way of God getting the glory. And finally, there are those who live and breathe the ministry in which they serve. These people look for opportunities to serve unconcerned with recognition. May we all be such wholehearted servants, working only for the glory of God! Let's keep our attitudes and actions in check as we grow in understanding the purpose God has for us.

Prayer:

Father in Heaven, may everything I do this day - actions, words, and thoughts - please You. Let me put my best into every effort for the glory of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In His Name, amen.



Day 40, June 19

Haggai 1:4-10

"Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?' Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.' This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,' says the Lord. 'You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?' declares the Lord Almighty. 'Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops.'"

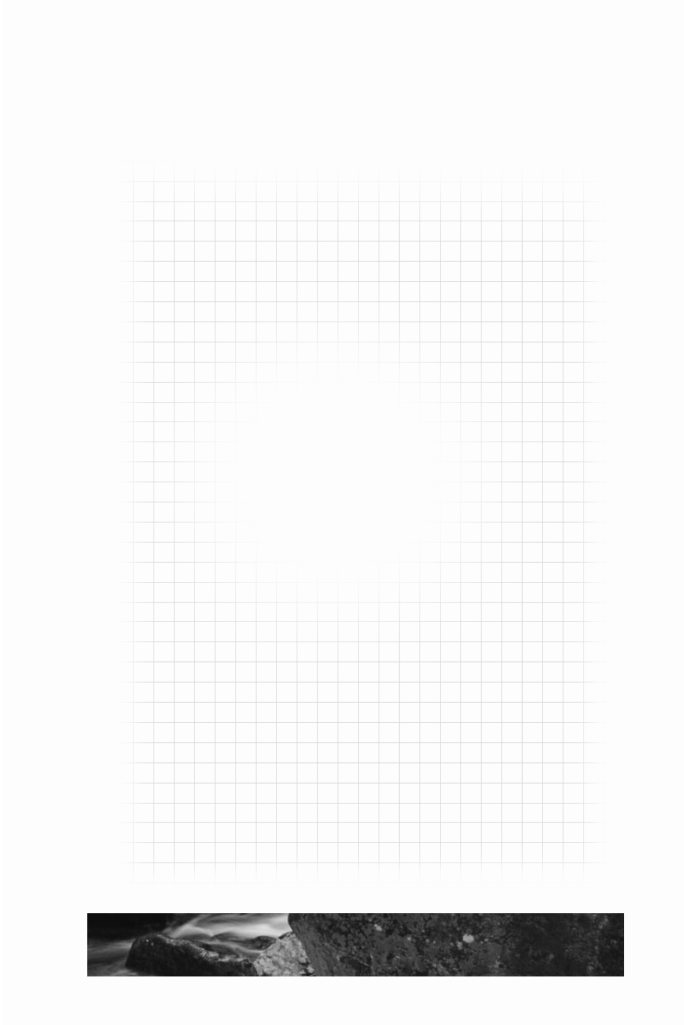
This was God's prophecy, which He spoke to Israel through the prophet Haggai. God explained to the Israelites the reason for the challenges they were facing with their crops, the central part of their economy.

As we face our challenges in this day and time, we must realize that, before we can expect America to turn to God, we must make God first in our lives. Our worship of God through participation in ministries and giving of our resources is how we put God first. Then God will work through His surrendered people to heal our land.

Prayer:

God, forgive us for putting ourselves and our wants ahead of our worship of You. We commit our lives to serve You. We seek to commit each day to You as we go about our daily agendas. We honor You on the first day of the week as we worship with our brothers and sisters in the church. We commit our resources to You and, as an act of worship, we give to advance Your Kingdom. Amen.





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