

The Important verses The Urgent

December 1

" Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord". — 1 Corinthians 15:58

amounts of unimportant things with having done something significant.

Before you read the next paragraph, please answer this three-part question: What is the single most significant thing you could begin doing regularly that would: (1) make you more effective at your work? (2) create a better atmosphere for your family? and (3) enrich your spiritual life?

Review

Moving quickly and efficiently is important only if your movement is in the direction of a worthy goal. Since you took the time to identify specific steps toward noble ends, why not take the time now to figure out how to include them in today's schedule for yourself?

Preview

Now that you have identified three specific things that would make your life better, can you defend your choice by omitting one of them from your schedule for this week?

You may have to eliminate some unimportant activities, but you will feel better. You will have started practicing discernment between the things that really matter in life and second-rate distractions.

All of us have urgent things that will be attended to today: phone calls, appointments, deadlines, interruptions, etc. But some of us will also do things we probably did not name earlier, like planning next week's big presentation or making three extra calls, telling someone "I love you" or helping children with homework, or reading the Bible and praying.

Praise God For: being my Master
Thank God For: His obedience training
Ask God's Forgiveness For: wandering thoughts
Ask God To Help: all eyes be on Him
Ask God To Supply Our Need For: disciplined minds

Innerview

The difference in people who tend to life's really important things and those who simply react to events and live the scripts others write is discernment. Or maybe you prefer to call it determining priorities.

DIGGING DEEPER AND REACHING HIGHER:

Is there something that you believe God is commanding you to do? Share your reluctance, fears or rebellion with Him and ask for His help..

It is absurdly easy to fall into the activity trap. We can think that being busy is being productive. We can equate having done huge

Journal for Digging Deeper:

Dodging Discouragement

December 2

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" — Hebrews 12:2

Preview

Suppose your dream is to be a baseball player. Imagine finally starting a game in the big leagues and striking out in your first trip to the plate. Then, in your next at-bat against a last-place team, you fly out harmlessly to right field. The manager decides to pinch hit for you the next time you are due up. To make matters worse, the player who hits for you beats out an infield single!

Do you think this start could discourage you? Would it make you doubt your ability to "play with the big boys"? Would you worry about the manager giving you another shot at proving yourself?

Innerview

Suppose your dream is to be a writer. You finish your first novel and begin submitting it to publishing houses for review. The first response you receive is a pink slip. Twenty-eight rejection letters accumulate on your desk. Is it possible you would give up your ambition to become a best-selling author?

The baseball player whose career began so unpromisingly was none other than Babe Ruth. The writer whose first book, *A Time to Kill*, was rejected by twenty-eight publishers was John Grisham. It is good neither man took his initial setbacks too seriously. Both were committed

enough to their dreams that they refused to interpret frustration as failure.

Review

And what about you? Anyone who has dreams and ambitions also face setbacks and disappointments. If the former test your creative energies, the latter test your character.

Persistence is a virtue. It turns dreams into realities and transforms failure into triumph. Many a person has surely accepted defeat when just one more try would have yielded victory.

I suspect you have a dream. If it was worth having in the first place, it is worth seeing through to the end. So whatever you do, don't give up.

Praise God For: His omniscience

Thank God For: inspiring teachers

Ask God's Forgiveness For: tuning out my teachers

Ask God To Help: all students

Ask God To Supply Our Need For: good teachers

DIGGING DEEPER AND REACHING HIGHER:

List the detractions that Satan has used in your life to create a stronghold. Write a prayer asking God to take your thoughts captive and keep you focused.

Journal for Digging Deeper:

Don't Let Failure Make A Monkey Of You

December 3

But since we belong to the day, let us be self controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and hope of salvation as a helmet." — 1 Thessalonians 5:8

Business professors Gary Hamel and C. K. Prahalad recorded an experiment using a group of monkeys. It is a vivid story of failure.

Preview

Four monkeys were placed in a room constructed with a tall pole in the center. Suspended from the top of the pole was a bunch of bananas. One of the hungry monkeys started climbing the pole to get something to eat, but just as he reached out to grab a banana, he was doused with a torrent of cold water. Squealing, he scampered down the pole and abandoned his attempt to feed himself. Each monkey made a similar attempt, and each was drenched with cold water. After making several attempts, they finally gave up.

Then researchers removed one of the monkeys from the room and replaced him with a new monkey. As the newcomer began to climb the pole, the other three grabbed him and pulled him down to the ground.

Innerview

After several attempts to climb the pole and being dragged down by the others, he finally gave up and never attempted to climb the pole again.

The researchers replaced the original monkeys, one by one, and each time a new monkey was bought in, he would be dragged down by the others before he could reach the bananas. In time, the room was filled with monkeys who had never received a cold shower. None of

them would climb the pole, but not one of them knew why!

Review

Unfortunately people who have become accustomed to failure can be similar to the monkeys. They repeat the same mistakes again and again, yet they are never quite sure why. And as a result, they continue to travel on "Failure Freeway". The old saying is true: "If you always do what you've always done, then you will always get what you've always gotten".

If you feel like one of the monkeys in the experiment, you cannot seem to achieve what you desire but you don't know why, then take a look at the pattern many failure prone people fall into and the ultimate solution.

Praise God For: His virtue

Thank God For: His kingdom within

Ask God's Forgiveness For: a poor attitude

Ask God To Help: soften hard hearts

Ask God To Supply Our Need For: loving hearts

!

DIGGING DEEPER AND REACHING HIGHER:

Is God asking you to do something today? If you're feeling that it is too difficult or beyond your reach, tell Him about it and place it in His hands.

Journal for Digging Deeper:

Choosing How To Be Remembered

December 4

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” – John 13:35

The Nobel Prizes are given in five categories (i.e., economics, chemistry, physics, medicine, and peace), but when most of us hear the term we think first of the Nobel Peace Prize. Either one is a great prize of prestige, not to mention the purchase involving an award of \$1 million.

But do you know the background to the world's best-known and most prestigious prize for advancing the cause of peace?

Preview

Alfred Nobel (1833-96) was a Swedish chemist who invented dynamite. During his lifetime, he made millions of dollars from the manufacture of high explosives. His inventions so magnified the killing power of weapons that some trace the history of modern warfare to him.

One morning in 1888, Nobel opened his newspaper only to find an article about his death! It was his brother who had died, however, and a careless editor had run the more famous Alfred's obituary. What a shock and revelation the experience proved to be! Alfred Nobel was afforded the opportunity to see himself through the eyes of his peers.

Innerview

Much to Nobel's chagrin, the article Nobel portrayed him as the Dynamite King. The article stated he would be remembered as a merchant of death, who made a fortune by making war

more destructive. His legacy to the world would be more efficient methods of killing people.

Dismayed over such a prospect, Alfred Nobel determined to do change the report. Under the conditions of his will, he left more than \$9 million to found five prizes to be distributed yearly in equal parts to those who were judged to have contributed most to helping mankind. Thus, the man who invented dynamite forever linked his name to the cause of peace.

Review

How will people remember you? As someone who loved his company and did things with his family, or vice versa? Or as a person of integrity? Or as one whose genuine faith produced the good fruit of Christian behavior?

As with Alfred Nobel, you can choose how you will be remembered.

Praise God For: His acceptance of all

Thank God For: affirmation from others

Ask God's Forgiveness For: looking down on others

Ask God To Help: social outcasts

Ask God To Supply Our Need For: love for all

DIGGING DEEPER AND REACHING HIGHER:

What adjustments can you make today to obey, thus allowing God more control in your life.

Harmed By A Trusted Friend

December 5

“Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.” –Proverbs 27:6

Yolanda Saldivar was found guilty of murdering Tejano music star Selena. On March 31, 1995, Ms. Saldivar shot and killed the 23-year-old Grammy winner as the two women argued in a hotel room.

What happened to Selena's security? Don't pop stars hire bodyguards and have layers of trusted people whose job it is to protect them from kooks and stalkers? Of course. But that's how Ms. Saldivar was able to have close access to Selena. She was an insider. She was a member of the small inner circle that had easy access to her.

Preview

Selena was killed by her friend! Saldivar had been president of her fan club. She was manager of a string of boutiques the singer owned. The prosecution argued that Saldivar had embezzled thousands of dollars from the boutiques and killed the woman who had been her patron because she was angry over being fired. And, by the way, Saldivar shot Selena in the back.

Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Who stabbed Jesus in the back? Who sold him, for 30 pieces of silver? Who had been skimming money from the joint bank account Jesus and his apostles kept? His name rings across the years as a synonym for betrayal by an insider: J-U-D-A-S !

Innerview

The truth is, only an insider can do Jesus real harm today. Madelyn Murray O'Hair can't discredit Jesus like a minister exposed for having an affair. No Satan worshiper can harm the cause of holiness in a city, like a Christian in the business world does when exposed for embezzling company funds.

Remember you are at your post this week to join God in his purpose to radiate light into dark places. You are the means Christ wants to use to bring his presence to those around you who do not know Him.

Review

Go into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God (Philippians 2:15, The Message).

Praise God For: His wisdom

Thank God For: the example of godly parents

Ask God's Forgiveness For: caving in under hardship

Ask God To Help: the aged

Ask God To Supply Our Need For: strength of character

DIGGING DEEPER AND REACHING HIGHER:

Make a list of both short-term and long-term goals. Pray over them and ask God to help you fulfill each one.

Rules For Living

December 6

“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even to them.” -Matt. 7:12

There are several different approaches people take to life.

THE IRON RULE

The Iron Rule says that one must always win, be noticed, get his way, be special, and receive a reward. This means, of course, that someone else must lose, be overlooked, feel slighted, be treated as less important, and get squashed. Iron Rule people feel good about themselves only when they're on top of the heap and don't mind having to hurt others to stay there.

Sounds terrible, doesn't it? Yet the Iron Rule is how some employers and managers treat their work force and how some church leaders treat members and volunteer workers. This rule also describes how some mates, parents, and siblings treat each other in families.

THE MARSHMALLOW RULE

The Marshmallow Rule, by contrast, tells one to see himself as a loser, never voice an opinion, always give in, regard himself as unworthy, and just make the best of things. Some have been taught this rule in the name of Christian "humility". Marshmallow people are natural matches to Iron Rule people. Iron types are eventually repulsed by Marshmallow apathy and Marshmallow types see things with

anger at Iron arrogance.

Marshmallows are eager to please and will do anything to keep the peace. They are taken advantage of at work and dumped on at church. They are complaining but angry mates and conforming but resentful children.

THE GOLDEN RULE

By contrast, Christianity proposes a world of mutual respect where people look for ways to show respect and bring benefit to all. Christianity says that everyone's opinions and feelings matter. It teaches us that shared values, shared triumphs, and shared benefits are best.

Yet most of us continue to act as though we are obligated to compete and seem to feel that we are compelled to excel someone else. What a waste of good energy? How unlike Christ's example.

So here is a different approach to guide you this week: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. It is called the Golden Rule.

Praise God For: bearing my burdens

Thank God For: openness

Ask God's Forgiveness For: worrying

Ask God To Help: single-parent families

Ask God To Supply Our Need For: open hearts

Daily Sunshine In The Son

DIGGING DEEPER AND REACHING HIGHER:

Is there anything in your life that seems too difficult for you? What action would allow you to take a leap of faith and let God show you that He can give you victory in this area?

Lord, today I thank You for:

Journal for Digging Deeper:

Thank You for these answers to prayer:

Today, Lord, I need

I pray for the needs of others, especially

Missing The Big Story

December 7

“...Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”-Isaiah 7:14

Preview

In December 1903, after a series of failed attempts, the Wright brothers were finally successful in getting their "flying machine" off the ground. Thrilled by the feat, they sent this telegraph to their sister: "We have actually flown 120 feet. Will be home for Christmas."

Katherine hurried to the editor of the local newspaper and showed him the telegram. He read it and said, "How nice. So the boys will be coming home for Christmas." His myopia toward their project caused him to miss the big story he could have broken to the world: Man has flown!

Innerview

Nearly 2,000 years ago, a star was seen in the eastern regions of ancient Babylon, Persia, and the Arabian desert. It was a new but distinct sight in the heavens. Insofar as we can tell, it was equally visible to all who looked upward.

Among the many star-gazers of that time, it must have caused quite a stir. Yet only a tiny little band of Magi packed their bags, secured gifts, and set off in the direction of Israel. People who thought the big news was that a new star had appeared missed the star's meaning: God is among us!

On December 25, tiny faces with saucer eyes will run to Christmas trees, tear away paper

and ribbon, and squeal with delight. Exhausted adults will watch with laughter, snap countless photographs, and get misty eyed as grateful tots squeeze their necks and thank them sweetly. There will be family gatherings and sumptuous meals. Then will come the analyses of what Christmas sales say about the state of the American economy.

Review

But who will tell of Bethlehem, shepherds, and the manger? Let's hear again about Mary, a virgin startled by word of a baby she will bear. Let's talk with children about history's Joseph, Gabriel, and Anna ... not merely fiction's Rudolph, Frosty, and the Grinch of Whoville. Let's teach our children to say prayers (or write letters) to thank reality's God ... not merely fantasy's Santa.

People who think this season's big story is decorations, gifts, and retail receipts miss its true meaning: God is with us! Immanuel! Hallelujah!

Praise God For: salvation

Thank God For: losing His life for me

Ask God's Forgiveness For: embracing the wrong things

Ask God To Help: the fearful let go

Ask God To Supply Our Need For: surrendered lives

DIGGING DEEPER AND REACHING HIGHER:

Tolerating Things That Drain Your Energy

December 8

"But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, it is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." -1Kings 19:4

Toleration = something we put up with that causes any level of personal distress. Essentially tolerations fall into two basic categories. First there are those things that bug us, things we can change. We can fix our car so it doesn't use all our time and spare change.

We can talk to that neighbor who mows his lawn at 5:30 a.m. Sunday Morning. The other category of toleration is those things over which we have little or no control.

Examples of this would be drivers that bust in ahead of you, or cut you off, etc. The only thing you can do now is to make a shift in your attitude. What good does it profit you to be angry over things you can't fix?

Have you thought about the things that you put up with (tolerate) in your life? We all do it to a degree. Here are ten common tolerations that can creep upon you, create stress and drain your energy.

1. Negative surroundings and people.

In some circles, it's almost a sin to expect life to be fun or spectacular. The truth is, if you want your life to be exciting and fun, you have to take action. One of the first acts in this direction is to begin eliminating from your experience those situations and people that are not contributing to the

fullness of your life. That may seem harsh, but it's really a two-way street. We share a mutual obligation to contribute our best to others and to expect their best in return.

2. Offensive entertainment.

Why do you think it is that so many tasteless television programs have such a large following? One possibility: many people's inner lives are not very interesting. It takes practice to discover the richness of your inner self--your visions, dreams, ideas and speculations. A good way to begin is to ruthlessly shut out the ceaseless distractions of media mediocrity. Many who have tried turning off the television for a week find it strangely invigorating.

3. Average performance.

The difference between average and outstanding performance is less a matter of ability than of discipline. If you want to be excellent, decide NOW that you're going to do your very best in EVERYTHING you undertake. This one decision can have immense ramifications: you'll work slower, at least initially; you'll probably stop doing many of the things you're now doing; and you'll begin to enjoy the act of doing, whether it's doing the dishes, cleaning, or writing a great novel.

Praise God For: His strengthening presence
Thank God For: earthly pleasures

Daily Sunshine In The Son

Ask God's Forgiveness For: hanging on when I should let go

Ask God To Help: prune our dead branches

Ask God To Supply Our Need For: grace to let go

Thank You for these answers to prayer:

DIGGING DEEPER AND REACHING HIGHER:

List some ways you could be a friend to others and tell them your experiences with God. If you are hesitant, ask Him to empower you by His Spirit.

Journal for Digging Deeper:

I pray for the needs of others, especially

Lord, today I thank You for:

Today, Lord, I need

Tolerating Things That Drain Your Energy (2)

December 9

"But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: ad he requested for himself that he might die; and said, it is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." -1Kings 19:4

4. Noise.

If you live in the city, you probably aren't aware of the degree to which noise is your constant companion. So the first step is to develop a sensitivity to the beauty of silence. At first, for many people, absolute silence can be scary. Try these two experiments: First, close yourself in a soundless room for fifteen minutes (just finding a room without sound can be a challenge). Notice how it feels to hear nothing! Actually, even with no sound you will notice that there are still distractions--you, your body, and your wandering thoughts. Second, take yourself out into nature where the only sounds you hear are those that are totally natural. (Yes, this may require half a day's drive, but it's worth it.)

5. Externally imposed deadlines.

How much of your life is run by deadlines imposed by others--a boss, spouse, or even your friends? Do you find yourself struggling to meet others' expectations? Externally imposed deadlines are especially draining because they run counter to our subconscious desires. Being "self-directed" means that the only deadlines in your life are those that you voluntarily accept or set for yourself. In order for this to work, you must be willing to set boundaries and be clear--as gently as possible--with others as to what those boundaries are.

6. Quantity rather than quality.

Since the first Puritan set foot on these shores, doing with less has been paired with scarcity (historically with good reason). Today, nearly four hundred years later, the reverse is true. We have too much "stuff" in our lives, and much of it is less than the best. Try experimenting with the notion of including only the "best" in your life even if, initially, the best is less. You may be surprised at what this shift in attitude can do for you.

Praise God For: being my pillar of strength

Thank God For: the support of friends

Ask God's Forgiveness For: my self-reliance

Ask God To Help: those who have been deserted

Ask God To Supply Our Need For: strong friends

DIGGING DEEPER AND REACHING HIGHER:

List areas of your life in which you suffer guilt and condemnation. Ask God to help you give each of those areas to Him-for good-so that you can be free.

Journal for Digging Deeper:

Tolerating Things That Drain Your Energy (3)

December 10

"But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, it is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." -1Kings 19:4

7. Limitation.

Are you: smart enough? good enough? Do you have enough: opportunity? money? time? space? friends? Are you tolerating limitation as a necessary part of your experience? If you want to eliminate limitation from your experience, you must begin by eliminating it from your thought.

8. Unsatisfying work.

One reason for the extensive downsizing that has taken place over the last decade, a reason not often talked about, is the willingness of too many people to accept work that is boring, dull and unchallenging. Yes, it takes effort, dedication, and a willingness to risk in order to find interesting and rewarding work, but the more than 28 million people working in home businesses are proof that it can be done. Tolerate unfulfilling work and you'll be bound by it.

9. Imprecise phrasing.

We all have our pet peeves. One of mine is the imprecision and sloppiness with which many people talk. That is peculiar, because speaking precisely does not cost money. In fact, you can learn to speak precisely by mimicking others who speak well. Many years ago, I had a mentor who was, to put it mildly, ruthless in his dedication to ensure that I became a skilled writer. I resisted his

efforts for weeks and then, at an early morning meeting to discuss a report I'd written, he finally reached me with a single statement: "Your writing is a reflection of your thinking. If your writing is sloppy, so is your thinking. He was right, and that applies to speaking as well.

10. Uncouth behavior.

From the rebellious sixties to the rapacious nineties, we have been bombarded with all manner of uncouth behavior--abusive and profane language and expressions designed to impress rather than express. We may have to accept it as an interpretation of our First Amendment rights, but we DON'T have to tolerate it in our living rooms, our cars, or our thinking. Such behavior is a violation of two values which, more than all others, offer promise of healing for humankind: gentleness and love.

You may not have had much to do with where you've been, but you HAVE EVERYTHING TO DO WITH WHERE YOU ARE GOING, and what you are becoming. It all depends on who you think you are.

Praise God For: His Holy Spirit

Thank God For: carrying my burdens

Ask God's Forgiveness For: carrying my burdens alone

Ask God To Help: those weighed down by life

Ask God To Supply Our Need For: His strength

Life From The Lifeless

December 11

"...I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly"- John 10:10

Review

Much of the religious of that day was moribund, lacking the vitality to produce a movement as dynamic as early Christianity.

And still today God allows new life to erupt even in lifeless churches! The miracle of the birth of Christ is that no Christian is ever too comatose to be used of God in bringing a fresh beginning to others. So, if you feel spiritually lethargic during the year, if your heart seems to be in a `coma' as the result of some crushing blow, give it a `second thought' God may be wanting you to carry the Good New of the Gospel to someone in need of Christ.

Praise God For: reconciliation

Thank God For: peacemakers

Ask God's Forgiveness For: strained relationships

Ask God To Help: bring peace to the Middle East

Ask God To Supply Our Need For: tenderness

Preview

On February 26, 1984, near Winter Haven, Florida, a vehicle ran a stop sign and crashed into a car driven by Tami Hicks, killing a passenger and leaving her unconscious from brain damage. Wife of an Army corporal at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, Mrs. Hicks was three months pregnant at the time of the accident. In the months that followed, she lay comatose in an intensive care unit with a respirator to assist her breathing and a tube in her stomach to provide the balanced diet needed by any expectant mother. On August 20, 1984, doctors delivered by Caesarean section a thriving daughter from the lifeless mother whose condition had not changed since her injury." (Shreveport Times, August 21,1984, p.2-A).

Innerview

What a tragic yet hopeful parable for us. The Gospels tells us that Jesus was born, not as the result of any human effort, but as a gift from God. John reminds us of this gift in his gospel, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" John 1:12.

DIGGING DEEPER AND REACHING HIGHER:

What secret fears do you harbor? Write them down, lift them to God and claim His promise that you *will* trust in Him, no matter what problems you face.

Journal for Digging Deeper:

A Tribute To True Love

December 12

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life". -John 3:16

It was a busy morning, about 8:30, when an elderly gentleman in his 80s arrived to have stitches removed from his thumb. He said he was in a hurry as he had a appointment at 9:00.

I took his vital signs and had him take a seat, knowing it would be over an hour before someone would be able to see him. I saw him looking at his watch and decided since I was not busy with another patient, I would evaluate his wound. On examining it I saw it was well healed, so I talked to one of the doctors and got the needed supplies to remove his sutures and redress his wound.

PREVIEW

While taking care of his wound, I asked him if he had another doctor's appointment this morning, as he was in such a hurry. The gentleman told me no, that he needed to go to the nursing home to eat breakfast with his wife.

I inquired as to her health. He told me that she had been there for a while! As she is a victim of Alzheimer's disease.

As we talked, I asked if she would be upset if he was a bit late. He replied that she no longer knew who he was, that she had not recognized him in five years now.

I was surprised and asked him, 'And you still go every morning, even though she doesn't know who you are?'

He smiled as he patted my hand and said, 'She doesn't know me but I still know who she is.' I had to hold back tears as he left, I had goose bumps on

my arm and thought. That is the kind of love I want in my life. True love is neither physical nor romantic. (Story author unknown)

INNERVIEW

True love is an acceptance of all that is, has been, will be, and will not be.

Peace is seeing a sunset and knowing who to thank. The happiest people don't necessarily have the best of everything; they just make the best of everything they have.

Life isn't about how to survive the storm but how to dance in the rain.

REVIEW

The road to success is not straight. There is a curve called Failure, a loop called Confusion, speed bumps called Friends, red lights called Enemies, caution lights called Family. You will have flats called jobs.

But, If you have a spare called Determination, an engine called Perseverance, insurance called Faith, a driver called Almighty God, you will make it to a place called Success.

Praise God For: the spirit of Christmas

Thank God For: the Good News

Ask God's Forgiveness For: not making room for Him

Ask God To Help: all receive Jesus

Ask God To Supply Our Need For: renewed strength

DIGGING DEEPER AND REACHING HIGHER:

A Cause For Celebration

December 13

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets. Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the world. ...”-Hebrews 1:1,2

An old pioneer traveled westward across the Great Plains until he came to an abrupt halt at the edge of the Grand Canyon. He gawked at the sight before him: a vast chasm one mile down, eighteen miles across, and more than a hundred miles long! He gasped, "Something musta happened here!" Suppose someone from another culture came to our community in mid-December. As he viewed the lights, decorations, parades, parties, malls filled with people shopping and churches with special services, no doubt he would say, "Something must have happened here."

Preview

I both dread and love the Christmas season. I dread the busyness. I dread having something to do and somewhere to be. I dread the traffic jams around the malls and the commercialism of the season. I dread the trite treatment of the birth of our Savior as though we could do justice to the greatest news of history with a few lighted plastic lawn fixtures. Oh, I am not an old Scrooge. I love the light in children's eyes on Christmas Day. I love surprising my family and friends with unexpected gifts. I love going back home again and seeing family and good friends. I love reflecting on the great love God has for us in sending His Son into the world.

Innerview

My question is, in all this festivity do we know what we are celebrating? Are we celebrating for celebration's sake or is there a purpose to all

this? Much of what I see during this season reminds me of Super Bowl hype. Even people who haven't watched a football game all season have Super Bowl parties. The game is just a reason to party.

Christmas is not just another excuse to party, shop 'til you drop or raise your cholesterol count. Christmas is about Christ. Christmas is about salvation. It's about God's grace and forgiveness. It's about eternity. It's about freedom from sin, death and hell. Christmas is about Christ.

Review

Sure, Christmas is about the virgin, the baby, the swaddling clothes, the manger, the shepherds and the angels. But there is so much more to the story. There is so much more to tell! I pray that as believers we will not be so caught up in the festivities that we fail to grasp the full meaning of God's greatest gift.

More than "something must have happened here," do we understand what happened here? Have we stopped to consider the full extent of the cause of our celebration?

Praise God for: being a God of order!

Thank God for: daily glimpses of His glory!

Ask God's forgiveness for: my overly crowded agenda!

Ask God to help: people dreading today!

Ask God to supply our need for: untangled days!

DIGGING DEEPER AND REACHING HIGHER:

God Promised Jesus To The World

December 14

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets. Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the world. ...”-Hebrews 1:1,2

Hebrews 1:1,2 is not a typical text for a Christmas message. Yet perhaps more than many other Scripture passages, it tells the full story of Christmas. It doesn't speak of shepherds or mangers but it gives us a panoramic view of what God accomplished on that memorable night in Bethlehem.

Let's examine how God prepared the world for Jesus and how He presented Jesus to the world.

Preview

God Spoke. John MacArthur has described physical life as living in a box. Deep within us we sense that there is something outside our box, beyond what we can see, hear, smell taste or touch. We realize there is a supernatural world we cannot attain with our senses. All the world's religions: Buddhism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Confucianism and New Age philosophies have sought to tear a hole in the box that we may peer out into the supernatural world. Christianity is distinct from these religions in that it claims that God Himself came into the box and adopted a physical form in order to tell us about life outside the box.

MacArthur says, "Because man by himself is incapable of identifying, comprehending, or understanding God at all, God has to invade the world of man to speak to him about Himself."

Innerview

V.1 says, "God... spoke." That's it in a nutshell. "God" is the subject. "Spoke" is the verb. The remaining words and phrases tell how and when God spoke.

God is always active. He is always working, always revealing Himself. He is never dormant. He has always been speaking to man. Deists believe that God created everything and then left His creation to run itself. On the contrary, God is not indifferent but actively speaking to and through His creation.

Review

"God... spoke in time past." God has spoken. He has disclosed Himself to us. He did not create the world and then leave it. He did not cloak Himself in the shadow of mystery. On the contrary, He has revealed His glory to man. He did that first in creation. In the beginning He spoke face to face with Adam and then Eve. Gen.3:8 says, "And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day..."

Praise God For: His loving correction

Thank God For: redeeming my mistakes

Ask God's Forgiveness For: impatience with mistakes

Ask God To Help: me encourage others

Ask God To Supply Our Need For: eyes to see butterflies in our errors

God Spoke

December 15

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets. Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the world. . . .”-Hebrews 1:1,2

After the Fall, God spoke to some men personally. He dealt directly with Cain and Abel. God spoke on such intimate terms with Enoch that Gen.5:24 says, "And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." In that pre-flood era, Enoch lived 365 years, walking and talking with God and then God simply took him home to heaven without allowing him to die.

Though God did not speak to every man personally, His mercy and grace has resounded from His creation. Rom.1:20 says, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."

Preview

Heb.1:1 adds even more, "God... spoke in time past to the fathers." Who were "the fathers?" They were the ancestors of all Jews, the patriarchs of Israel. This is a letter to the Hebrew believers.

God spoke to Abraham and called him out of Ur of the Chaldees to a land flowing with milk and honey. He promised this old man that he would be the father of a great nation. He spoke to the promised son Isaac. He spoke to Jacob and wrestled with him. He spoke to Joseph in dreams. He spoke to Moses through a burning bush. The Old Testament is filled with accounts

of "time past" when God "spoke... to the fathers."

Innerview

God Spoke in Various Ways. God not only "spoke" but He did so "in various times and in various ways." This is a play on words in the Greek text. Literally it means "in many different seasons and in many different portions." In other words, God did not always speak in the same way all the time.

"Ways" or "portions" can be accurately translated "books." Through all 39 books of the Old Testament, we see God speaking, revealing Himself to mankind. Consider some of the many "various ways" God spoke in that era. God spoke through dreams and visions. He spoke through metaphors, parables and stories. He spoke through types and symbols. He spoke through angels. He spoke through His prophets. He spoke through the Scripture.

Review

Sometimes God spoke directly to men. "Various ways" may also refer through many literary ways. The Old Testament contains narrative accounts, poetry, songs of praise, law, prophecy, doctrine, ethical and moral writings, proverbs, encouragements, warnings, etc... Yet it is always God speaking to men.

Praise God For: love letters from Him
Thank God For: reunions with loved ones

God Spoke (2)

December 16

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets. Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the world. . . .”-Hebrews 1:1,2

God Spoke in Various Times.

At times God was very active with new revelation coming all the time. Think of how God dealt with Abraham or Moses. Yet at other times there was little revelation. During eras of disobedience God remained quiet. The time between the testaments is called "the 400 silent years."

God Spoke through His Prophets.

The writer of Hebrews also tells us the predominant way in which God spoke in "time past." In the Old Testament era, God primarily spoke "by the prophets." Amos 3:7 says, "Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophet".

In the Old Testament (OT), there are many men and women who are referred to as prophets. In the New Testament (NT), the OT is called "the law and the prophets" (Mat.7:12, et al). In the OT, there are "major prophets" with large books such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. There are also "minor prophets" with small books of prophecy such as Amos, Hosea and Joel. However, the classical sense of the word, "prophets" not only refers to those who were "foretelling" but also those who were "forth-telling" or speaking forth the Word of God to the people. This is similar to the NT spiritual gift of prophecy or teaching. Therefore, every man or woman who was inspired of God, whose writings are in the OT are considered "prophets," not just those who bear that specific title. Thus in our passage today, "prophets" refers to the entirety of the OT.

Over 1,500 years using some 40 plus writers or "prophets" of differing backgrounds, culture, education and status, God "spoke" in the writings of the OT. These people were "inspired" by God to write. "Inspired" does not mean that they were merely creative but that the words they wrote were "God-breathed" (theopneustia). God used their personalities, vocabularies and life experience to "breathe" the Scriptures of the OT.

2 Tim.3:16 says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God [breathed by God], and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." 2 Pet.1:20-21 says, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

Daily Sunshine In The Son

Thank You for these answers to prayer:

I pray for the needs of others, especially

Today, Lord, I need

God Speaks

December 17

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets. Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the world. . . .” -Hebrews 1:1,2

God Spoke by Progressive Revelation.

Progressive revelation is a theological concept that we can easily grasp. I learned to read in school. I did not learn to read all at once, but a little at a time. I did not begin reading with Tolstoy's War and Peace but with the alphabet. I learned the ABC's. I learned the sounds of each vowel and consonant. Then I learned to sound out words like "A-a-pple" and "B-b-oy" and "C-c-at." Then I progressed to reading words in sentences like "See Spot run." Anyone remember Dick and Jane? The further I progressed in my education the greater my reading skills became. I went from books with many pictures and few words to books with many words and no pictures. My vocabulary increased with my reading skills. With each new level of learning, I added to what I already knew. I learned to read by PROGRESSIVE UNDERSTANDING.

Preview

In the OT era, "God... spoke" by PROGRESSIVE REVELATION. God did not reveal Himself fully at one time, but a little at a time. For example, Genesis gives us some truth about God. Exodus builds on what we learned in Genesis. Numbers builds on what we learned in Exodus and so on. Each book progressively reveals to us the "whole counsel of God." That's why we always interpret the Bible in context.

The Bible does not progress from error to truth but from incomplete truth to complete truth.

The Bible also progresses from promise to fulfillment. The OT is about promise; the NT is about fulfillment of those promises. Jesus said in Mt.5:17, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."

Innerview

In fact, for the most part, those who wrote the OT did not fully understand what they were writing. 1 Peter 1:10-12 says, "Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven; things which angels desire to look into."

They had, if you will, the ABC's and the first grade primers of God's truth. In this age, "in these last days" we have the full revelation of God in our completed Bible.

Review

Daily Sunshine In The Son

The focal point of every prophet and each of the 39 books of the OT was to prepare the world for the coming of Jesus. "God who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets" in order to prepare His people, to receive His Son. God was about to invade our world.

He was about to invade our world as...

- Abel's Sacrifice, Noah's Rainbow,
- Abraham's Lamb, Isaac's Well,
- Jacob's Ladder, Exekiel's Burden
- Judah's Scepter, Moses Rod,
- David's Slingshot, Hezekiah's Sundial,
- A Husband to the Widow
- A Father to the Orphan

Praise God For: His comfort

Thank God For: the Best of Books

Ask God's Forgiveness For: relying on human reasoning

Ask God To Help: when evil oppresses

Ask God To Supply Our Need For: light in the darkness

DIGGING DEEPER AND REACHING HIGHER:

If you are right now facing some seemingly hopeless situations that are keeping you from running your race, think about God's faithfulness to you and then write about your circumstances from that perspective.

Journal for Digging Deeper:

Lord, today I thank You for:

Thank You for these answers to prayer:

I pray for the needs of others, especially

Today, Lord, I need

God Prepared The World For Jesus

December 18

“But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law”. –Galatians 4:4

Five (5) things that happened in history that made the timing of God just right for his birth.

1. The spreading out of the Jewish people in the Mediterranean basin.

The "Diaspora," the dispersion of the Jews. Prior to the birth of Christ, the Jewish people were dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. Those God-fearers, worshipers of Jehovah, began to spread out throughout the Roman Empire. Once Jesus ascended back and evangelism began to unfold, it was in these God-fearing Jewish communities throughout the Roman Empire that the seed was first sown that Jesus Christ was to be the Messiah.

Those were to be the beds of evangelism throughout the whole Roman Empire. If the Jews had not been dispersed, evangelism would have remained there. But it was through the sovereignty of God, he said, “ Before I allow my son to be born into this world, I’m going to spread these Jewish people through all these small communities in the Roman Empire.”

2. There was a favorable legal environment when Jesus was born.

When I talk about the favorable legal environment, understand the Roman Empire was composed of various conquered peoples. They became a massive empire because they conquered different nationalities, peoples, and relation religions. They were quite tolerant towards these different religions with one exception. All religious sects and groups were to proclaim Caesar as God.

The Roman Empire was intolerant and basically said if you’re going to be under our rule, then Caesar is God. That worked with every religious sect except the Jewish people. The Jewish people never would do it. It got so bad, that after decades of killing and intimidation, the Roman Empire said, "Okay, we will grant an exemption with the Jewish people." Notice how the timing of God is perfect.

Now the Jewish people do not have to proclaim Caesar as God, for the first 70 years after the death of Jesus, the Roman Empire made no distinction difference between the Jewish people and Christianity.

By 70 A. D. the Roman empire realized Christianity and Judaism was not the same. Christianity had become rooted in the Roman Empire to the extent that it could not be removed. This was so as a result of the sovereignty of God’s timing.

God Prepared The World for Jesus (2)

December 19

“But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law”. –Galatians 4:4

3. It was a favorable political climate.

Julius Caesar, the best known Roman emperor, was assassinated. There was more civil war under Julius Caesar than any other Roman emperor. By the close of his reign, approximately 25 years before Christ Augustus Caesar came to the throne, peace erupted in the Roman Empire. For the following two (2) centuries there was peace. With peace, things began to happen. Instead of the Roman Empire consistently battling, they began to build roads. Roads were built and travel was safe.

Under Augustus Caesar, at the time of Christ, Rome began to monitor the safety of the people that traveled by formulating a literal highway patrol. It was now safe to travel, spread the good news and fulfill the great commission.

4. There was a favorable cultural climate.

When I speak of a favorable cultural climate, all language now was the same for the very first time since the Tower of Babel. Remember the tower where men spoke the same language, but their motives were wrong and therefore God gave them different languages. From that time until Jesus' birth, all different nations spoke different languages. By the time Jesus was born, because of Alexander the Great, who was truly a world conqueror, everyone spoke a

common Greek language.

The New Testament was written in common Greek, because that was the common language everyone spoke. Therefore, every book that was written by Paul, and the other apostles was written in the New Testament where even the common people could pick it up and understand exactly what was said, because of one common language.

5. A favorable philosophical environment.

Philosophically, the word was made ready for the coming of Christ. Plato, Aristotle, and all the Greek philosophers had done a better job questioning than giving answers. Christianity became like a cleansing breeze in society. It's been said that the Greek philosophers were like plowing fields. They plowed the fields but they didn't sow the seed. Christianity came into those cultivated, fertile, plowed minds and began to sow the seed of Christianity.

Christmas is about God's timing in our lives. Christmas is about the coincidences, the census, the going to Bethlehem, all the little coincidences and circumstances that happen in our life. One of the great rewards of going to heaven is being able to see how God used the little things to bring about his purpose.

Praise God For: showing us His ways

Daily Sunshine In The Son

Thank God For: the right word when I need it

Ask God's Forgiveness For: taking my own path

Ask God To Help: a friend facing uncertainty

Ask God To Supply Our Need For: a word for today

DIGGING DEEPER AND REACHING HIGHER:

Ask God how He would like you to finish your race and then write down what He tells you.

Journal for Digging Deeper:

Lord, today I thank You for:

Thank You for these answers to prayer:

I pray for the needs of others, especially

Today, Lord, I need

God Presented Jesus To The World

December 20

“But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law”. –Galatians 4:4

Christmas is much greater than a baby in a manger surrounded by adoring shepherds. The gift of God's Son is so vast in scope, that to limit it to one season of the year or one scene in a stable in Bethlehem, is to limit our understanding. Christmas is about Christ. It is God presenting to the world His one and only Son, the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev.13:8).

Preview

God has also Spoken to Us by His Son. He became one of us. He left the heights of deity to come to the depths of humanity. He entered a world, not of piano strings and birds, of problems and heartaches. John prophetically provides a ray of redemptive hope for many disobedient as he wrote, "The Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness." (JOHN 1:14 NLT)

The Abstract turned into the concrete.
The Eternal became external.
The Superior merged with the inferior.
The Holy entered the commonplace.
The Spiritual embraced the carnal.
Perfect Peace clothed itself in the human struggle for liberation.
Thought was changed into action.
Principle became person.
Law was turned into love.
Transcendence was turned into intimacy.
The Word was made flesh.

Innerview

Up there came down here to say, "I am not just everywhere; I am somewhere. I am not just Almighty; I am an intimate friend. I am not just from everlasting to everlasting, but I am also here and now."

He made a throne out of a manger and a royal court out of stable occupants.

He took a common name, Jesus, and made it uncommon.

He took disadvantaged people and made them privileged.

He could have lived over us or away from us, but He chose to live among us.

He became a friend to the sinner and a partner to the poor.

He touched their sores, felt their pains, cried their tears, carried their sorrows and paid for their mistakes.

Review

He died their death on a cross and entered a tomb.

He came out proclaiming and pledging to give us resurrection power.

He promised salvation to the sinner and resurrection to the redeemed.

To all of us with hurts, habits and hang-ups, He shares the same message: "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust in me...I will come back and take you to be with me, so that you maybe where I am". (JOHN 14:1,3 NCV)

Praise God For: thinking about me at all

God Speaks Now Through Christ

December 21

"But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law". -Galatians 4:4

Hebrews 1:1 tells us that "God... spoke in time past". V.2 tells us that He has "in these last days spoken to us by His Son." God "spoke" in that era and He has "spoken" in this era. He spoke "in time past" and has spoken "in these last days." He spoke "to the fathers" and He has spoken "to us." He spoke "by the prophets" but now has spoken "by His Son."

First things first. In "time past" God spoke "by the prophets" but now "in these last days" God has spoken to us "by His Son." God's message to man was incomplete without His Son. The OT without the NT makes little sense. The final stage of progressive revelation is full revelation and we have that in Jesus Christ.

Preview

God once spoke too "at various times and in various ways." He once spoke in different ways through different people but has finally spoken to man in one way and through one Person, His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Everything in the NT is centered on Jesus. The gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John narrate His story, the events of His earthly life. The letters or epistles comment and more fully explain what we learned in the gospels. The Revelation foretells the final culmination of all things, the crowning glory of the Lord Jesus.

Innerview

The OT was given to men by God in bits and pieces. Taken alone it is like having a large

unassembled jigsaw puzzle set before you. You see colors and bits of the picture, but you can't immediately see how it all fits together. In the NT, we see Jesus fully "the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person!" Jesus is the big picture. Jesus not only gave but is the full revelation of God. What God whispered in His creation, what He spoke in the OT, He shouts to us in His Son. II Corinthians 1:20 says, "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us."

As with a jigsaw puzzle, once we see the assembled picture, we can appreciate the individual pieces. Once we have the full revelation in the NT, we can appreciate the bits and pieces of the OT.

Review

God has also Spoken in these Last Days. "In time past" God spoke but He has also spoken "in these last days." What is meant by "these last days?" This refers to the Messianic period. The last days began when Jesus was born in Bethlehem and we are still in them 2,000 years later. It was the last time God spoke until we hear His voice again in the Kingdom Age. It is the "last days" of revelation. God's truth has come to us directly from the lips of His Son. He is no longer speaking through special revelation, visions or dreams. He speaks through his son and his son speaks through the Word that we know as the New Testament. The New Testament is God's last will or testament to the world.

Praise God For: His strength

Christmas Truths

December 22

“But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary, thy wife for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghos”. –Matthew 1:20

Almost everyone celebrates Christmas but most people don't know why they celebrate. They rush here and there; they buy presents they cannot afford; they sing songs they do not understand. They watch sappy movies and endless holiday TV specials. They give more to charities in December than at any other time of year. They linger on childhood memories. They may even go to church. They search for some sense of meaning, some good feeling, some purpose in all the festivity. Then when December 26th rolls around, it is back to work. Another holiday has come and gone and the New Year is just around the corner.

Preview

Henry Nouwen writes, "Songs, good feelings, beautiful liturgies, nice presents, big dinners, and sweet words do not make Christmas. Christmas is saying yes to something beyond all emotions and feelings. Christmas is saying yes to a hope based on God's initiative, which has nothing to do with what I think or feel. Christmas is believing that the salvation of the world is God's work and not mine."

Though we don't know exactly when Jesus was born, Christmas is a celebration of the "fullness of times" when "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons". (Gal.4:4-5) Christmas is a celebration of salvation!

Innerview

One mother wrote of attending a Christmas play with some friends and their two young boys, ages 4 and 6. They were impressed with the boys' fascination at seeing the baby Jesus in a manger. The play was, indeed, realistic and convincing. Later at their home the boys started arguing, and after ignoring repeated warnings to stop, their mother sent them to their rooms to ask forgiveness from Jesus for their disobedience. When the older boy rejoined them, his mother asked him if he had asked Jesus to forgive him. "No," he replied, "I asked God because Jesus is too young to understand." Cute story, but for many grown-ups, the Jesus of Christmas is little more than a baby in a manger.

It is true that Jesus was a baby, conceived of the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin girl. It is true that the creator of the universe was thriving in a placenta, protected by water, bounced about on a donkey ride to Bethlehem. Yes, Christ was "God deep in the flesh." Jesus came into the world with us that He might take us to heaven with Him. He became one of us that we might become like Him. John.1:14 says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Christmas Is About Giving Light

December 23

"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shall call his name JESUS for he shall save his people from their sins". –Matthew 1:21

Preview

Dr. James Dobson tells the story of an elderly woman named Stella Thornhope who was struggling with her first Christmas alone. Her husband died a few months prior through a slow developing cancer. Just before Christmas, she was almost snowed in by a brutal weather system. She felt terribly alone, so much so she decided she was not going to decorate for Christmas. That afternoon the doorbell rang, and there was a delivery boy with a box. He said, "Mrs. Thornhope?" She nodded. He said, "Would you sign here?" She invited him to step inside and closed the door to get away from the cold. She signed the paper and said, "What's in the box?" The young man laughed and opened up the flap, and inside was a little puppy, a yellow Labrador Retriever. The delivery boy picked up the squirming pup and explained, "This is for you, Ma'am. He's six weeks old." The young puppy began to wiggle in happiness at being released from captivity. "Who sent this?" Mrs. Thornhope asked. The young man set the animal down and handed her an envelope and said, "It's all explained here in this envelope, Ma'am. The dog was bought last July while its mother was still pregnant. It was meant to be a Christmas gift to you." The young man then handed her a book, *How to Care for Your Labrador Retriever*. She again asked, "Who sent me this puppy?" As the young man turned to leave, he said, "Your husband, Ma'am. Merry Christmas."

Innerview

She opened up the letter. He had written it three weeks before he died and left it with the kennel owners to be delivered with the puppy as his last Christmas gift to her. The letter was full of love and encouragement. He vowed that he was waiting for the day when she would join him. He had sent her this young animal to keep her company until then. She wiped away the tears, put the letter down, and then remembering the puppy at her feet, she picked up that golden furry ball and held it to her neck. Then she looked out the window at the lights that outlined the neighbor's house, and she heard from the radio in the kitchen "Joy to the World, the Lord has Come."

Suddenly Stella felt an amazing sense of peace washing over her. Her heart felt a joy and a wonder greater than the grief and loneliness. "Little fella," she said to the dog, "It's just you and me. But you know what? There's a box down in the basement I'll bet you'd like. It's got a little Christmas tree in it and some decorations and some lights that are going to impress you. And there's a manger scene down there. Let's go get it."

Review

God has a way of sending a signal of light to remind us life is stronger than death. Light is more powerful than darkness. Matthew 4:16 says, "The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned."

The Glorious Time of Christmas

December 24

"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David A Saviour, which is Christ the Lord".

-Luke 2:10,11

Christmas is just a few days away! This is really one of my favorite times of the year. I sat in child like wonder and watch another Christmas Program this last week - it was wonderful to hear the great music and hear the Choir and Children sing. It always brings tears to many eyes and flood the soul with great memories to hear the Children's Choir sing Happy Birthday Jesus! Is Christmas time a glorious time of year for you? If not, consider this:

At that first Christmas, some angels told a bunch of Middle Eastern shepherds, "**Do not be afraid.** We bring you **good news** that will be **a great joy** to all people. Today **your Savior** was born... He is Christ, the Lord. Give glory to God in heaven, and on earth **let there be peace** among the people who please God." (Luke 2:11-12,14)

CHRISTMAS TIME IS A TIME FOR CELEBRATION! *"Good news...great Joy!*

Christmas is a time to celebrate all that God has given us and done for us. It is a time to set aside your problems and pressures for a moment and focus on God. If God wanted to communicate to birds he would have become a bird ... but he wanted to communicate to human beings so he became like one of us and came to earth some 2000 years ago. Now we can know what God is like - Jesus tells us.

Of all the ways God could have come to earth, he came the same way each of us did - by a birth. Why? Because he did not want us to fear

him - and no one is afraid of a baby! Christmas says God wants YOU to know him
Heaven's Bread for earth's hunger
Heaven's water for earth's thirst
Heaven's light for earth's darkness
Heaven's GRACE for earth's guilt
Heaven's LOVE for earth's hate
Heaven's WISDOM for earth's folly
Heaven's FORGIVENESS for earth's sins
Heaven's GLORY for earth's shame
Heaven's BEAUTY for earth's ugliness
Heaven's HEALTH for earth's sickness
Heaven's PEACE for earth's strife
Heaven's justification for earth's condemnation
Heaven's SALVATION for earth's damnation.

There never was anyone like Jesus BEFORE Jesus.

There never has been anyone like Jesus SINCE Jesus.

There never will be another LIKE Jesus - before all, in all, all in all.

CHRISTMAS TIME IS A TIME FOR SALVATION! *"Your Savior was born..."*

If we needed information, God would have sent an Educator. If we needed more government, God would have sent a Politician. But what we need most is salvation - so God sent us a Savior. **One** day, God, standing, as it were, on the front porch of heaven, looking down through the arcade of man's civilization, saw us floundering in a cesspool of immorality and sin.

Daily Sunshine In The Son

He decided that man needed a Savior, He plucked the fairest flower that blossomed in his celestial Garden of Paradise and sent us a person and a Deliverer.

That person came walking down the Avenues of Prophecy, paused under the blinking stars of Bethlehem. Took upon Himself a fleshly garment, and covered his likeness of God with the likeness of man. He went out in the wilderness, conquered the devil to become our example in overcoming. He paid every debt humanity owed to the Holy Law, and instructs us that we are bought with a price!

What a great salvation. It is forgiveness for my past... power to manage my present problems ... and a guarantee for my future. However, like any gift, you must *accept it* in order to benefit from it. You cannot save people until they stop trying to save themselves.

CHRISTMAS TIME IS A TIME FOR RECONCILIATION! "Let there be peace.."

Christmas is a time to seek to restore those broken or strained relationships. It is a time to say "I'm sorry" and "Will you forgive me?" It is also a time to *offer* forgiveness to all those who have hurt you. First you make peace *WITH* God, and then you receive the peace *OF* God. Once you have that you will find it much easier to make peace with other people.

DIGGING DEEPER AND REACHING HIGHER:
List the names of people you personally know who need God's strength today. Ask Him to strengthen them and let them know in some small way today that He is with them.

Make This A
Merry Christmas!

Praise God For: His support
Thank God For: The sensitivity of others
Ask God's Forgiveness For: my disappointment in others
Ask God To Help: the physically and emotionally needy
Ask God To Supply Our Need For: Immanuel

Journal for Digging Deeper:

Lord, today I thank You for:

Thank You for these answers to prayer:

I pray for the needs of others, especially

Today, Lord, I need

The Inexpressible Joy of Sharing

December 25

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life". -John 3:16

A Boston florist named Henry Penn once told how two boys and a girl came into his floral shop one day and explained: "We're the committee, and we'd like to buy some pretty yellow flowers, sir. So, you have any yellow flowers? He'd like them better if they were yellow. He had a yellow sweater."

Are they for someone's funeral? asked Penn.

The children nodded and fought to keep back the tears. "She's his sister," explained one of the boys. "He was a good kid. A truck yesterday ... we were playing in the street; we saw it happen."

Then the other boy added, "Us kids took up a collection. We got 18 cents. Would roses cost a lot, mister? Yellow roses?"

Preview

Touched by their tragic story, Penn replied, "I have some nice yellow roses here that I am selling for 18 cents a dozen just this morning."

The sympathetic florist accepted the 18 cents and the committee of children carried away the flowers. Said Penn, "I felt uplifted for days. I had been given the inexpressible privilege of sharing something."

Innerview

Many people live frustrated lives precisely because they do not know the joy of sharing. Sharing does not diminish; it is an opening

through which we receive. Giving to others makes it possible for God to give to us; the more we share, the more we have left.

Someone needs you today. Perhaps it is a member of your family. It could be someone with whom you work. It may be a friend who phones you out of the blue.

Review

Mark it down: you will be in touch with someone today who needs what you have to give. She may just need your time. He may need your skill or kindness. It may be an affirmation of worth. Maybe that person will need to be challenged to get his or her life back on a positive, productive life path.

By sharing yourself with someone today, you will multiply your joy in living. You will become an instrument of God in the world.

Praise God For: being our Savior

Thank God For: salvation

Ask God's Forgiveness For: choosing sin

Ask God To Help: those who don't know Him

Ask God To Supply Our Need For: deliverance from sin

DIGGING DEEPER AND REACHING HIGHER:

What difficulties have you and God walked through together? Write them down and record your praises for the lessons He taught you during those hard times.

Acting Right For Christmas

December 26

"And the WORD was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory of only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth". -John 1:14

Waiting for an elevator at Galleria mall, my friend heard a commotion and turned to see a young family approaching. The father was pushing an infant in a stroller, while the young mother was practically dragging a little boy of about five years by the arm.

The little boy was screaming, kicking, and trying to bite his mother's hand. She screamed back and continued to wrestle him toward the elevator.

PREVIEW

The man telling me about the episode said the boy reminded him of a cartoon character he used to watch on Saturdays the Tasmanian Devil.

Then my friend found himself on the elevator with this dynamo of terror. The child and mother continued their raging contest of wills. Then, through the elevator's glass wall, the mom saw her chance. She grabbed her son, pushed his face against the glass, and screamed, Look who's out there! Now will you be good?

Innerview

The child suddenly became silent as he stared down at Santa Claus. There he was, getting the list of things children wanted for being good all year.

The shock was apparent on the boy's face. Then, with all the innocence and honesty only a

child could exhibit, he turned an angelic face toward his mother and said, "I will be good until I get past him".

Review

My friend burst into laughter. He insists that it continued until his sides ached. Then he left the elevator and watched the family disappear into the crowd. Sure enough, the little boy walked silently and obediently, held his mother's hand, and looked at Santa over his shoulder. Then, safely out of the bearded one's view, the screaming and battling resumed!

Here's what my friend said: I was shaken to see myself in a mirror as I watched that little boy being good in the right settings and going out of control in the rest of my life. This Christmas I've finally realized that the only gifts I need are the ones I've already had and never really accepted. This year I'm accepting God's Son, God's grace, and God's Word.

Praise God For: the spirit of Christmas

Thank God For: the Good News

Ask God's Forgiveness For: not making room for Him

Ask God To Help: all receive Jesus

Ask God To Supply Our Need For: renewed strength

DIGGING DEEPER AND REACHING HIGHER:

Write a love note to God and tell Him what He means to you today.

The Spirit of Christmas at Christmas

December 27

"And the WORD was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory of only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth". -John 1:14

Tammie Murphy was just doing her job at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis the first week of December in 1995. She had worked there for nine years as a donations clerk for the world-famous Tennessee hospital that specializes in cancer research.

Preview

Toward the end of Thursday's work day, she opened a plain white envelope addressed in blue ink. There was no name, no return address, and no note. Postmarked from Dallas, it contained a game piece for McDonald's recently begun Monopoly promotion.

"The words 'instant winner' really caught my eye," said Ms. Murphy. And the prize was not fries, a soda, or even a Big Mac. It was \$1 million! On Tuesday of the following week, a representative of the Arthur Andersen accounting firm authenticated it as one of the three \$1 million instant prizes available in McDonald's national game.

Although the rules of the game clearly say that all prizes are nontransferable, the president of McDonalds has announced the company's decision to make a \$1 million donation to the hospital in 20 annual checks of \$50,000 each. The anonymous donor's wish has been granted.

Innerview

Maybe it's the spirit of the Christmas season that prompted such generosity. After all, Christmas is about the self-giving love of God. Heaven cared so much about our critical

situation that a manger in a Bethlehem stable became the critical first step to a process of redemption that has opened heaven's doors to all who come to God through Jesus Christ.

Review

Wish you had \$1 million for some worthy cause this Christmas? How about a gift to some child whose name is on an Angel Tree at the mall? What about an anonymous \$20 bill in a Christmas card to an unemployed family from your church? What about undivided attention to your family?

I hope the Christmas spirit is in your heart. And I hope you can find just the right way to express it to someone who needs your love.

Praise God For: the Spirit of Christmas

Thank God For: wise men

Ask God's Forgiveness For: half-hearted commitment

Ask God To Help: all who come to Him

Ask God To Supply Our Need For: recommitment to Him

DIGGING DEEPER AND REACHING HIGHER:

Write down one problem that is causing you to experience a lack of joy. Ask God to give you back your joy and to grant you a willing spirit to sustain you in the days ahead.

Journal for Digging Deeper:

Practices That Can Dramatically Change Your Life

December 28

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night". -Psalms 1:1,2

Do you sometimes feel overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of what it takes to change your situation or your life? I have ... regularly, but I've discovered that adopting some or all of the ten practices below can make a huge difference. For the record, a practice is defined as a conscious deliberate habit.

Preview

1. Be fully present, in the moment.

It has been estimated that up to 80% of our thoughts in any given day are about the past or the future rather than the present. Think of it. That's a tremendous dilution of energy. Being fully in the present means that you have no thoughts about past or future. You are fully engaged in what's taking place at this exact moment.

2. Meditate.

I know you have heard this before, and you may have tried meditating and concluded that it isn't your cup of tea. Try again. If you have found a mantra disconcerting or you get bogged down in your visualizations, try this: Sit down and get comfortable, pay attention only to your breathing, particularly the exhalation phase. Let each breath take you down to a more relaxed state. Continue for at least twenty minutes for at least one session each day, preferably in the early morning. The effects will increase with time. It may take three to

six months to begin noticing really significant changes.

Innerview

3. Act deliberately.

Have you any idea how much of your daily activity is dictated, in whole or in part, by situations, other people, or external demands? The answer, for most of us is, quite a bit. To act deliberately is to operate from a deep level of inner calm, so deep that to those around you, it may appear as though you are slow to react--and you are! Why? Because, instead of reacting on the basis of whatever emotion is being currently triggered by the situation or person, you respond in an appropriate manner. So, how do you begin to act deliberately? By monitoring your every action and reaction on a moment-by-moment basis. Do it for three days in a row and you'll be happily surprised at the difference it makes.

Review

4. Develop a sense of pace.

Everything and every being has its own rhythm. You have yours, I have mine, and they are different. The pace I seek is one that allows me to align myself effortlessly with what is going on while still managing to act deliberately. There's a secret to developing a sense of pace: relaxation. Approach everything and everyone in an aikido-like (relaxed) manner and you'll be amazed how different it (and they) feel.

Daily Sunshine In The Son

5. Periodically, withdraw and recharge.

I've always been attracted by the stories telling how Jesus would withdraw from those around him. Sometimes he would go to the top of a mountain, sometimes to a fishing vessel, and sometimes he just vanished. In order to keep your calm and to be fully present, it's important to withdraw and recharge, regularly.

Thank You for these answers to prayer:

- Praise God For:** finding value in each of us
- Thank God For:** treasuring me
- Ask God's Forgiveness For:** not valuing others as He does
- Ask God To Help:** sin-covered live
- Ask God To Supply Our Need For:** restoration

DIGGING DEEPER AND REACHING HIGHER:
Write a prayer of praise to God for the grace He offers each of us.

I pray for the needs of others, especially

Journal for Digging Deeper:

Today, Lord, I need

Lord, today I thank You for:

Practices That Can Dramatically Change Your Life (2)

December 29

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night". -Psalms 1:1,2

Preview

6. Take steps to eliminate clutter, noise, distractions, and people who drain your energy.

Some people live in clutter, thrive on noise, and allow themselves to be drained by demanding friends and acquaintances. If any of this sounds familiar, you can do something about it NOW. Clear off your desk, skip television and radio for a week, and distance yourself from those who use you to meet THEIR needs. And think about this: someone once described a Master as one from whom all the extraneous has been removed. Mastery, in its highest sense, is purity. So, when you eliminate, you purify!

7. Commit to service.

Do you gauge your success by how much you are recognized and rewarded by others? Isn't that what profit is all about? Let me suggest a different slant; try ordering your life around this objective: Not my will, but Thine be done. Judge yourself and your day not by how much you get, but by how much you GIVE. In time, you will be amazed at how this difference in orientation changes you. Good things come into your life more effortlessly and life becomes easier. A word of caution here. You do not have to find a great cause or become a professional do-gooder. Engage fully in the opportunities that

appear on a daily basis. Soon you will find opportunities increasing and you will be GROWING!

Innerview

8. Stop chasing your mission.

Have you discovered your mission in life? If not, are you filled with a consuming desire to know what you are all about? If so, then STOP. Become fully engaged in your present and let your mission find you. It will come, I promise, most likely as a quiet nudge that something just feels ... right.

9. Let go of needing certain outcomes.

"Everything you are stuck too prevents you from moving freely." Letting go is an absolute requirement in this life and, ultimately, of this life. But there is a kicker here: it is imperative to reach the point in your thinking where letting go becomes a joyous act rather than a personal sacrifice.

Review

10. Love unconditionally.

I saved this one till last, because it is the most difficult. To love unconditionally means: to love without any strings attached. It's the toughest kind of love, because it is often most needed in situations that can best be described as unjust or unfair. So, why is it necessary to love unconditionally? I suppose there are many reasons, but one stands out in

A Blessing For You At The Year's End (2)

December 31

"Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." -Galatians 6:18

I pray that you don't have to learn humility
By being humiliated or
Honesty by being cheated.

Preview

When you are lonely
I wish you love.
When you are down
I wish you joy.
When you are troubled
I wish you peace.
When things are complicated
I wish you simple beauty.
When things are chaotic
I wish you inner peace.
When things look empty
I wish you hope.

Innerview

I wish you the courage to know yourself.
Patience to accept the truth and love to
complete your life.

May a kind word, a reassuring touch, and
a warm smile be yours every day of your life,
and may you give these gifts as well as receive
them.

May what you see in the mirror delight you,
and what others see in you delight them.

May someone love you enough to forgive your
faults, and be blind to your blemishes.
May the teachings of those you admire become
part of you, so that you may call upon them
when life is difficult.

Review

May you see your future as one filled with
promise and possibility.

I pray that you never walk alone in life and
always have a hand to hold as you walk through
life's way.

I wish you a merry, extra joyful,
Super happy, Warm and loving,
Most amazing,
Holly, Jolly
NEW YEAR!

---David L. Lane, Ph.D.
written December 12, 1999

Praise God For: His friendship
Thank God For: childhood friends
Ask God's Forgiveness For: avoiding
responsibility
Ask God To Help: the discouraged
Ask God To Supply Our Need For: friends

DIGGING DEEPER AND REACHING HIGHER:
*What situations are you allowing to block God's joy in
your life? Ask God to take away the joy blockers from
your life and give you courage to conquer them. Find at
least one opportunity today to bring joy to a joyless
situation.*

Journal for Digging Deeper:

Daily Sunshine In The Son