

THE YEAR OF SHARING OUR FAITH

Petaluma Christian Church
September 2009

30-Day Devotional

*Life Applications from the Bible:
A Positive Faith for a Negative World*



Sharing our Love of Jesus

**Petaluma Christian Church Devotionals
September, 2009**

We have written these devotionals so that we, as a congregation, will be encouraged as we journey together in God's Word. Our desire is that P.C.C. will be inspired to share our positive faith in Jesus Christ with our often negative world. We hope you are blessed by these Life Applications from the Bible during the month of September.

-Your Elders

Tuesday, September 1

James 1:2-8 “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.”

Have you ever gotten mad at God when life takes a wrong turn? Well maybe you haven't but know someone who has. Well then, we need a good dose of biblical therapy. So then here is a two-step program toward a positive, God honoring response to pain as written by Joe Stowell.

Step-one: Think straight about trouble. It's not only inevitable, it's indiscriminate. Trouble comes in all shapes and sizes. “Various trials” (James 1:2) affect our health, our careers, our relationships. Once we understand the facts we can begin appreciating their significant value in our lives.

Step-two: Trade resistance and resentment for receptivity and rejoicing. “Count it all joy” (v.2). The joy is not in the presence of pain but in the knowledge that God is using our pain to refine us and make us better, not bitter. God chooses what we go through; we chose how we go through it.

God does not always remove a trial from us, but he will help you to go through it. Then once we get through it, we need to praise God for his help. Going through trials makes us who we are as a person. It is good to think back about trials you have faced in your life and how God helped you through them. Then as your friends face trials in their lives you can encourage them. You can also use this as a witnessing tool for those who don't believe. You can share how God helped your through your trials in life.

Suggested Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the trials I have and will face in my life. I ask that you continue to refine me into the person you want me to be. Also help me to see opportunities to encourage and witness to other by sharing my trials and how you brought me through them. Amen

-E.B.

Wednesday, September 2

TIMELY TOOLS: THE DEPRAVITY OF HUMANITY

“There's something deep within us that is depraved. It's called our sin nature. That's why we can't clean up our act, can't say “no” to certain temptations. If we are going to have control over all this, it must come from outside ourselves.” - Charles Swindoll

Question: I'm confused about the "sin nature" that I often hear other Christians talking about. After I became a Christian, did I lose my sin nature? If not then what separates me as a believer from nonbelievers?

Answer: The Bible speaks of a believer's life before and after Christ as the "old self" while the "new self" represents a Christian's spiritual rebirth. However the apostle Paul teaches that the "old self was crucified" with Christ. (Romans 6:6) and yet still exists as something that we as believers must choose to set or lay aside.

- Ephesians 4:22 - We have two tendencies because the attributes of both sin and righteousness remain within us. And these two forces are at war with each other.
- Romans 7:15-25 - Christ has done away with our sinful nature.
- Romans 6:6 - This doesn't mean that our sinful nature no longer exists, but that it no longer has unrestrained control over us.

Live it!! Two choices regarding Human Depravity

1. We can choose to live as victims of sin (Romans 7:5).
2. We can choose to live in victory through Christ (Romans 5:21).

Words to Remember: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Suggested Prayer: Lord, give us power over our sin nature from the power of Christ directing our lives. -S.D.

Thursday, September 3

WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS, WORRY

Sometimes I get the feeling from our media that there's a serious effort underway to keep all of us anxious, deeply concerned, and always on the alert against — well, everything. Rather than a balanced exhortation to be careful, they seem to manufacture fear. We take the mix of 24/7 news, a proliferation of "experts," and a deluge of "the latest studies," and out comes an overdose of worry and fear.

Every day, we're told that educational standards are falling, the economy is in shambles, crime is rising, our food is dangerous, disease is killing us, predators are on the prowl in neighborhoods, our bodies are under assault from saturated fats, and we can't trust our bankers, accountants, or politicians. Weapons of mass destruction are out to get us, gas prices are rising, work is hard to get, and on top of it all, the poisoned environment is gearing up to offer a big time payback.

Now, I don't know about you, but when I'm constantly immersed in that panic, it doesn't bring me hope, expectation, joy, or comfort. Can we listen to a word from another century? Jesus said, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear" (Matthew 6:25). How on earth can we *not* worry when we have whole industries whose massive budgets

are dedicated to marketing worry? After all, it's a necessary condition of our modern economy to keep us restless, dissatisfied, and always seeking, wanting, striving for things, experiences, stuff, education, honors, entertainment, or whatever to pacify us.

We're distracted, busy, under demand, and more often than not, worn out or beaten down. So what can we do to combat these forces that deeply affect us? When I was a child, I was taught a basic discipline for walking or riding my bike on treacherous roads: Stop! Look! Listen!

Learning to stop is often the beginning point in our harassed lives. Simply stop and be still. Then, look. Look around, look within, evaluate, and discern. Next, listen. What do you hear, see, sense? The media's invasive power can be resisted by these simple steps that break the hold of intrusion and allow us to reestablish our focus (see Matthew 6:33). With a fresh resolve to live differently, listen carefully, and act intentionally, we get fresh perspectives on life.

Writing in a time of great pressure, real danger, and many struggles, Paul said to the Philippians: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, and with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6). What can we expect as the outcome? God's peace will guard our hearts and minds (Philippians 4:7). The Lord of history offers an alternative to worry: trust in Christ!

Suggested Prayer: Father, thank you for the peace that passes all understanding that you give me through faith in Jesus Christ. May my hurried and harried life undergo the transformation your Holy Spirit gives so that I may experience all the joy you have for me. And may my life reflect to others the peace that only you can give. Through Christ I pray, Amen. -B.L.

Friday, September 4

RELATIONSHIP OVER RELIGION

Romans 5:18-19 Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

Religion says that we must follow rules and laws. We sometimes feel separated from Christ by our failing to fulfill those rules and laws. But this is not the purpose of Religion and we need to get to the heart of faith and worship, and it is all about Christ.

Jesus just wants us to have a close relationship with Him. You ask, "How can I have a relationship with someone I cannot see or touch?" Have you ever talked with someone over the phone and felt as though you were right there with them? We worship a living God. We can have a personal connection. Do you have someone in your life that you like to just spend time with?

A true friendship does not require rules and guidelines. A true friendship requires time, attention, forgiveness, communication, openness, honesty, unselfishness---and most of all, love. Jesus wants more than just a relationship with us; He wants our love.

Why is this love relationship so important?

When Adam and Eve sinned, all of mankind was doomed to death. One sin brought down every human being who would ever be born. From that moment on, we would all be born of sin, and death would be our destination. One sin is all it took to separate us from God. When Jesus died for us, His one act of sacrifice on the cross was all it took to restore us back to God.

We had no choice in being born. We had no choice in the condemnation of sin that is within each one of us. But we serve a merciful God who by His grace has given us a choice. We have a choice to believe in His Son. We have a choice to accept His free gift of eternal life. We have choice for total and complete restoration back to our heavenly Father. We cannot change what happened through Adam, but Jesus changed the outcome that awaits each of us.

Spend some time today just *being* with Jesus. Talk to Him. Walk with Him. Sit at His feet. He will meet you no matter where you are. Stop working, stressing, trying, striving---just rest. Turn off the noise and listen. Think of Jesus as you would your best friend. He will help you get to know Him better. Pray to have the relationship with Jesus that He wants to have with you.

Now you can take that love to the world. Being grounded in Christ means you now have all those qualities of love, patience, attention etc. to pass on. This will give you opportunities to explain the source of the love and friendship you offer to others...Christ.

Let's pray: Dear Lord Jesus, I seek you today. I just want to talk with you Lord. I want to thank you first of all for your sacrifice. I can never repay you for your pain, but I can seek to know you Lord. I pray that through my seeking you that you would meet with me. Allow me the honor of loving you, trusting in you, communicating with you and have the relationship with you Lord that would honor you as my Lord and Savior. Please see my heart today Lord, hear my voice and know I am yours. In your name I pray, Amen. -D.R.

Saturday, September 5

"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." 1 John 4:10

Back in the day when I was driving my son and daughter to school to Santa Rosa, out of the blue I started wondering what makes them feel loved. I assumed it was when I would buy them something, or when I would make their favorite food, or when I let them have a friend over. Basically, I figured they felt most loved when I gave them what they wanted. I decided to ask them. "Hey kids, what makes you feel loved?"

They sat there quietly, thinking. Then they blurted out a surprising answer.

"THIS!"

"*This?*" I asked.

"Yeah, Dad. *This*. You being with us. You driving us to school and talking to us about our day. You telling us you'll be there when we get home. That makes us feel loved. Thanks, Dad, we love you, bye!" And they hopped out of the car.

This is love?

You mean I don't have to run out and buy something? Me being there for them is love? Even after I was harsh with my words yesterday prompting them to ask if I was mad about something. Still, *this is love?*

As I drove away, I wondered if God were to ask me what makes me feel loved, what would I say? Immediately my heart whispered, "Lord, *this is love*. You asking and caring. You being there. You keeping Your promises like You said You would."

This is love.

- A promise that is kept.
- A place that is certain.
- Someone who asks.
- Someone who listens.
- Someone who is present again and again.

We are loved. We don't have to wait for God to show it. He already has! He sent His Son so that we could know Him in an intimate relationship. Then promised He'd always be there for us, and He is. He is present and listening. Asking and caring. No matter what we are going through today, we can live in His love. And we can love from the overflow of being loved. We can know and rely on God's promises and presence, and be made complete in Him.

This is love.

Dear Lord, thank You that You first loved us. Remind us and embrace us and pour out on us Your perfect, complete and unfailing love today. As we think of those we love, and the ways we want to be loved, remind us that we are Yours and we are loved! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

-T.W.

Sunday, September 6

Philippians 1:9-10 "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ."

Have you ever skipped a stone across the surface of a smooth lake? If you have, then you would see that ripples would flow from the impact of the stone. Choices are that way as well. Every choice we make creates a ripple effect on our lives as well as on the lives of others. Choices we have made in life have determined where we are and what we are becoming. Choices reveal who we are. What we really want, love, and think show up in the choices we make.

With that in mind Paul urges us to make excellent choices that emanate from a heart fully committed to Jesus. Excellent choices are the proof of a life

that is committed to Jesus and His ways, and they have the ripple effect of filling our lives “with the fruit of righteousness.”

I have heard it said that our lives are not made by the dreams we dream but by the choices we make. So I encourage you to make excellent choices. There is no greater choice than to accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. However another excellent choice would be to share your faith with someone you know or have an encounter with. After all isn't that what Jesus commissioned us to do?

Suggested Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the fact that you chose to send your Son to the cross for my sin. That shows how much you wanted and loved me. Give me wisdom and opportunities to share you with others. I desire to make excellent choices that have an impact on expanding your kingdom for your glory. Amen. -E.B.

Monday, September 7 (Labor Day)

CAREER AND AMBITION?

Every man has a competitive nature, and Christian men are no different. As we strive to earn a living for ourselves and our families and to fulfill our ambitions, are we doing something that's contrary to God's law? Is ambition, especially in our career, unbiblical?

Jesus addressed the dilemma Christian men face today: "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Luke 16:13 NIV).

Let's face facts. Everything costs money, from the necessities of life to the luxuries we all enjoy. The way we get money is by working for it. Typically, the harder you work or the more hours you put in, the more money you make. If we're not extremely careful, our career can crowd God right out of our life. The slippery slope for many is the result of the need for money becoming an obsession that fuels ambition.

If you have children, you want to provide them with everything you can, from dental braces to a college education. In between are toys, clothing, computers, electronic gadgets, vacations, and everything else that makes life more enjoyable.

So where do we draw the line with our ambition? Christ's words seem pretty clear. Must we choose between God and career? Can we have both?

All God, All the Time

The answer seems to be prioritization. If we get our priorities straight we will not replace God with ambition. If you're living the life of a Christian, you never truly separate God and work. Just because you're on the clock doesn't mean you can't pray, praise and worship God throughout the day. We do this to acknowledge that God is the true master in our life, not our job or boss.

If the people around you at work see that you as a Christian who can be successful, they will be drawn to you. “Hey, how do you stay so positive at work when the pressures on?” What a great opportunity to say, “I just have faith that it will all work out, because God is in charge.”

The person who remembers God throughout the work day is not only more productive, but they also enjoy their work more since they put it into an “eternal” context. Serving coworkers and customers becomes an extension of being a follower of Christ. Work is not a nuisance but rather a privilege.

In this way, your focus is on serving God and the ambition is a byproduct of your focus. Serve the one Master of our life and show yourself to be a woman or man of God. Use your job to serve the Lord. Then Christ will be served first and your boss second. In other words, do well for God and your boss will think it’s all about him. In this way you will be able to keep ambition and career in proper balance.

Let’s Pray: Dear God, we love you and are thankful for Christ’s lesson for us. Please help me today to keep myself focused on you Lord. I need my daily bread, but I pray that my work be God honoring, showing myself to be a servant to others as you have called me to be. May you be glorified by my actions today and may I, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit serve you well. In Christ’s name I pray, Amen. -D.R.

Tuesday, September 8

SINGLE IN A COUPLED WORLD

Sometimes single people (whether it’s from having never been married or from losing their partner) feel like a fraction. The world tends to see them as half, and they often feel like a third wheel when around couples.

While the Bible talks about marriage as a gift from God, nowhere does it say marriage is a requirement for a happy, godly life. Yet single Christians are often treated as “works in progress,” not able to contribute significantly to God’s kingdom. What a mistake!

The Apostle Paul was single (and often times in prison to boot!), but rather than mope about his circumstances, he got in contact with people who cared about him. That’s why we have so many rich letters that he penned while in jail. He also worked to encourage others who were going through difficult times.

Paul had plenty of reasons to be unhappy, but instead he looked for reasons to thank God. He chose honorable actions when many people would have expected him to act dishonorably. He refused the temptations that spring from loneliness. He was so caring that people understood God’s love simply by being around him. (You can find all this in Philippians chapter 1).

When the gifts and contributions of singles are ignored, we all lose out on God’s amazing wisdom in using all kinds of people — young, old, wise, foolish, married, and single – to reach out to the world. God uses our life situations to His full advantage. So even when we don’t understand why our life is the way it

is, we can be assured that God will give us the energy and freedom to soar — as if on eagles’ wings. It’s what He’s promised in Isaiah 40:31: “But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

Trusting in God's wisdom is easier said than done. But as we employ the gifts God has given us, we’ll discover God uses each of us in a unique way — no matter what our marital status.

Suggested Prayer: Father, help me not to use the circumstances in my life – (whether I’m single or married) – to be an excuse to sin. Instead, may my life display the purity of Christ to all around. And may I seek always to bring you glory with my life. Through Jesus Christ my Lord, Amen.

-B.L.

Wednesday, September 9

OUR LIVES BEFORE AND AFTER CHRIST

Before

1. Dead in transgressions
2. Objects of wrath
3. Followed the ways of the world.
4. God’s enemies
5. Enslaved to Satan
6. Followed our evil thoughts and desires

After

1. Made alive with Christ
2. Shown God’s mercy, given salvation
3. Stand for Christ and truth
4. God’s children
5. Free in Christ to love and serve and sit with him
6. Raised with Christ to glory

The world is after us. It desires to send us on a trip headed for destruction. God on the other hand, desires as He says in (Jeremiah 29:11) “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.”

If we desire a hope and a future planned by God, we must leave the past life before Christ behind and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal all the hopes and future plans God has for us.

Suggested Prayer: Thank you so much Father for the new plans you have for us. Plans to prosper us, giving us hope and a future with you.

-S.D.

Thursday, September 10

“But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

Isaiah 40:31

I remember it so well – the night I lost all hope. I had been hoping that my son was not lying to me. While I was 99% sure he was, I still clung to the 1% chance he was telling the truth. My heart simply refused to give up that final thread of hope.

As a condition of living in our home again, we asked that our 19-year old son attend church with us and get a job. We wanted him back home; his other living choice was not a good one. But we needed to establish boundaries, offering a safe place to live without tolerating or enabling his destructive behavior. We wanted to start rebuilding the trust we had lost.

One night I just had to know if he was living up to his commitment. I drove to the place where worked and my fears were confirmed: he was nowhere to be found. I went right home and waited. When he came home I asked about his job. He lied and said things were fine. It wasn't until I called his employer only to find out he was fired.

Hope left me and discouragement came quickly to replace it. I couldn't even confront him – at least not yet. I needed time to wrestle with the loss of the 1% of hope. It was just a tiny bit of hope. That last 1% of hope is what I held onto the tightest. I was so angry and crushed. But then, God spoke. He chose a friend to speak His Words to me the very next day. She had no clue what was happening with our son. She just prayed what God prompted her -- for me to have HOPE! She emailed me her prayer:

“Father, You are the God of all hope. Your Word tells us that those who hope in You will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, and they will walk and not be faint.

Reading her prayer, it suddenly became clear to me. My hope had been in my son and in his job. The hope I had lost – that 1% I'd been clinging to – was *human* hope. That kind of hope is in limited quantity, and when it runs out, you are left drained, discouraged, disappointed and ...hopeless! *God's* hope renews and refreshes. It empowers, uplifts, and strengthens. Unlike human hope, God's hope does not disappoint! There is an unlimited supply of God's hope.

Suggested Prayer: God, thank you for the hope we have in you and for teaching me not to rely on my human hope. Your hope is endless and unlimited and I praise you God. Amen

-T.W.

Friday, September 11

DISASTERS

A terrible thing happened 8 years ago. Islamic terrorists crashed several jet planes into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and a field in Pennsylvania. We were stunned as a nation that we were unable to keep this kind of hatred away from our borders.

When I was a small child singing of the God who had the whole world in his hands, it filled me with awe. The whole world, after all, was a big place. As I grew older, the world as I understood it grew as well. But unfortunately, my awe for the One who held it all in his hands did not always grow along with it. In fact, as the world grew increasingly bigger, so my anxiousness increased. In the shadows cast by a looming globe, God's hands seemed somehow smaller. I did not see the expanding world as an opportunity for expanded faith.

At times, this is still the case for me. While the need for God's hands is heightened with news of each developing war or suffering community from disaster, this is usually not the first analysis that comes to mind. In times of uncertainty, the world begins to seem much more than a handful-for me and perhaps even for God.

An editorialist for The Atlantic Journal expresses similar sentiments: The world is too big for us. Too much is going on, too many crimes, too much violence and excitement. Try as you will, you get behind in the race in spite of yourself. It's an incessant strain to keep pace...and still, you lose ground. Science empties its discoveries on you so fast that you stagger beneath them in hopeless bewilderment. The political world is news seen so rapidly you are out of breath trying to keep pace... Everything is high pressure. Human nature cannot endure much more.

The author's words express the difficulty of living in a world marked by modern momentum, where advances in media and the influence of globalization keep us hyper-informed but exhausted by the sheer number of newsworthy events. "The whole world" is a different place today than it was when I was a child in awe of God's embrace.

Or maybe it's not that different at all. Ironically, this editorial was first published on June 16th, 1833.

It is perhaps much easier to sing of a world that is in God's hands when the world is calm and at rest. But that is not the world into which Christ came, nor the world that God carefully holds in his hands. "In this world you will have trouble," Jesus told his disciples. "But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

No matter what burden we find ourselves carrying, no matter what shape the world looms in our minds, God is not far off. Whether we grow more anxious with each newscast or tremble in awe at the immensity of all that is around us, this is our Father's world. His hand guides us; his right hand holds us fast.

John's Gospel further demonstrates the capable-and surprising-hands of Christ: "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that

he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet" (John 13:3-5). Knowing all things were in his reach and under his authority, Jesus bowed to serve, and accordingly touched the masses.

Suggested Prayer: Father, when I am distraught over what I see in the world around me, help me to remember that You are not. You still have the whole world in Your hands, and through Your people, You continue to serve the needs of the world. Help me to be responsive to Your touch on my life, so I can serve like Jesus. In His name we pray, Amen. -B.L.

Saturday, September 12

IS IT REALLY "DIRTY FILTHY MONEY?"

1 Timothy 6:10 – "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

1. How does this verse define the love of money? What happens when people are too eager for money?

This is one of the most misquoted verses of the Bible. This verse does not say that money is evil, nor does it say that money is the root of all evil. It says that the **love of money is the root of all kinds of evil**. The **love** of money! The warning is clear in this verse -- those who are too eager for money will have problems in their lives. They may become so obsessed with their finances that they wander from the faith -- their job or their investments become their commitment instead of their faith. Some will pierce themselves with grief -- when we are seeking material possessions, we will never be satisfied. We will always want more things that are bigger and better. Nowhere does the Bible tell us not to earn a living, but it does warn us against the danger of being obsessed with money.

Mark 12:41-44 - Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything--all she had to live on."

Why do you think the rich people gave so much? What was their motivation? Have you ever had wrong Motivations when it comes to giving to God? It is easy to condemn the rich for having the wrong motives, but believe it or not the poor can be just as wrong in the way they give to God. People with

less to give can also give in a way that dishonors God if they give for the wrong reason too.

There is no piety in poverty!

Jesus is pointing out that the widow gave her all even though she was living in poverty. I have noticed that sometimes the most generous people are the ones who have more? I believe God wants us to be give from the heart with proper motives. God wants us to make Him a priority in all areas of our life, whether we are financially ok, poor, rich or whatever.

Luke 16:13-15 - "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

We Americans are the same as the Pharisees -- we try to justify ourselves in the eyes of men. It is amazing how many people judge their worth and the worth of others by how much money they earn or what car they drive or what home they live in. But these are not God's values. God's priorities are entirely different from ours. Jesus said, "What is highly valued in men is detestable in Gods sight."

So is the money dirty and filthy? No. Christ understood that there was a need for money. Christ taught lessons to make us think about where our heart is and where priorities are. If you seek riches, you fail the Lord. But if you seek Christ first and you are financially blessed, thank God for your blessing.

Just remember what God is looking at is what you do with your blessing and what you hold dear in your heart. Do you share it? Are you obedient with your tithing? Are you giving to God so others might be able to come to Christ?

If the opportunity to help someone arises, we need to show Christ's love to them by helping. And when they say "thank you", tell them, "Don't thank me, Christ asked me to help you." That might give you the chance to share something far more valuable than money with them.

Let's pray: Amazing Father in heaven, thank you for the food on my table. Thank you for the freedom and blessings of my life. Thank you for loving me and providing a way for me to be with You forever. May Christ be honored by whatever you provide me financially. May my focus be on You all the days of my life. And may I use your blessings to show others the love of Christ, giving all credit to Him that is the real source of the most valuable of gifts. AMEN

-D.R.

Sunday, September 13

HOW TO PRAY FOR OTHER CHRISTIANS

Question: How many people in our lives could be touched by God if we prayed this way:

- First: Be thankful for their faith and changed lives. Colossians 1:3
- Second: Ask God to help them to know what he wants them to do. Colossians 1:9
- Third: Ask God to give them deep spiritual understanding. Colossians 1:9
- Fourth: Ask God to help them live for Him. Colossians 1:10
- Fifth: Ask God to give them more knowledge of Himself. Colossians 1:9, 10
- Sixth: Ask God to give them strength for endurance. Colossians 1:11
- Seventh: Ask God to fill them with joy, strength and thankfulness. Colossians 1:12

Because of our love for Christ and one another, Christians can have an impact that goes far beyond their neighborhoods and communities, Christian love and prayer that comes from the Holy Spirit. Love is the by-product of our new life in Christ to be shared with brother and sisters in the Lord and the lost world. Christians have no excuse for not loving and praying for each other and the world. Christian love and prayer is a decision to act in the best interest of others.

Suggested Prayer: Lord, help us to bear fruit for you. -S.D.

Monday, September 14

Mark 4:35-41 "That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

They were terrified and asked each other, "who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

In his book *The Perfect Storm*, author Sebastain Junger reports astonishing facts about the power of a hurricane: "A mature hurricane is by far the most powerful event on earth; the combined nuclear arsenals of the United States and the former Soviet Union don't contain enough energy to keep a hurricane going for one day. A typical hurricane....could provide all the electric power needed by the United States for 3 or 4 years."

Sea travelers who have experienced a severe storm have one emotion in common- fear. The above passage records a gale that threatened the boat carrying Jesus and His disciples on the Sea of Galilee. The disciples were afraid so they awakened Jesus. He calmly rebuked the wind and sea by saying, "Peace, be still" like a parent would say hush to quiet an agitated child. Immediately, the gale stopped and the water became inexplicably calm.

Do you ever feel as if your life's circumstances are a mighty storm crashing down on you? Then you need to look to Jesus Christ, who has authority over heaven and earth. He will give you the strength to survive the storm until He ultimately calms it. When we trust the power of God, His peace keeps us from panic. Then as God brings peace either to you or your circumstances you can share that with others in your life. We need to share with our friends why we react differently (hopefully) to storms/problems that we face in life with God's help. One of the best ways to share your faith is to share how it has personally changed your life in practical ways and in facing life's challenges.

Suggested Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank you for being more powerful than any problems I face in life. I pray that my faith in you will grow stronger, so that I may have peace as I face challenges in life. I also pray that how I react to difficult times may bring glory and honor to your name. Amen. EB

Tuesday, September 15

We read in Proverbs 23:4: *Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint!*

This is one verse I really need to take to heart. First, please notice that this verse does not say don't work. And it does not say don't work hard. It says don't overwork. In this economy you might even say "I'm lucky to have a job!"

That may be true...but read on.

There are some people in God's family who are not led, they are driven. They are so focused on reaching their goals and achieving whatever level of success they are going after, that they are making a lot of sacrifices along the way.

But they are making the wrong sacrifices. They are sacrificing their marriage and they are sacrificing their relationship with their kids. Why? Because they overwork. And, friend, that is not healthy even if it's out of economic necessity. You may need to drive a less expensive car or live in a less expensive house in order to achieve balance. God can direct you.

In fact, I would say that overworking is as unhealthy as not working. You miss out on the grand things in life, the important things in life. With some people, even their relationship with God gets squeezed out because they overwork.

You need to be motivated; you need to work hard; but you don't want to overdo it to the point that you don't have time for your children. You don't want to

work so hard that you don't have time for your spouse. And you don't want to overwork that you don't have time for God.

You are missing life if you are just after possessions, and you are sacrificing the more important things along the way.

How does your work life measure up today? Are you overworking at the expense of your marriage, your family, and your relationship with God? If so, determine today to get your life back in balance.

Overworking is overrated!

Dear Lord, help me to find balance in my work life so that I will not only enjoy the fruits of my labor, but more so the bounty of your blessings in my marriage, my family and especially with you, God. Amen
-T.W.

Wednesday, September 16

HOW SHOULD I HANDLE IT WHEN I FEEL REJECTED OR EXCLUDED BECAUSE OF MY FAITH?

Being rejected hurts. You may turn that pain outward and lash out at the people who reject you, but this will almost always make matters worse. Or you might turn inward with fretful questions such as, *What's wrong with me?*

1 Peter 4:12-19 - Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

It doesn't hurt to do a little soul-searching after rejection. Ask questions like: Have I been insensitive or offensive in something I said? Did I fail to listen? Does my manner suggest coldness, disinterest or even worse, superiority? We could all improve on our sensitivity to others, and these questions may alert us to our shortcomings—and help us correct them.

But sometimes rejection has nothing at all to do with personal faults. You may be rejected simply because of your Christian faith. In more restrictive societies, Christians could expect social rejection, job discrimination, political persecution, and even death. Christians in all eras have suffered (and are still suffering), so you may occasionally join their ranks.

In America we have it easy! We can worship, gather and share our faith without fear of being put to death as those who came before us had to face. But it

can be difficult to deal with the social rejection or separation that can occur at work or even in our social groups. So what do we do? Stop sharing Christ so we don't bother anyone?

We have a duty to share our Lord when we can. Remember to be respectful of those around us. Remember to allow them to digest the message. Not many will drop to their knees and accept Christ on the spot. Many more will tell you to shut up. This was the case in the beginning and it is now.

Even Christ, being God was rejected. So who are we to complain, right? Peter's words should give us a quiet confidence. Do your part to share the Lord when you have an opportunity. But allow God to work on their hearts. Peter's words can help you endure with confidence.

Let's pray: Dear God I love you. I ask you today to help me deliver an example of what being a Christian looks like. I ask you to help me reflect the love of Christ in such a way that He would be glorified. But If the message is rejected, give me the confidence to know, You are in charge here and You and only You will decide who will be there with You in glory.

If I am rejected fill me with the satisfaction that comes from knowing I have stood up for my savior and it is He who I seek to have a relationship with. In the name of the one and only Christ, Amen -D.R.

Thursday, September 17

THE BATTLE FOR THE MIND

I'm firmly convinced that our doctrine affects our lifestyle. What we believe at any moment in time determines what we do. That's one of the reasons John Stott warns us about the dangers of media. He says, "The morally 'disordering' influence of television is more subtle and insidious than direct incitement. What happens to all of us, unless our powers of moral judgment are acute and alert, is that our understanding of what is 'normal' begins to be modified. Under the impression that 'everybody does it', and that nobody nowadays believes much in God or in absolutes of truth and goodness, our defenses are lowered and our values imperceptibly altered. We begin to assume that physical violence (when we are provoked), sexual promiscuity (when we are aroused) and extravagant consumer expenditure (when we are tempted) are the accepted norms of western society at the end of the twentieth century. We have been conned."

The secret of holy living is in "knowing" (Romans 6:6) that our old self was crucified with Christ. It is in "knowing" (Romans 6:3) that baptism into Christ is baptism into his death and resurrection. It is in "reckoning" – intellectually realizing (Romans 6:11), that in Christ we have died to sin and we live to God. We are to know these things, to meditate on them, to realize that they are true and believe them. Our minds are so to grasp the fact and the significance of our death and resurrection with Christ, that a return to the old life is unthinkable. A born-again Christian should no more think of going back to the old life than an

adult to his childhood, a married man to his bachelorhood, or a discharged prisoner to his prison cell.

It's not enough to know what we should be. We must go further and set our minds upon it. The battle is nearly always won in the mind. It is by the renewal of our mind that our character and behavior become transformed. So Scripture calls us again and again to mental discipline in this respect. "Whatever is true," it says, "whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Philippians 4:8).

Again, "If... you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:1-2).

And again, "those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:5-6).

Self-control is primarily mind-control. What we sow in our minds we reap in our actions.

Suggested Prayer: Heavenly Father, I don't want to "believe" in a way that it doesn't affect the way I live. As I learn more about my salvation in Jesus Christ, may holiness be my desire. I want to share the love of Jesus with others with nothing holding me back."
-B.L.

Friday, September 18

Tools for Life

God's word is indeed the greatest tool provided for us to use in our walk of faith. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."

Checklist for encouragers: The command to encourage is given again and again throughout the Bible. We need to build each other up. Today point out to someone a positive quality you appreciate in him or her.

1 Thessalonians 5:13 prescribes for us to live in peace. Therefore we should search for ways to get along with one another.

1 Thessalonians 5:14 instructs us to warn the idle. Challenge someone to join you in a project. Encourage the timid, encourage someone who is timid by reminding them of God's promises.

1 Thessalonians 5:15 tells us to resist revenge. Instead of planning to get even with someone who mistreats you, do good to them.

1 Thessalonians 5:16 reminds us to be joyful. Remember that even in the midst of turmoil, God is in control.

1 Thessalonians 5:19 says, "Do not put out the Spirit's fire." Cooperate with the Holy Spirit the next time he prompts you to participate in an event that is good for God. Which also means it is good for you.

1Thessalonians 5:22, "Avoid every kind of evil." Avoid situations where you will be drawn into temptation.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 tells us to count on God's constant help. We need to realize that the circumstances of our Christian lives are to be lived not in our own strength but in the strength of God's power - the Holy Spirit.

Suggested Prayer: God we praise you and thank you for the power of your Holy Spirit. Enable each us by your word to follow your Holy word so that we will have good success for you in our walk of faith. Thank you in advance as we trust and follow Jesus Christ, Amen
-S.D.

Saturday, September 19

I'M SUCH A WORRYWART! HOW CAN I KEEP FROM OBSESSING OVER MY KIDS?

Matthew 6:25 - "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?"

Most of us have heard the words of Mathew and said..."That is so true." Yet, we worry ourselves in many cases, literally to death. How can this be? We know it is wrong and almost useless to worry about work, money, family and all that.

But when it comes to our children we can barely contain our concerns. I learned from the best of the worriers, my Mother. She blessed me in many ways, but her lessons on worry were less than healthy. And, while you could talk Mom down from her "wall of worry" on most things, when it came to her children, she could not control herself.

I heard her say, "I constantly worry about my kids, their kids and all the family. Sometimes I lie awake at night thinking about all the things that could go wrong or harm them. Even praying about my concerns doesn't seem to ease my mind."

I think all of us with children have done this. I have experienced similar feelings. I not only worried about my children's physical safety, but also about their spiritual safety in the midst of such an ungodly culture. God taught me an important lesson that applies to both our fears.

I have been at our monthly Prayer Meetings and, along with many others, have asked for prayer for my children. I wanted prayer for God to protect my children because I was growing increasingly afraid for them, and I felt out of control. The older my children become, the more I feel them slip from my protective grasp.

Then this passage comes to mind; "**I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day" (2 Timothy 1:12).**

Immediately I understood what the Lord was telling me. I never could protect my kids adequately, only He could. It was then that I remembered the last

thing that my Mother had told me in her lesson on worry. She said that when all else failed, she handed us over to God and only then she felt relieved.

All I could do, and ultimately all I needed to do, was commit them into God's hands and then trust in Him. Good thing I know that God's **more** than able to take care of my children. You know that, too. Now hand your kids over into the only hands in which they'll truly be safe.

Do you have friends who could use this message? What a great chance to share Christ. Next time you find yourself listening to another person's worries and troubles, share this message with them. Tell them to put their worries in the hands of God.

Tell them to: "Relax, do their best and trust God with the rest!"

Let's pray: My Lord and Savior, what relief I have in your supremacy and providence over all life. Thank you for the wisdom of your word and thank you for coming and teaching us about worry. Help me now to put your words into practice.

Thank you for taking over where I am so helpless. I will put my faith and trust in Your plan for all of us.

And when it comes to my children, I will dedicate them to you. I appreciate your blessings upon them. Thank you for taking them into your arms. Keep them safe Lord and when bad things come, keep them strong in You so that they will endure. Thank you Father for being there for all of us, Amen

-D.R.

Sunday, September 20

Salvation through faith or religion by self effort

By faith we trust in Christ with all our heart and mind. Then live to please God. By self effort we try to please God by our own good deeds.

By faith we confess, submit and commit ourselves to Christ control. By religion and self effort we practice diligent service, discipline and obedience in hope of reward.

Salvation by faith is the Holy Spirit in us that helps us do good work for Christ's kingdom.

Religion by self effort we purpose good honest effort through self determination.

Salvation by faith Christ in me; and me in Christ.

Self effort of religion, self motivation, self control.

Salvation by faith is Joy, thankfulness, love, guidance, service forgiveness.

Religion by self effort results in chronic guilt, apathy, depression, failure, constant desire for approval.

Salvation by faith in Christ sounds too easy for many people. They would rather think that they have done something to save themselves. Their religion becomes one of self effort that leads either to disappointment or pride: but finally

to eternal death. Christ's simple way is the only way, and it alone leads to eternal life. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Lord we pray: make our salvation pure, holy, by the means of being joined with Him in his death at the cross and resurrection. Our bondage to sin died at the cross. Our new life begins with Christ in each of us. Amen -S.D.

Monday, September 21 (Autumn Begins)

GETTING OLDER AND BETTER

As Autumn begins today, I'm reminded that all of us are getting older. If you're not getting any older, it's because you're already dead. But sometimes as people age, they begin to feel useless. As their ailments increase and their abilities decrease, they go into retirement mode. But there's no retirement plan in the Bible for God's servants.

Myrtie Howell was a devoted Christian woman who had lived a hard life. Her family was very poor. When she was 10, she quit school and went to work in a steel mill for 10 cents a day. She married at age 17; then in early 1940, her husband was killed in an accident. She lost her home and went back to work to support herself and her three children.

Years later, her declining health forced her to move into a high-rise nursing home. A few weeks later, her youngest son died, and that's when she fell into a depression. She said, "Lord, what more can I do for you? I've lost everything that ever meant something to me, and now I'm stuck in this dark, dreary room. I have nothing left to live for! I want to die! I've had enough of this prison. Take me home."

Then God spoke to her. She heard Him say, "I'm not through with you yet, Myrtie. Write to prisoners."

So she wrote a letter and sent it to the Atlanta Penitentiary. This is what the letter said: "Dear inmate, I am a grandmother who loves you and cares for you. I am willing to be a friend. If you'd like to hear from me, write me. I will answer every letter you write. A Christian friend, Grandmother Howell."

The letter was given to the prison chaplain and he gave her the names of eight prisoners to whom she could write. Prison Fellowship gave her some more names. Soon, she was corresponding with up to 40 inmates a day. She became a one-woman ministry reaching into prisons across America. She said, "I thought my life was over, but these past few years have been the most fulfilling years of my life."

Myrtie Howell became a great evangelist for God out of a one-room apartment. No matter where we live or what our situation is like, God can still do wonderful things through our lives. As long as our heart is still beating and the blood is pumping, Jesus isn't through with us yet.

Suggested Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you that by the power of your Spirit, my usefulness isn't limited by my age. Help me to find creative ways to share your love with others. -B.L.

Tuesday, September 22

I'M STRUGGLING WITH DEPRESSION AND I FEEL SO ALONE. DOES GOD REALLY CARE?

God is with you even in the darkest night.

Psalm 16:7–9

I will praise the LORD, who counsels me;
even at night my heart instructs me.

I have set the LORD always before me.

Because he is at my right hand,
I will not be shaken.

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest secure,

Many people today struggle with depression. It can range from a few minutes to many days of an empty feeling that literally cripples the person's ability to see any joy in life at all. Some say it is a chemical problem that some people are born with. Others say there is a societal problem that is increasing the number of people who suffer from depression. Depression is real and can be the result of mental illness. But for this discussion I am referring to the all too common form of depression that seems to affect nearly everyone.

In a recent article about anti-depressants, it was noted that the recession has only added to the amount of people seeking help for depression and other severe mental issues. In fact anti-depressants are now the most commonly prescribed medication in the US! That means more people are taking anti-depressants than birth control, allergy pills and even Viagra!

The Church talks about sharing Christ, but how do I do that when I am depressed? How can I be a good ambassador for God when I am down and feeling so low?

So what is depressing everyone so much? What is this thing called depression? Imagine that you're in a place so dark that you can't see even the faintest trace of light. You don't know where you are, and you're afraid to reach out because you don't know what's lurking around you. If you suffer with depression, that may be how you feel much of the time—and that's frightening. You wonder if the darkness will ever go away, if you'll ever see and feel the light of the sun on your face again. Nothing in your life feels stable, except for the continuing blackness around you.

Sounds like separation from God. Maybe the world just needs to know they are not alone. But the world says “do your own thing” or “Be your own person.” Or “It's all about me!” That is a very lonely place to be. The world, at the urging of the evil one, tries to distract you from God and people search for something to replace their emptiness. Maybe a pill will help?

God says not to fear because he is always with you. That means that even in the dark times, when you can't see the light at the end of the tunnel, He is walking with you, holding your hand securely in His. And even when you don't know where you're going, He's gently leading you into healing and wholeness. That's why the Bible says you can still rejoice (which is different from being joyful—who can be filled with joy when they're depressed?) in God's goodness, and "rest in hope."

Good Words to Remember: "I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand I shall not be moved" (Psalm 16:8)

Let's pray: Dear God, I confess there are times when I feel down and depressed. I don't know why, because I know I have You in my life and I am never alone. Thank You for being there with me as I go through my day. Help me to weather a moment of depression by stopping to bask in the love of Christ. Today I pray for the lost, for they do not have you to help them. Let them turn away from the drugs and turn to you for comfort. Lord may the lost come to know the joy of having a loving relationship with You. I ask these things, dear God, in the name of your son, Jesus Christ. -D.R.

Wednesday, September 23

"As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Matthew 24:3.

Matthew 24 looks at some of the things people worry about today that are going on in our world—the economy, your job, your marriage, your family, earthquakes, famine, pestilence, war, and rumors of war.

Now, it is easy to be concerned about these things, but the above passage—Matthew 24: 3—tells us why we should not worry.

Jesus was answering the question about the signs of His return, and what will point to the end of the age. That is why He said, "When you see these things begin to come to pass, it is not time to start worrying." It is time to lift up your head because He is coming soon! Hallelujah!

Think about it. When you open up the paper today and read about the things happening in the Middle East, it seems like Bible prophecy is being fulfilled almost on a weekly basis. What a time we are living in!

Folks, Christ is going to return, and from the way things are shaping up, it is not far off at all. I want to live like He is coming back today, and I want to plan and work like He won't be back for a hundred years...but it could be any day.

Jesus is coming soon. Are you ready to meet Him? Think about it. Are you living in a way that you know when Jesus Christ comes, you won't be ashamed at His coming?

Dear Lord, I pray I will be able to look up with a joyful face and heart and say, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!" Amen.

-T.W.

Thursday, September 24

Isaiah 53: 3-6 "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

God has many names such as "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). All these names/attributes of God help us at different times in our lives. But for those that are grieving we should look at Isaiah 53: "He isa man of sorrow and acquainted with grief....surely He has borne our grief and carried our sorrows...And by His strips we are healed" (3-5). So we can take comfort in knowing that God knows our pain and feels our hurts.

We are also reminded in Psalm 147:3 "The Lord heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." So I want to remind those that may be hurting that: Jesus came to save us, help us, and to heal us. He doesn't just want to know and feel your hurt and leave you there. He wants to help you through those hurtful and difficult times. Then once God has helped you deal with the things that hurt us and you healed you, you need to share that with others. By sharing how God has helped you in dealing with pain in your life, you can encourage other believers and witness to non- believers.

Suggested Prayer: Loving Heavenly Father, I thank you that you know and feel all our hurts and pains. I pray that you help me to draw closer to you as I grow through those difficult times. I also ask that as you help me to give the glory to you as you walk me through those tough times. Amen.

-E.B.

Friday, September 25

Salvation Freeway

Romans 3:23 Everyone has sinned.

Romans 6:23 The penalty for our sin is death.

Romans 5:8 Jesus Christ died for our sins.

Romans 10:8-10 To be forgiven for our sin we must believe and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone.

Tools for salvation are simple. Have you ever been asked, "How do I become a Christian?" Salvation is as close as your own mouth and heart. People think it must be a complicated process. But it is not.

If we believe in our hearts and say with our mouths that Christ is risen Lord, we will be saved.

Suggested Prayer: Father God we praise and thank you for drawing us to you. We pray Lord; please use us your children to spread the awesome news of Jesus' Christ salvation message. May we be used by you to plant the seeds of salvation throughout the world. Amen -S.D.

Saturday, September 26

CELEBRATE THE YEARS

Today, Kim and I celebrate our 28th anniversary! When I look back at our wedding pictures, I can't believe how young we were (I was 20; Kim was 19). My, oh my! And we had our struggles, be sure of that. Sometimes, we still do!

But I thank God for His grace in preserving our marriage and in helping us keep our covenant vows to each other.

"For the first time in its history, Western civilization is confronted with the need to define the meaning of the terms 'marriage' and 'family' writes author Andreas J. Kostenberger. And it's true. What until now has been considered a 'normal' family, made up of a father, a mother and a number of children, has in recent years increasingly begun to be viewed as one among several options, which can no longer claim to be the only, or even superior form of ordering human relationships.

So let's say you're having a conversation with a non-Believing friend or a co-worker, and you want to defend the traditional Christian view of marriage. You're prepared to appeal to Scripture — to talk about how God made man and woman, how He instituted marriage. But your argument falls flat. Especially since your friend doesn't believe there is a God in the first place, or believe the Bible.

Which is why sometimes the best arguments we Christians can make are prudential ones—those that appeal to common sense and the common good.

So the next time you talk about the importance of traditional marriage with a non-believer, be ready to cite the July 13th, 2009 cover story from *Time* magazine.

In her article, "Why Marriage Matters," Caitlin Flanagan provides a powerful, prudential defense of traditional marriage. Reflecting on the painfully public infidelities of Governor Sanford, Senator Ensign, and others, Flanagan laments the state of marriage in America and shows why its deterioration should concern us all. She writes, "There is no other single force causing as much

measurable hardship and misery in this country as the collapse of marriage." That collapse "hurts children, it reduces mothers' financial security, and it has landed with particular devastation on those who can bear it the least: the nation's underclass." And Flanagan isn't shy about showing how marriage benefits children. She writes, "On every single significant outcome related to short-term well-being and long-term success, children from intact, two-parent families outperform those from single-parent households."

She also believes that "few things hamper a child as much as not having a father at home." And the voices corroborating this come from unlikely allies. Flanagan cites one feminist, Maria Kefalas, who confessed, "Women always tell me, 'I can be a mother and a father to a child,' but it's not true. The mom may not need that man, but her children still do."

Another study, by Princeton sociologist and single mother Sara McLanahan, shows that "children who grow up in a household with only one biological parent are worse off, on average, than children who grow up in a household with both of their biological parents, regardless of the parents' race or educational backgrounds."

Flanagan also challenges her readers by asking what is the fundamental purpose of marriage. If it's "simply an institution" to make us happy, then she writes, we "might as well hold the wake" for traditional marriage right now.

If, however, marriage is "an institution that still hews to its old intention and function," that is, "to raise the next generation, to protect and teach it, to instill in it the habits of conduct and character that will ensure the generation's safe passage into adulthood"—well, that's something worth defending and sacrificing for.

What seems like a juggernaut for gay "marriage" is aimed at us. This is a good time for us to give good, prudential arguments to our friends, neighbors, and churches. And don't let up or accept the inevitability. Keep on fighting—truth is on our side.

Suggested Prayer: Help me Lord to defend marriage not only by the way I speak about it, but also in the way I hold your design in high regard. And if I am married Lord, help my marriage to reflect the love You have for the church, and the church has for You (Ephesians 5:25-33). In Jesus' name, Amen.

-B.L.

Sunday, September 27

I HAVEN'T GOT THE TIME FOR _____!
(You finish the line.)

How can I balance the competing demands of home and work?

Exodus 23:10-13 - "For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then

the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what they leave. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.

"Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in your household, and the alien as well, may be refreshed.

"Be careful to do everything I have said to you. Do not invoke the names of other gods; do not let them be heard on your lips."

Phones, beepers, fax machines, e-mail—these days, work follows you home! There's always one more project, one more phone call, one more important contact to make. But work isn't all there is to life. We all try to balance out work with the rest of life: exercise, housework, grocery shopping, and laundry. And those with families have an even more complicated juggling act, combining diapers, Little League, homework, and special nights out with all those other responsibilities.

With all this technology, Christians have never had more ways to share the Lord with others. Yet who's got time? I have a hard time just trying to justify taking a day off to picnic with the kids, soak in a bubble bath, or have a date with my spouse?

It's helpful to know that both work and "free time" are important to God. In his laws, God affirmed the importance of work to the Israelites. As a matter of fact, he told them to work six days every week! But that's not all. One of God's sacred decrees was that his people take every seventh day off to rest, celebrate, and relax. As a matter of fact, rest is so important to God that he even ordered the Israelites to give their animals and fields time off. Today's culture may push you to work until you drop, but that isn't God's command. In Exodus 23, he says that work, worship, and family recreation are all important to him—and that you must not neglect them.

Let's pray: Dear Lord thank you for all the work you provide me. I am blessed to serve your kingdom and know that I have much work to do for You. But there are times when I grow weary and need to rest. Thank you dear Father for providing me with time to be with you in prayer, time to be with my Church family, time to be my loved ones and time to be with myself. I ask you to help me slow down enough to share you with others too.

Dear God. send the Holy Spirit to help me slow down and smell you're your beautiful flowers and savor the moments of calm and relaxation so that I might be refreshed and better able to serve You. I thank you for your blessings in the name of the one true Christ, Amen

-D.R.

Monday, September 28

Hebrews 13:5-6 - Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

I know I'm not supposed to worry but sometimes I get a little concerned about things. It could be finances, health, relationships or the future and what it holds. The unknown can be overwhelming, especially when the known has so many struggles. That's why we need to trust in what God has promise. No matter what we face, we can depend on God's promise of help – regardless of what is happening around us.

God said "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5) Jesus said "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20) Those are great promises to depend on when we start to worry.

As believers we have hope because we have Jesus on our side. So I encourage you to share your hope with those around you who are worried about things going on in their life, for their only hope is a life in Jesus Christ.

Suggested Prayer: God, thank you for the hope I have in you. I am so grateful that you are always with me no matter what may be going on around me. I ask that you give me opportunities to share my hope, which is Jesus Christ, with others. Amen.
-E.B.

Tuesday, September 29

Tools for Life

Faith that works!!! When your life is full of difficulties and persecutions, be glad. A reward awaits you. That seems strange, huh? But remember we are to be perfect, mature and not lacking anything because Christ is in us. Ask God and he will answer.

Those who are humble and don't seem to amount to much by the world's standards should rejoice in their position as those whom God loves.

Watch out for anger for it can be dangerous. Be merciful and kind to others as God is merciful and kind to us. Our faith should express itself in helping others. Blessed are the peace makers, they sow in peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.

Faith is an action word. We need to show our faith as a church and individually, serving with compassion, speaking lovingly and truthfully. Live in obedience to God's commands and love one another. The body of believers needs to be an example of heaven on earth, drawing people to Christ through love for God and each other. God's word is not something we merely read or think about, but something we do. Belief, faith and trust must have hands and feet. Exemplify Christ by the actions of your faith.

Suggested Prayer: We pray Lord that You give us action, faith, hands and feet to serve you with compassion, by the power Jesus sent to us by the Holy Spirit. Thank you Lord as you enable us to be all we can for you. -S.D.

Wednesday, September 30

THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT

How can I encourage a friend
who's going through a divorce?

2 Corinthians 1:3-7 - Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

Watching a friend or co-worker go through divorce can be an emotionally draining experience. This has become almost common place in our lives. Divorce is so rampant in the US. The numbers are staggering and sit around 50/50. Marriages have a 50/50 chance of surviving the rigors and pressures of the world, society and the evil one.

Divorce can bring grief so intense that it resembles the grief of a family death. (Some people who have gone through both insist that divorce is worse.) You'll need to draw on your own times of sorrow, whether it's sorrow over past sin or over losses you've suffered. Try to remember how God and his followers comforted you. Then pass on the comfort you received.

There's nothing like having come through a dark time to give confidence to a friend who's in the middle of one. Listen respectfully to any doubts he expresses about God, any sorrow he feels, or his fears for the future. As you do this, you demonstrate how God still loves him and will walk with him through his time of trouble.

Sometimes the most comforting thing you can do for a friend is simply to be available and to let them express their pain and fear without judgment. They are going through a time when tunnel vision may take over, and their perspective may be temporarily lost. So listen with one ear tuned to wisdom from God. As you offer comfort, expect God to continue to bring new levels of meaning and healing to your own experience with suffering.

When appropriate, offer to contact outside sources to help them such as the Stephen's Ministry or others who might be there to give an impartial and unemotionally attached perspective. It might sound strange, but depending on the situation, we may be too close to the person to help. Getting them the

support they need is the work of a good friend and will allow you to help them without getting caught up in the situation.

To summarize; when trying to comfort those who are suffering around you, draw on the comfort God's given you.

Let's pray: My Lord Jesus Christ, oh how you have comforted me. In my times of trouble you have given me a place to go with my issues and fear. Your strength has made me stronger and me thank you for that. Now I need to try to do the same for my friend and I ask you to give me the words, the strength and the loving touch that you have blessed me with. Help me to be a comfort to them as you have been for me.

-D.R.

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